Conversation Guide: Upcoming Election in the Time of Corona

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 100 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. Some hosts may offer a Q & A after Closing.*

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 -- Upcoming Election in the Time of Corona (~40 min)

One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.
COVID-19 has affected every American and has been called unprecedented. It has also hit during a time of transition for our country as we prepare for the 2020 elections. This conversation seeks to explore how COVID-19 is impacting our experience of the 2020 election cycle.

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 national, state, and local government responses to the coronavirus pandemic impacted your perception of the situation? In what ways has that affected your feelings about this election season?
- What shifts in preparation for the election have you witnessed during the pandemic emergence? If your own political position has changed, what has that been like for you?
- Since early March, primary elections have been postponed, cancelled or impacted by reallocation of resources. Given this history, what are your hopes, concerns and fears related to this election cycle?
- Communication during a critical event impacts ability to respond with agility and effectiveness. Which communications have been helpful to you? Which have been less helpful? What have you learned about candidates and sitting officials from their communication?

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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