Conversation Guide: Nuclear Weapons

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?
Round Two: Exploring the Topic -- Nuclear Weapons (~40 min)

One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.

It has been more than 7 years since the US bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The number of nuclear weapons in existence worldwide are down from a peak of 68,000. Currently there are an estimated 13,000 nuclear weapons in storage, on alert or lost. What is the right thing to do now that the generation that first built and deployed nuclear weapons has passed and left responsibility for these weapons to us? The US is currently planning to modernize our nuclear weapons and delivery systems to the tune of an estimated cost of $700 billion dollars with the stated intent of nuclear deterrence. Perhaps it is a good time to talk about the role of nuclear weapons in our country and the world outside of Washington, D.C. How do we want the next 70 years to unfold and what can we do to achieve that vision?

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.

- Are you concerned about nuclear weapons? If so, why?
- What would you like to see the U.S. and other countries do with their nuclear weapons?
- Do you see a path forward that leads us to a safer world? Might we someday live in a nuclear-free society?
- What are the ethical issues surrounding the use of nuclear weapons?
- In 70 years, what is the story you hope will be told about how we managed nuclear weapons in the early 21st century?

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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