

## **The Status of the American Dream**

### **Overview**

In Living Room Conversations, a small group of people (e.g. 4-7) people come together to get to know one another in a more meaningful way. Guided by a simple and sociable format, participants practice being open and curious about all perspectives, with a focus on learning from one another, rather than trying to debate the topic at hand.

### **The Living Room Conversation Ground Rules**

#### **Be Curious and Open to Learning**

Listen to and be open to hearing all points of view. Maintain an attitude of exploration and learning. Conversation is as much about listening as it is about talking.

#### **Show Respect and Suspend Judgment**

Human beings tend to judge one another, do your best not to. Setting judgments aside will better enable you to learn from others and help them feel respected and appreciated.

#### **Look for Common Ground and Appreciate Differences**

In this conversation, we look for what we agree on and simply appreciate that we will disagree on some beliefs and opinions.

#### **Be Authentic and Welcome that from Others**

Share what's important to you. Speak authentically from your personal and heartfelt experience. Be considerate to others who are doing the same.

#### **Be Purposeful and to the Point**

Notice if what you are conveying is or is not "on purpose" to the question at hand. Notice if you are making the same point more than once.

#### **Own and Guide the Conversation**

Take responsibility for the quality of your participation and the conversation by noticing what's happening and actively support getting yourself and others back "on purpose" when needed.

Though feedback is consistently positive, some people are concerned about managing people that dominate the conversation as well as off- topic, or disruptive situations during the Living Room Conversation. We offer these tips:

- Everyone shares responsibility for guiding the conversation and is invited to help keep the conversation on track.
- The group can decide to keep track of time in some way to help people remember to keep their comments similar in length to others. Soft music when the time is up is a great reminder.
- If an area of interest has arisen that has taken the group off topic, ask the group if they would like to set aside the new topic for a separate Living Room Conversation.
- If someone is dominating, disruptive or has found their soapbox, respectfully interrupt the situation, refer to the Ground Rules and invite everyone to get back on track with the current question
- If the group opts to shift from the format of the Living Room Conversations, please provide us with feedback for future learning. There are many ways to have a great conversation! Thank you!

[feedback@livingroomconversations.org](mailto:feedback@livingroomconversations.org)

## **Rounds/Questions: The Living Room Conversation Starts Here**

Since early in America's history, the "American dream" was the belief that anyone in this country (including immigrants) could "make it" if they worked hard enough. Some people believe this has always been an illusion - while others point to it as a legitimate heritage of our country. Similar differences in perspective exist today: Is the American Dream alive and well, or do the realities of today's American economy and socio-political structure hamper certain groups of people so they cannot achieve what others might? What do you find inspiring about your personal American Dream? Different perspectives on this issue are rarely explored - and we hope you have fun doing so in your conversation!

### **Round One: Getting Started / Why Are We Here?**

- What interested you or drew you to this conversation?

### **Round Two: Core Values**

Answer one or more of the following:

- What sense of purpose / mission / duty guides you in your life?
- What would your best friend say about who you are and what makes you "tick"?
- What are your hopes and concerns for your community and/or the country?

### **Round Three: The Status of the American Dream**

Remember that the goal for this Living Room Conversation is for all of us to listen and learn about where we have different opinions and where we have shared interests, intentions and goals. Answer one or more of the following questions:

- How do you describe the current American Dream? Is it alive and well?
- What do you find inspiring about your personal American Dream?
- Do you think the American Dream is unique to America? If so, how?

### **Round Four: Reflection**

Answer one or more of the following questions:

- In one sentence, share what was most meaningful / valuable to you in the experience of this Living Room Conversation.
- What learning, new understanding or common ground was found on this topic?
- Has this conversation changed your perception of anyone in this group, including yourself?

### **Round Five: Accomplishment and Next Steps**

Answer both of the following questions:

- What is one important thing you thought was accomplished here?
- Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the conversation you just had?

**Closing** – Thank you! Please complete the feedback form to help improve Living Room Conversations.



## Host & Participant Feedback Form

**Please complete following the form, AND TAKE PICTURES OF YOUR GROUP!**

Turn into your host or take pictures and email them to [feedback@livingroomconversations.org](mailto:feedback@livingroomconversations.org)

Host, Location & Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

<p><b>1. Before it took place, how did you feel about this conversation? (check all that apply)</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Nervous</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Not worried at all</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Excited</p>	<p><b>3. Did you learn or become aware of something valuable during the conversation?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p><b>2. How do you feel now that the conversation is over? (check all that apply)</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> My fears were confirmed</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I am relieved it's over</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> It was more enjoyable than I expected</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I was grateful to be a part of it</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I really enjoyed the conversation</p>	<p><b>4. How do you feel about these kinds of conversations in the future?</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I want to co-host with my friends.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I would enjoy doing another in the future.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I would enjoy getting involved in lots of them.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I would rather not have these kinds of conversations again.</p>
<p><b>5. Which of the following statements apply to your relationship with other participants after the conversation? (Check all statements that apply)</b></p>	
I feel closer and more connected to them	I feel more distance between us
I know them more personally	I don't know them any better
I like them more	I like them less
I see more goodness in them than before	I don't see any more goodness than I did before
I see more common ground now	I see less common ground now
I understand where they are coming from more	I am more confused at where they are coming from

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for helping us learn about how the Living Room Conversation process worked for you! If you have any further feedback or a quote we can use, please write them on the back side or send us a note at [info@LivingRoomConversations.org](mailto:info@LivingRoomConversations.org)

We are conducting research on the impact of Living Room Conversations. May we contact you for more information?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

- Yes! Keep me updated on Living Room Conversations. We will only send you email updates if you check the box.
- You have permission to use my photo in materials for Living Room Conversations.
- You may share my email with CivilPolitics.org so I can participate in an online survey about my experience here.

*Privacy statement: Your contact information, including name, email and phone number will be used only for the purpose of gathering your feedback, unless boxes are checked above to receive additional communication.*