

## Conversation Guide: Talking to Strangers

Living Room Conversations offers a simple, sociable and structured way to practice communicating across differences while building understanding and relationships. Typically, 4-7 people meet in person or by video call for about 90 minutes to listen to and be heard by others on one of our nearly 100 [topics](#). Rather than debating or convincing others, we take turns talking to share and learn, and be curious. No preparation is required, though background links with balanced views are available on some topic pages online. [Anyone can host using these italicized instructions. Hosts also participate.](#)

### Introductions: Why We're Here (~10 minutes)

[Each participant has 1 minute to introduce themselves.](#)

- Share your name, where you live, what drew you here, and if this is your first conversation.

### Conversation Agreements: How We'll Engage (~5 minutes)

[These will set the tone of our conversation; participants may volunteer to take turns reading them aloud.](#)

- **Be curious and listen to understand.** Conversation is as much about listening as it is about talking. You might enjoy exploring how others' experiences have shaped their values and perspectives.
- **Show respect and suspend judgment.** People tend to judge one another. Setting judgement aside opens you up to learning from others and makes them feel respected and appreciated. Try to truly listen, without interruption or crosstalk.
- **Note any common ground as well as any differences.** Look for areas of agreement or shared values that may arise and take an interest in the differing beliefs and opinions of others.
- **Be authentic and welcome that from others.** Share what's important to you. Speak from your experience. Be considerate of others who are doing the same.
- **Be purposeful and to the point.** Do your best to keep your comments concise and relevant to the question you are answering. Be conscious of sharing airtime with other participants.
- **Own and guide the conversation.** Take responsibility for the quality of your participation and the conversation as a whole. Be proactive in getting yourself and others back on track if needed. Use an agreed upon signal like the "time out" sign if you feel the agreements are not being honored.

### Question Rounds: What We'll Talk About

[Optional: a participant can keep track of time and gently let people know when their time has elapsed.](#)

#### Round One: Getting to Know Each Other (~10 min)

[Each participant can take 1-2 minutes to answer one of these questions:](#)

- What are your hopes and concerns for your family, community and/or the country?
- What would your best friend say about who you are?
- What sense of purpose / mission / duty guides you in your life?

### **Round Two: Exploring the Topic -- Talking to Strangers (~40 min)**

One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.

A growing number of studies from Toronto to Turkey have found that when people do make an effort to talk to strangers, it usually goes far better than they anticipated. Study participants report that they are much better at it than they predict, and the strangers they speak to are generally receptive, interesting, and interested.

That said, there are many norms that discourage people from talking to strangers. We worry that we're not allowed to do it, that we'll be rejected, that we won't know what to say, or that the people will dislike us. The prospect of talking to someone from another group--be it racial, gender-based, ideological--can further heighten those anxieties, especially if we don't have regular contact with members of that group

This conversation is inspired in part by themes found in Joe Keohane's book [The Power of Strangers: The Benefits of Talking to Strangers in a Suspicious World](#).

Take ~2 minutes each to answer a question below without interruption or crosstalk. After everyone has answered, the group may take a few minutes for clarifying or follow up questions/responses. Continue exploring additional questions as time allows.

- Typically, when you talk to a stranger where are you and what inspired you to connect?
- Do you believe there is any benefit in reaching out to strangers? How might you do it? Do you think they'd be interested in talking to you??
- Do you have fears about talking to strangers? What are they, and where do you think they come from?
- How has talking to strangers influenced your life or way of thinking? What happened?
- Who in society are your strangers? The people you have little contact with, may be at odds with, or simply do not understand?

### **Round Three: Reflecting on the Conversation (~15 min)**

Take 2 minutes to answer one of the following questions:

- What was most meaningful / valuable to you in this Living Room Conversation?
- What learning, new understanding or common ground was found on the topic?
- How has this conversation changed your perception of anyone in this group, including yourself?
- Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the conversation you just had?

### **Closing (~5 min)**

- Give us feedback! Use [livingroomconversations.org/feedback-form/](https://livingroomconversations.org/feedback-form/) or QR code
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- Join or host more conversations! With a) this group by exchanging your emails; b) others in person and/or by video call online. Get more involved or learn how to host at [livingroomconversations.org/get-involved/](https://livingroomconversations.org/get-involved/)



Thank you!