

## Silence or Noise: Finding Stillness in the Modern World

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 judgment 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 -- Silence or Noise: Finding Stillness in the Modern World (~40 min)**

*One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.*

Our entire lives are a combination of silence and sound. We often associate silence with the absence of noise, but silence is far more complex (and interesting) than the mere absence of auditory noise. We can experience silence both internally and externally. Noise, in the modern world, also shows up in our external and internal surroundings. Paradoxically, we can even experience peace and quiet, in seemingly loud moments like a symphony, heavy metal concert, or high on a windy mountaintop. While sound can accompany experiences of deep silence, internal noise can fuel worry, negative self-talk, and an inability to focus. These days there's a truly unprecedented volume of noise—or unwanted distraction—in our ears, on our screens, and in our heads. In a world of noise, how do we find silence and why might it be important for us to do so?

*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.*

- How would you describe the noise in your day-to-day life? What types of noise cause you the most interference or distraction?
- How does noise impact us collectively? At work? At home? As a society?
- Describe a favorite moment or time in silence. What was going on? What impact did it have on you?
- Are you intentional about seeking silence? Why or why not? What does it look like for you?
- Do you think there is a cultural value for silence? Where do your ideas around silence come from?

## **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
- *Donate!* Make more of these possible; give at [livingroomconversations.org/donate/](https://livingroomconversations.org/donate/)
- *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!***