Conversation Guide: Race and Ethnicity Series
Conversation 2: Ethnicity

This is the second conversation in our Race & Ethnicity series of three conversations. You can check out the first one here and the third one here. You can also listen to a podcast recording of this conversation here. A reminder that rather than debating or convincing others, we take turns talking to share and learn. Background links with balanced views are available on this topic page 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 -- Ethnicity (~40 min)

One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.

Ethnicity means many things to many people, including (just for a start): your ancestral heritage, one’s cultural background, and things cultures typically include such as cuisine, holidays, ways of doing things, assumptions about “life”, etc. However, in the American context, race and ethnicity are often entangled with one another. This conversation’s primary focus is on ethnicity. For the purposes of deeper exploration, this guide (part 2 of the 3-part Race and Ethnicity Cohort Conversation) makes deliberate distinctions based on some of the common definitions for ethnicity.

Common definitions of ethnicity include:

- A category of people who identify with each other based on similarities such as common ancestry, language, history, society, culture or nation.
- An inherited status based on the society in which one lives. Membership of an ethnic group tends to be defined by a shared cultural heritage, ancestry, origin myth, history, homeland, language or dialect, symbolic systems such as religion, mythology and ritual, cuisine, dressing style, art or physical appearance.
- A social group that has a common national or cultural tradition.
- A social group that shares a common and distinctive culture, religion, language, or the like.

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 do you understand ethnicity?
- How would you describe your own ethnicity? How has it impacted you?
- Have you ever claimed an ethnicity that wasn’t yours or that wasn’t visibly yours in order to “pass,” or have privilege?
- How have race and ethnicity functioned differently in your life, if they have?

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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