



Conversation Café: Variations

Conversation Café hosts have adapted the basic method to unique circumstances. Three varieties are: **Café Lite**, **Instant Café** and **Super Café**. **Lite** is when you have less than 45 minutes for the conversation. **Instant** is when you initiate a Conversation Café spontaneously. **Super** is when you have a big conversation event. More varieties surely exist, but these three will give you a way to think about using the method for your own purposes.

Conversation Café Lite

You may want to host a Conversation Café at a conference or in a classroom or in a workshop and not have the luxury of 60 to 90 minutes for it. If you have 30 to 60 minutes you can still do it. Fewer people at each table are best—no more than six, no less than three. You might not even have a table. You can even let go of the pens and paper for jotting notes. All you need is the *Process & Agreements*, a topic and a talking object. Take 10 to 12 minutes for the two opening rounds; with six people that's one minute per person—but with focus you can say a lot in a minute. Keep the open conversation going until three to five minutes before the end and ask everyone to say one word or sentence—no more!—about their experience of the conversation.

Instant Conversation Café

What are Instant Cafés? An Instant Café uses the basic Conversation Café Lite method spontaneously anywhere and any place where people are hanging out for a chunk of time and might love a chance to connect with other people, if only they knew how. Think crowded airport gates when a flight has just been announced hours delayed, or your kid's school's family potluck when the small talk gets annoying, or on a longer ferry crossing, flight, or train ride (especially if you manage to sit in seats that face other passengers). It could also be used as an after-dinner activity on Thanksgiving with a simple question like, “*What are you thankful for in your life?*” or Christmas, with a simple question “*What gifts has life brought you in recent times?*”

If you have the *Process & Agreements* cards handy, you can hand them out. But if not, you can use anything handy as a talking object (a salt shaker, a cell phone on mute!, or?), and explain how we use it (one round of speaking in turn, in response to the question, no cross talk, then set it down for open dialogue). Also explain the etiquette for these conversations (we speak briefly, from the heart, from our life experience, with respect, with curiosity about what we are going to learn about ourselves, one another and life) and offer a juicy question. Off you go!

For *Let's Talk America* we developed weekly “hip pocket questions” that people could use in grocery lines, cabs, elevators, other similar places to get people thinking and conversation flowing.

Super Cafés (Including Conversation Cafés with Presentation Events)

What are Super Cafés? A Super Café integrates a Conversation Café into another public “featured presentation” event. The elements are:

- A featured speaker, panel of speakers, or presentation at an event.

- A *Super Host* who introduces the *Process & Agreements* and “traditions” (no marketing, no committees) to the whole group assembled and then facilitates people forming smaller conversation circles following the *Café Lite* (30 to 60 minutes) guidelines.

Super Café Process

Before the Presentation: In the publicity for the event and in the introduction at the start of the event, announce that a *Conversation Café 'Lite'* is included that will allow people to connect with each other about what they got from the featured speaker/panel/presentation. The publicity should include the Conversation Café web address (www.ncdd.org/conversationcafe), and the event should include a handout per person, or at least per table, that presents the *Conversation Café Process & Agreements*. (The wallet cards, available on the website fill this need wonderfully.) This announcement gives a brief description of what a Conversation Café is such that people know they will be in a structured environment designed to create respectful, meaningful conversation.

Starting the Conversations: When the presentation concludes, someone acts as '*super host*' to introduce the process and read the agreements to the group as a whole, and state the question or topic to guide the conversations. Then, the super host gives directions for how people can organize themselves ("*please turn your chairs to create circles of four to five people. . .*"), find a talking object (*something symbolic is nice, but even a set of keys or an eyeglasses case works fine*"), and a prompt to get started ("*go ahead and start the first two rounds of speaking briefly using the talking object, then open up with interactive, spirited conversation*").

Concluding the Conversations: The super host is the time keeper and interrupts the conversations when it comes time to announce the start of the closing round. Then, as a closing for the group as a whole, the super host asks everyone to turn to the front again, and takes comments from a few people regarding what came up in the small group conversations that was surprising or particularly moving. Finally, the super host tells everyone that they can start these conversations themselves in a public venue of their choosing, and that resources for doing this can be found on our website.

Examples of Other Variations

Visit the Conversation Café website for examples of other variations, such as:

- Conversation Cafes at Green Festivals (and trade shows, conferences, etc)
- Conversation Cafes at Hostels
- Conversation Cafes after Film Events
- Conversation Cafes in Sunday School
- Conversation Café and World Café Combo (developed for Let's Talk America Project 2004)

Let us know how you have used Conversation Café in different settings.