Conversation Guide:
News in the Modern World: Expectations vs. Reality

Living Room Conversations offers a simple, sociable and structured way to practice communicating across differences while building understanding and relationships. Typically, 4-6 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, 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.

I. 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.

II. 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.

III. 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?

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Round Two: Exploring the Topic -- News in the Modern World: Expectations vs. Reality (~40 min)

One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.

News and an independent press are a crucial part of a healthy democracy. The electorate needs accurate and complete information to make informed decisions. However, according to Gallup Poll, millions of Americans no longer trust the news media as evenly and uniformly credible. Political partisanship, bias by omission, opinion, social activism, and outright falsehoods are seen as too often replacing fact gathering and news reporting that follow established journalism standards. Although purposefully inaccurate reporting has always been part of our country’s history, the term “fake news” has spiked in recent years. With the rise in use of social media, sound bytes, clickbait, and open source news outlets, the onus is increasingly on citizens to critically assess not only the news, but where they get it. This conversation is designed not to critique specific news sources, but to clarify what we can and should expect from news sources in order to be an informed citizenry.

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 have you seen news media shift or change over the years? What concerns or appreciation do you have for those changes?
● What consequences have you seen or expected from the spread of “fake news”?
● How do you decide what news sources to trust? How has your trust in news sources changed? What news reporting practices or standards increase your belief that a news source is credible?
● What are examples of fake news you have seen that are of concern to you? How did you verify they were false or misleading?
● Have you ever discovered a news report or story you had talked about or shared on social media was “fake news?” What happened?

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)

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Thank you!

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