

Race and Ethnicity Series, Conversation 1: Race

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 -- Race (Race and Ethnicity Conversation Series) (~40 min)

One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.

The expressed American ideal is the creation of a society that is fair and has opportunity for all, regardless of individual or group identity. Even as we work to build a nation that reflects those ideals, there are challenges to living into its fullest expression. This conversation series is an opportunity to explore our varied experiences of race and ethnicity in the American context. Where are we and what do we aspire to for ourselves and our communities?

Background Information: *In the American context, "race" and "ethnicity" are complex terms often used interchangeably. These terms were initially separated to designate "race" as a biological quality and "ethnicity" as a cultural phenomenon. For the purposes of deeper exploration, these Guides make deliberate distinctions between these two identifiers. For this Conversation (part 1 of the 3-part Race and Ethnicity Conversation series), we will focus on race as it is commonly defined.*

Common definitions of race include:

- A grouping of humans based on shared physical or social qualities into categories generally viewed as distinct by society.
- A group of persons related by common descent or heredity.
- An arbitrary classification of modern humans, sometimes, especially formerly, based on any of a combination of various physical characteristics, such as skin color, facial form, or eye shape, and now frequently based on such genetic markers as blood groups.
- A socially constructed category of identification based on physical characteristics, ancestry, historical affiliation, or shared culture.

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.

- What qualifications do you use to determine a person's race?
- What is an early memory of race (not necessarily racism)? Or what is a powerful memory of race that still informs how you navigate relationships where race is a factor?
- Was that memory of race a positive or negative experience for you?
- Do you feel your race impacts your daily life? If so, how?
- Were conversations about race a part of your upbringing? If so, how was the subject approached? How did the people around you talk about other races?

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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