

Conversation Guide: Disability and Ableism

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 150 [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 -Disability and Ableism(~40 min)

One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.

In the United States, one in four adults have some type of disability. Even though a quarter of the population is included, this issue can be difficult to talk about. There are a number of factors that may lead people to avoid this conversation: uncertainty around proper terminology, feeling like you don't know enough about it, or feeling fatigued by having to explain what living with a disability is like. Society has a responsibility to acknowledge and care for all its members. This conversation is a step in that direction, an opportunity to explore topics associated with ableism and disability, and share how our life experiences inform our understanding of this subject.

Note: For this conversation we are using the term "disability" rather than "differently-abled" as it may be more recognizable.

Helpful definitions for this conversation:

- Ableism: Discrimination and social prejudice against people with disabilities and/or people who are perceived to be disabled.
- Non-disabled: A person who does not have a disability.
- Disability: Any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the world around them (participation restrictions). Can include chronic illness, physical disability, cognitive disability, long-haul COVID, anxiety/depression, and many other disability types. Some prefer the term differently-abled.

Link to the CDC page [here](#).

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.

- When you were growing up, how was disability treated or talked about? How do you consider disability now?
- How have you or others in your life experienced disability? What assumptions might you make about others based on whether or not they look like they have a disability? If you are living with a disability, what assumptions have people made about you?
- What have you learned or appreciated by interacting with people living with disabilities different from your own? How did it come about?
- What is something you wish people asked, or did not ask you about your disability? If you do not live with a disability, what makes you curious to engage or ask people with disabilities about their lived experience?
- How do we better support persons with disabilities? What access needs have you seen in your community?

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/ or QR code
- *Donate!* Make more of these possible; give at 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/



Thank you!