

Tips + Strategies for a Smooth Conversation

- Remain open to all possibilities and don't try to force the conversation in a particular direction. The process of dialogue is the process of co-creating something that didn't exist before.
- Use "I" statements. This can help you avoid speaking in generalities or sweeping statements. Examples include: "I feel...", "It is my understanding...", "I am trying to understand..."
- Keep defensiveness at arm's length and try to replace judgment with curiosity. Asking yourself, "I wonder why that person feels this way" can move you out of a defensive position.
- Stay in the moment. As ideas or thoughts come to mind, try to quiet them until the discussion or statement has finished. Make a mental or written note so that you can bring them up at an appropriate time so you do not walk away feeling regret or feeling like the moment was missed.

What happens if...

Conversations can go off track. Trust the format of the conversation guide, it's designed to help you. Here are some tips that may be useful. You can also refer to the Conversation Agreements.

- **Over talkers?** "Fred, it seems like you have a lot of experience with this topic. Thank you for sharing, does anyone else have similar or different experiences with the topic?"
- **Cross talkers?** "It looks like Fred and Ginger are really connecting. How about the rest of you, do you have an experience that is similar or different from theirs?"
- **Off track?** "It sounds like many of you are interested in the way socio-economics affects racial disparity. Is that something we want to continue to explore, or do we want to go back to one of the questions from the guide?"
- **Sweeping statements or opinions?** "Ginger, I wonder if you could illustrate what you just mentioned with an experience from your own life."
- **Strong tension emerging?** "I'm noticing some strong emotions or tension. Thank you for being authentic and sharing. How are the rest of you feeling? How can we recognize those emotions and still be open to listen to each other?"

A few final reminders: share the work. Let folks know this conversation involves participation by everyone. Ask folks to help keep track of time; take turns reading, etc. These conversations are meant to be fun and social — it's OK to laugh, make mistakes, and show your personality (without taking more than your share of time) — this will put others at ease.

Who We Are

This conversation guide was created in partnership with Ideos Institute and Living Room Conversations for use with the [Dialogue Lab: America film](#) or on its own.

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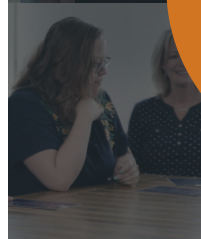
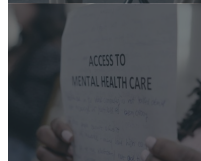
Ideos is a research and practice institute dedicated to advancing empathy in leadership, culture, and spiritual life. We do this to help heal the divisions that plague our communities, our congregations, and our culture.

LivingRoom
Conversations

Living Room Conversations connect people across divides and within communities to build understanding through conversation. We believe belonging starts with conversation.

Find the Dialogue Lab: America film at <https://vimeo.com/659609762>.
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DIALOGUE LAB: AMERICA

“There’s a problem in America, we’re just not talking anymore.”

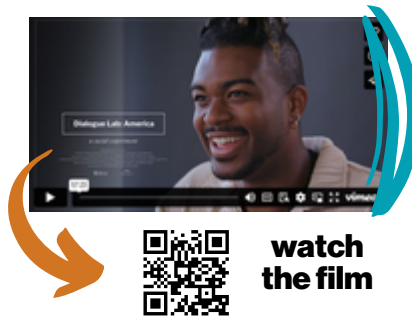
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DIALOGUE LAB: AMERICA

From Division to Dialogue

Like us, you've probably felt the impact of division and polarization in your life or work. They may have impacted your relationships and family dynamics, as well as your work and social environments.

Statistics, surveys, and research paint a picture of the growing distance between us based in part by our differing beliefs, experiences, and political stances. Though we each want to be seen as an individual, we often group others together, oversimplifying the positions, intelligence, and motivations of those we disagree with. The question is, "how did we get here and what can we do about it?" The film *Dialogue Lab: America* offers one explanation, "...we're just not talking anymore." This guide is designed to explore what keeps us out of conversation and how we can stay engaged to talk about the issues that matter most to us.



Anyone can host using the italicized instructions. Hosts also participate.

What is Living Room Conversations?

We offer a simple, structured way for 4-7 people to practice communicating across differences while building understanding and relationships.

Introductions

Share your name, where you live and what drew you here.

Each participant has 1 minute to introduce themselves.

The Conversation Agreements

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 find you learn more about someone's values and perspectives just by listening.
- **Show respect and suspend judgment.** Setting judgment aside allows you to learn from others. It also makes them feel respected and appreciated. Try to 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.

Let's Talk

In order to help everyone feel seen and heard, this conversation has both timed as well as open response components. A participant should keep track of time and gently let people know when their time has elapsed.

Round One: Getting to Know Each Other (~30 min)

This round helps you tell a part of your story. It's also an opportunity to practice listening. Participants will go around the circle taking turns as a speaker and a listener. Each participant can take 1 minute to answer one question below while another participant focuses on listening to what is being shared. After answering the question, the listener will take 1-2 minutes to reflect back what was said. The speaker will then have a chance to clarify. Once the speaker feels heard/understood, move onto the next pair.

- What would your best friend say about who you are?
- What are your hopes and concerns for your family and/or community?
- What sense of purpose/mission/duty guides you in your life?

Round Two: Exploring the Topic (~40 min)

Take ~2 minutes each to answer a question below without interruption or crosstalk. After everyone has answered, the group may take 5-10 minutes for clarifying or follow-up questions/responses. Continue exploring additional questions as time allows.

- In *Dialogue Lab: America*, the moderator said, "If we're not talking we can't solve the problems before us." What problems do you wish we could solve? What connection does it have with your personal story?
- Is there an issue you feel misunderstood about? What do you wish others understood about your experience around that topic?
- What fears and hopes do you have when it comes to engaging in dialogue with those you disagree with? What is there to gain or lose by engaging?
- What experiences from your life have shaped the principles you would most courageously stand behind?
- Based on your experience, what could reduce America's polarization problem? Who needs to be involved to make that happen?

Round Three: Reflecting on the Conversation (~10 min)

Take 1-2 minutes to answer one of the following questions:

- What was most meaningful/valuable to you in this conversation?
- What learning, new understanding or common ground was found on the topic?
- How has this conversation shifted your perception of others or yourself?
- Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the conversation you just had?



Empathy-driven dialogue is, at its essence, the pursuit of discovery - of discovering previously unknown or unconsidered ideas about ourselves and ultimately about others.

- Christy Vines