

# **PEACE WORK**

## TOOL-KIT

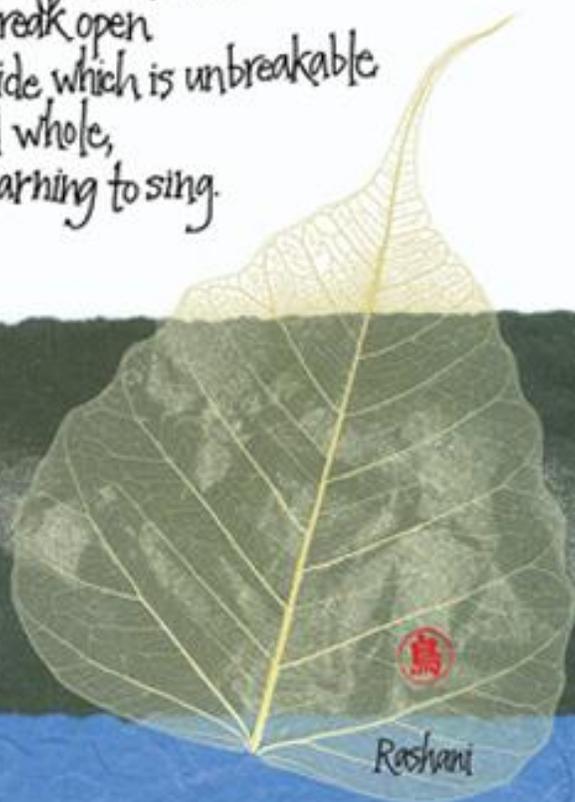


Tips for facilitating ***“These little lights of yours & mine...”*** to shine!

Use to “train the trainer” or co-create

***good groups!***

There is a brokenness  
out of which comes the unbroken,  
a shatteredness out of which blooms the unshatterable.  
There is a sorrow  
beyond all grief which leads to joy  
and a fragility out of whose depths emerges strength.  
There is a hollow space, too vast for words  
through which we pass with each loss,  
out of whose darkness we are sanctioned into being.  
There is a cry deeper than all sound  
whose serrated edges cut the heart  
as we break open  
to the place inside which is unbreakable  
and whole,  
while learning to sing.



Rashani

# Acknowledgements

This material was born out of trauma...

Thank you **Alternatives to Violence Project\*** heroes...

...past, present & future!

When we notice Heaven *has* arrived on earth,

...you're a big part of the reason why!

Thank you **everybody** who *loves* this stuff!

Your enthusiasm is my motivation!

...and most of all, thank you "Transforming Power!"

Tailored to serve people in "recovery" from trauma-related & other mental & emotional challenges, the material & much of the language in this tool-kit is rooted in the work of **\*The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)**, a powerfully transformative process developed by people incarcerated in prisons & Quakers, in response to the Attica riots. It is a non-hierarchical process that utilizes experiential exercises in specific ways to achieve genuine community. Every activity invites some aspect of "us" forward: our life experience, our wisdom... our joy! This generates tremendous buy-in as personal insight & interpersonal skill develop naturally. The foundational concept of "Transforming Power," something we each define for ourselves, opens us to the idea that there is always a power available to transform a moment, a dynamic... or a life.

Contact: [avp@avpusa.org](mailto:avp@avpusa.org) to experience a workshop or purchase manuals (both highly recommended!) Adult Manuals permit limited copying

# Dedication...

For Phoenix – my beloved spider swallower & fish kisser –  
Thank you for providing 25 years of delight  
& a most bountiful education!  
I love you!

## ...& Other Gratitude

Thank you! Poets & translator who have allowed me to use your work!  
Thank you! Artists & photographers who have made your work available  
through Bing's "free photos" on line.  
Without your "frosting" the cake wouldn't be half as beautiful or tasty!!!

Thank you! Unicorns & "Titans" of Recovery, Community Building & Spirit!  
(many listed in the Resource Section at the end...)

Thank you! Beloved "circles": family, friends, co-workers, AVP circles,  
"training" circles, "The Circle," the other circle, Peace Work circles,  
"House of Light" circle... (I'm dizzy!) Everyone in every circle!  
Without you, there wouldn't be any cake!

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*In the spirit of AVP,  
I give my permission for anyone engaged in a personal healing journey to copy &/or  
share my writing in this **Peace Work Tool-Kit** for the purpose of benefiting themselves,  
& humanity in general, by encouraging the formation & practice of **good groups!**  
(You'll need separate permission from contributing writers.)*

*I do request that no changes, deletions or additions to the material be made in my name  
without my permission... & that if financial opportunities arise in connection to it,  
I'm part of the conversation & a beneficiary...  
Many thanks!*

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# Introduction

This **tool-kit** is made from the treasure of my own recovery journey & I'm very grateful for the opportunity to share it! Good groups, as I'm defining them, heal!

Humans are (deep down?) social animals & just like on the television show "The Dog Whisperer," if our "pack" is healthy, individuals integrating into it pick up social cues in record time. I learned this as a long-time volunteer for the **Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)**, a prison-based group process that helped me trade the symptoms, medications & hospitalizations associated with eight psychiatric labels for skills such as listening & expressing my authentic self!

As an educator sharing concepts supporting mental health recovery with people working in the "mental health system," I shared wisdom from the very few mental health organizations facilitating **truly remarkable** healing outcomes. What they have in common is a healthy pack! ...a sense of shared ownership & power that fits this tool-kit's definition of a good group!

In a good group all participants – **no matter what role** – count equally. We all have things of equal value to impart. We all have **& need** particular pieces to the puzzle of creating a healthy, unified, functioning social body. We're all endowed with unique talents, gifts & insights... that are meant to serve the whole. **Everyone** is on a journey to wellness! Some people may seem *apparently "ahead"* or *"behind,"* but each of us, at every point, holds needed experience & perspective. Even (...maybe especially!) those with behaviors we *don't like*, offer tremendous opportunities for our healing & growth. Often the *"apparently behind"* are readier for community than those who feel a sense of their own power or are "in charge." They don't perceive they have as much to lose! People who work in these successful organizations express the satisfaction of shared ownership, a decreased feeling of burden, & a deep sense of purpose & joy. People who receive services in them smile ...***on the way out the door!***

Creating good groups involves the cultivation of new beliefs, the willingness to risk equalizing power & the development of new skills. For many, the inclusion of a generic "Higher" or "Transforming" Power concept is essential. This could be considered a "pack leader" in a sense – something each person defines for her/himself – since a good group is non-hierarchical. It might be the hidden wisdom of the subconscious mind to one person and "God" to another.

**To avoid alienating people, it's important to maintain consensus on this!**

*"Healing is a thought by which two minds  
perceive their Oneness, and become glad!"*

-A Course in Miracles

**good groups** heal!

Not so good groups provide an exquisite form of torture!

This toolkit offers opportunities for lived-experiences  
of engaging, inspiring... & productive **good groups!**

A "**good group**" is being defined as... a circle of people  
engaging in processes, activities & discussions that lead us to feel  
we are part of a meaningfully bonded... even joyful, community!  
(These tools apply to long term, short term & training groups.)

It's a group in which we are safe to risk "shining" the truth of who we are!  
...Both the perceived positives and negatives.



One that encourages shared ownership & leadership...  
& fosters interpersonal skills, personal insight & growth!  
...All ingredients of a healthy life!

Best of all... a **good group** is... **fun!**

The most important thing you can do to facilitate a **good group** is to  
...be authentically "YOU!"

**Tool-Kit Layout:** A "**Sample Training Agenda**" is offered. Subsequent chapters  
explain why each component of that agenda facilitates a **good group**.

Following that are **ideas for shorter groups**, thoughts on **related topics**  
(trauma, e.g.), **additional exercises** & **resources**.

A binder makes for easy copying, sharing & inclusion of your own treasures.  
All of it provides a recipe; **YOU** are the **#1** ingredient & the outcome is heavenly!

**Hang in, trust the process... it's all useful for growth!**

There's Only  
One Job To Do...



...and that is Accomplish  
**YOU!!!**

*(The good news is, we're already done with this! All we gotta do is shine!)*

# 1. Some Good Group Features

Tool-kit orientation & general “gems”...

- ♥ **We show up!**
- ♥ Our general arrangement is a circle
- ♥ We create “Cooperative Agreements” that provide safety
- ♥ We value INCLUSION & discover that diversity is essential for our growth!
- ♥ If agreed, we enlist aid from a “Transforming” or “Higher” Power
- ♥ We share power intentionally, in all aspects of our group process. Ideally good groups are facilitated by a team w/agendas created by consensus
- ♥ We utilize “experiential exercises” to create agendas or formats that grow skills... invite play... clear the air... invite the reluctant forward, etc.
- ♥ Facilitators take turns orienting the group to each new exercise & participate in all of them, if possible
- ♥ The insight “payoff” is often in the debriefing... “What did we learn? ...Notice? ...Feel?” “How does it relate to our lives?” etc.
- ♥ We benefit from sharing our “gems”: insights, vulnerabilities, life experiences...
- ♥ When sharing is deep, “Light & Lively” exercises release painful energy in playful ways; which makes the process healing, bonding & often terrific fun!
- ♥ By these means, we develop well-honed interpersonal skills (listening, e.g.)
- ♥ We make it a point to affirm & point up one another’s strengths & gains
- ♥ We evaluate as part of our group process; for further insight & quality control
- ♥ *We discover we can heal! ...& facilitate the healing of others!*

**No one is “teacher” or “counselor”**

**...or conversely – everyone is teacher & counselor!**

**The wisdom is culled from the life experience of all participants  
& therefore comes with tremendous buy-in!**

## 2. Experiential Learning...

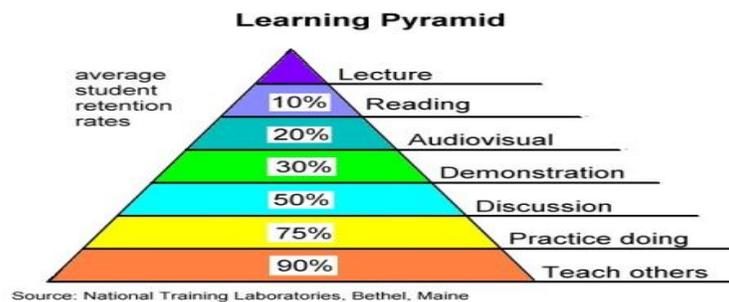
A definition of Experiential Learning:

“Instead of looking outside of yourself for knowledge, going inside...”

-A Wise Unicorn

Experiential learning here refers to sharing an experience – as in engaging in a well constructed exercise – and exploring resulting insights... together!

**Though we all have different styles of learning,  
we generally retain what we experience;  
particularly if it's attached to an “Aha!” that bubbles up  
from inside our very own self!**



- ♥ This “Pyramid” is generally recognized as true. In a good group, 99% of what we do involves the three bottom rows ... We're not passive; we experience! We discuss, practice skills & teach one another.
- ♥ When you get down to it, LIFE is one big, fat experiential exercise! ...& we've already learned a whole lot that we don't realize we know! Well designed good group activities bring out what we know ...but don't know we know!
- ♥ ...& a lot of *that*, is chock full of bonafide wisdom! Bringing this forth heals & enlightens – both ourselves & others...
- ♥ ...which tends to make us pleased & invested. A swell basis for community!
- ♥ There are exercises in this tool-kit [page 48] and many more in **AVP** & other manuals [107] & once you get the hang of it, you can create your own!
- ♥ Exercises usually have written directions. Facilitators/volunteers take turns orienting the group to an exercise. This shares power & promotes new skills!

# ...& Briefly on Debriefing



- ♥ “Debriefing” is being defined here as discussion, after an activity, that generates discovery & the sharing of insight
- ♥ **Debriefing also serves as a means to release energy when what is “discovered” is a pocket of emotional trauma that had never fully healed**
- ♥ It’s not unusual, when debriefing an exercise, for someone to touch a deep pain & cry, e.g. It’s also not unusual that some of us may join in! **That heals!**
- ♥ Debriefing generates “Aha” moments. An “Aha” comes from deep inside & feels as if we’ve found a beautiful gem sparkling in a cave ...amazing!
- ♥ We always **feel** an “Aha” as **Truth!** inside of ourselves... but comments from others in the group can trigger them...
- ♥ Because we all have unique life experiences, a **good group** offers a great pool of “Aha” material! When we walk out of a group with more **Truth!** than we came in with... We’re gonna wanna come back!!!
- ♥ We ask, “What did you learn... notice? How did that feel? What did it remind you of? How does that relate to your life? Was power shared fairly, etc.”
- ♥ If energy is charged with anger or sadness, e.g. & the discussion seems to be at a standstill; acknowledge the feeling & change the energy...
- ♥ ...One method is to have people sit in silence for a few minutes, feeling the energy as One; if the group has formerly agreed, invite healing from a Transforming or Higher Power (& debrief that!) Other methods include offering a grounding [page 54] or Light & Lively [page 59] exercise
- ♥ Team work is especially important because what one person may miss, another will catch... Invite the whole group to help with making sure nobody leaves the room “unreleased” (You may want to employ a “buddy system”)
- ♥ Debriefing is a skill that develops over time... Do your best – NOW!

# 3. *good group!* Training Agenda

(Sample - 3 Hours)

**Intro:** Hello from YOU! (& any co-facilitators)/Orientation-Overview... (10 min.)  
...including reading a posted version of this agenda

**Cooperative Agreements:** Suggest & request safety agreements (15 min.)  
A very important agreement, up front, is “We share attention fairly...”

**Gathering** (Go Round): “To me, the value of a good group is...” (10 min.)

**Seeds of Equality** (Common Ground): We throw “Magic Beans” when a statement on a list is “true” for us [page 20] (20 min.)

**Affirmation in Twos** (Dyads): 2 minutes per person: “Some valuable things about me that could serve a ‘good group’ are...” Debrief (20 min.)

**(Beefed-Up) Brainstorm – “How to get ‘Buy-In?’”** (Cooperation/Commitment):  
Collect answers on a poster, while adding some “beef” [page 23] (15 min.)

**Groupies...** (Small Group Exercise): Give groups of 3-5, 20-25 min. to reach consensus on the purpose & format of a group they’d enjoy. Debrief (35 min.)

**...& Guppies!** (Anonymity): On index cards (collected & read ), ask for further feedback on the “groupies.” Did everyone have an equal say? Did you feel heard, etc.?” Also ask for “solutions” that might help improve things, next time. This uncovers hidden power dynamics & safely includes everyone (20 min.)

**Evaluation & Planning:** On poster [sample, page 28] ask people to comment briefly on each exercise. Explain their input improves quality... & let it! (10 min.)

**Closing – Gift Share:** Depending on the time – Have folks turn – in turn – to the person to their right, to share “A gift I see in you...”

OR – If time is short:

Ask someone in the group to share a gift of gratitude they feel toward the entire group. (10 min)

**(Add Break & Yammering – that’s 3 hours!)**

## 4. Intro/Orientation

- ♥ **good groups** (& **good group** trainings) happen in a circle!
- ♥ Ideally they are facilitated by a team (3 or 4 is great!)
- ♥ They can reasonably accommodate up to 25 people
- ♥ Ideally, they include a thorough (concise!!!) "orientation"
- ♥ Facilitators share why they are excited to participate
- ♥ It helps to read a posted agenda, so everyone feels some control
- ♥ Let people know how essential every individual is to the group's success! And that every person has equally valuable gifts to impart! (No teacher!)
- ♥ Orientation also clues folks in on what the group is about...
- ♥ Ideally, the group is about whatever the participants of the group want it to be about! Explain: "We decide together..."
- ♥ "House Keeping" refers to practical matters; building rules, bathroom locations, etc. Someone covers that...
- ♥ Whether you are training group facilitators or starting your own group...

...a place to start might be:

"A priority I have for this group is that everyone in it comes to feel that they own it!

What's yours?"



## 5. Creating Safety

“What will help me feel okay about being in this group?”

“I” am the basis of success in this group!  
No matter which “I” I am!



- ♥ In order for me to “shine,” I need to feel safe & comfortable
- ♥ Instead of prefab “GROUND RULES” let us explore what “safe & comfortable” means to each of us & create our own:  
“Cooperative Agreements”
- ♥ ...to be posted, & ideally read, each time we meet
- ♥ This is respectful, culturally competent & trauma-savvy
- ♥ **When new folks join, its important to update with *their* input**
- ♥ A POWERFUL agreement: Hang in through the tough times!  
(a.k.a. – If you need to run out screaming... come back!!!)

# Cooperative Agreements



Consider these **Alternatives to Violence Project** “Ground Rules”  
...as a place to start.

- Look for & affirm one another’s good points
- Avoid put-downs of ourselves & others (even jokes!)
- Listen to one another without interruption
- Avoid side conversations
- “K.I.S.S.” – keep it short and simple – don’t speak too often or too long
- Volunteer only ourselves (& our own personal information)
- Observe confidentiality
- Everyone has the right to pass

## **...here are some other hard-won favorites:**

- ♥ Share attention fairly; attention is the “healing elixir!”
- ♥ Cultivate a willingness for uncovering “personal blind spots”...
- ♥ ...which translates to: *cultivate tolerance for the discomfort of learning how our behaviors affect others*
- ♥ **Act** on impulses to express love to others in the group!
- ♥ Seek an inclusive way to invite a “Transforming or Higher Power” into the group; if successful, do so with gusto!
- ♥ Spelling don’t cown’t; be sensitive to folks who don’t read &/or write
- ♥ Help one another keep our agreements &...
- ♥ ...practice tolerance while we get the hang of it!

## **For extra precaution around trauma you can...**

- ♥ Offer index cards for anonymous “Agreement” feedback
- ♥ Suggest people “Ask before touching.”
- ♥ Suggest “Go slow & gentle sharing BIG-TICKET pain”; exposure can hurt
- ♥ Invite people to leave the room as needed
- ♥ “Buddy System”; pair folks for peer-support in case anyone is triggered
- ♥ Utilize or create exercises to deal with BIG feelings in the moment
- ♥ **Utilize facilitators & participants to make sure triggered energy releases!**

## ***Depending on the group's purpose, "Corona Process" guidelines are terrific!***

*-Thanks to Thomas R. Yeomans, Ph.D.!*

- ❖ **Slow down** Slow down from your habitual pace of interaction & take all the time you need to listen to yourself & others, to express, to interact.
- ❖ **Breathe** Breathe fully & rest in this rhythm of breathing as you participate in the group.
- ❖ **Silence** Tolerate, accept & welcome silence in the group, either when called for by a group member or when it falls spontaneously.
- ❖ **Truth of Experience** Speak the truth of your experience, moment to moment & over time. This includes disagreement, negative feelings & the experience of being disconnected – these being the hardest to express.
- ❖ **Deep Listening/Presence** Listen to each other deeply & with presence. Let go of rehearsing your response, or strategizing.
- ❖ **Welcome/Appreciate Differences** Express differences & appreciate others; even if this generates conflict. Hold the differences as a creative part of the group's experience, not as something to be avoided.
- ❖ **No Blame/Judgment** Suspend judgment/blame of self & others & practice simply being with your own &/or the other's experience.
- ❖ **Hold Intensity** At moments of intensity, hold this experience in your awareness without reacting or trying to do anything about it. Let it live in the group & be contained within the circle.
- ❖ **Patience** Have patience with the workings of the group & the time it takes to grow & change, both individually & collectively.
- ❖ **Enjoy the Process** Enter into the moment-to-moment changes in experience, both individual & group, that necessarily constitute the multidimensional process of human healing, development & creative work.

***For further info contact "The Concord Institute," [Page 109]***

# A Word on Power

Power is the trickiest thing! It's used to define force... dominance... confidence... charisma... & even an indwelling peace... Well... which is it???

Your group gets to chose! If one of your cherished values is to share power & if you collectively & vigilently do what that takes, you will enjoy the tremendous benefits of a truly **good group!**

In practical terms that means sharing attention fairly, rotating leadership wherever possible, soliciting consensus on all the group's "business," sharing any workload (considering preferences & strengths), honoring diverse personal styles, i.e. using anonymous exercises to encourage input from the less "forthcoming" ...& a "BIGGIE": gaining a facility for giving & receiving authentic feedback!

When sharing power isn't a priority in a group, someone's version of reality will likely rise to dominate, while someone else will begin to feel unseen; unheard, unvalued. People will come & go; discouraged by "the same old same..."

Good bye **good group.**





Tools for Change



Common Behavioral Patterns that Perpetuate Power Relations of Domination

By Margo Adair & Sharon Howell

Power is the ability to act—the more access to resources one has, the more options one has. Power differences are expressed in institutional and cultural contexts. These power differences continually inform our interpersonal relationships.

The following chart shows some patterns people learn in order to survive in a hierarchical society. Not to conform to expected behavior risks social ostracism, privilege and /or one's survival. These patterns take place in correspondence to each other; they are tendencies in relationships not personality characteristics. They are to be read horizontally. When we ignore these patterns or fail to act to transform them, we reinforce the dominant culture's injustice, even if we aspire to egalitarian relationships. It takes courage to step outside of the norms and feels as though one is going against the grain. Because they are relational a shift on one side brings about a change on both sides and the pattern is broken.

NOTE: As you read, think of a circumstance you find yourself in where some of these patterns may be occurring. You may find it painful to consider these issues. Though the temptation is to close down, the challenge is to open and cultivate compassion both for others and ourselves. Doing so, we will find it easier to step out of the patterns and develop relations of mutual care, creativity and support.

Tendencies of people in Privileged positions

Tendencies of people in Oppressed positions

Table with 2 columns: Tendencies of people in Privileged positions and Tendencies of people in Oppressed positions. It lists 20 rows of contrasting behaviors and feelings between the two groups.

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## 6. **Gathering:** Value of Good Groups

Ideally, every session begins with a “Gathering.” In a Gathering everyone speaks, in turn, without interruption. The facilitator usually goes first & may choose to briefly toss in an idea at start &/or finish...

(K.I.S.S.!!!) Consider these valuable things about a good group:

- ♥ We practice expressing our “real” selves...
- ♥ ...and learn it's safe & beneficial to do so
- ♥ We gain deeper insight into ourselves & others
  - ♥ We learn to share power & leadership
- ♥ We delight in our ability to help others grow
  - ♥ We discover our commonalities
  - ♥ We come to appreciate our uniqueness
    - ♥ We learn to embrace diversity
    - ♥ We learn to reframe adversity
    - ♥ We learn to sit with discomfort
- ♥ We enjoy a deep feeling of connectedness
- ♥ We learn skills to enhance life beyond the group
- ♥ We entertain the idea that we may have a “unique purpose”
  - ♥ We take risks & try “personal mission” things
  - ♥ We live a template for a healthier world!

**“I used to be sane, but I got better!”**

-Off a Button

# 7. Seeds of Equality

## A Common Ground Exercise

Place a large planting pot on a large piece of fabric (i.e. brown felt to represent "earth") on the floor in the center of your circle. Give everyone a big handful of "magic (lima) beans." Have folks throw one bean or many into the pot each time a statement is true for them. (When finished most beans are in planter or on the felt for easy clean up. Ask for additional clean-up help as needed.)

### Have you ever...?

Felt overwhelmed or out of control?

Made a REALLY BAD judgment?

Lost your liberty? (Hospitalization, incarceration, bad marriage, grounding, crappy summer camp...)

Been judged for something beyond your control?

Felt isolated & alone?

Resented someone else's control over your life?

Experienced a sense of powerlessness around something very important to you?

Had trouble correcting a behavior long after you knew better?

Been annoyed at someone who tried to get you to give up a behavior before you were ready?

Known that your answer for yourself was better than the answer a professional gave you?

Used something to fill an emotional void?

Experienced a trauma that never fully left you? (*Researchers tell us that 57 - 95% of people diagnosed with mental illness are trauma survivors!*)

Found yourself acting like less than you are because someone believed you were less than what you are?

Had any habits, behaviors or thoughts that wouldn't stand up to public scrutiny?

Had to deal with comments in your head saying nasty, judgmental things about you or others?

Felt you hurt someone badly?

Believed there was no hope?



**Debrief: "What did we grow? How'd it feel? Why'd we do it? What'd you notice? etc." (Dig deep into answers that may have depth!)**

*Follow Up With...*

**Sunshine Questions:** Instead of throwing beans, ask people to say... **“YES”**



**Have you ever...**

- Found capabilities in yourself you didn't imagine you possessed?
- Gone through something difficult & felt improved because of it?
- Outgrown behavior that could have (or has) gotten you locked up?
- Developed a skill, like assertiveness, that made a remarkable improvement in your life?
- Believed in something wonderful? (Santa, the benevolence of the Universe, a falling star, the God of your understanding, fortune cookie, e.g.)?
- Been amazed at your own power, ability or value?
- Learned something HUGE from the outcome of a REALLY BAD judgment?
- Found tools to help you cope with the trauma that never fully left you?
- Benefited from someone believing in you when you didn't believe in yourself?
- Discovered hope when you believed there was none?

**Debrief: “How was that? Did it feel different? Why? How often do we take stock of ‘sunshine’ things? What does this say about mental illness?” etc.**

**Some sample optional questions to consider depending on audience:**

- Given away your last anything?
- Taken in or cared for a stray anything?
- Stood up for someone?
- Broken a law?
- Disappointed another to be true to yourself?
- Done something hard because you knew it was right?
- Done something against the rules because you knew it was right?
- Seen the lovable in someone behaving horribly?

**Note: This exercise can be modified in many ways:**

- 1) Tailor questions for specific groups**
- 2) Create questions relating to specific topics**
- 3) Change up styles: with poker chips as “It’s a Good Bet”; with old buttons as “Buttons” (use questions on personal triggers); with Beach Balls as “Equality Beach Ball” (toss balls between all those who raise their hands)**
- 4) BIG groups can use multiple planters & bags of beans (at a conference, e.g.)**

## 8. Affirmation in Twos

...& *good group* building blocks



According to **Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)** philosophy, the basic foundational building blocks for community are: **Affirmation, Communication, Cooperation & Conflict Resolution**. There are various exercises to explore each.

**(1) Affirmation...** When we start with an affirming activity we create safety & set a tone that invites us to feel good about ourselves & each other. In this tool-kit's version of "Affirmation in Twos" we explore what qualities we have that will contribute to a *good group*. When we answer, negative "qualifiers" are not allowed... (i.e. "I care about people, *but*... I'm bossy.")

In **AVP** terms, the second building block is **(2) Communication ...**

In good groups & good relationships *listening truly is the "healing elixir!"* Providing skilled listening attention to one another is an incredibly powerful wellness tool! A skilled listener is one who offers as close to 100% compassionate "presence" attention as possible; with NO other agenda! There are many exercises that foster listening & other communication skills. The exercise "Affirmation in Twos" provides an opportunity for both of these building blocks.

The other **AVP** building blocks are **(3) Cooperation & (4) Conflict-resolution**. **AVP** suggests that if we utilize exercises in this order, honor the "**Ground Rules**" (a.k.a. Cooperative Agreements) & toss in a hefty helping of "**Transforming Power,**" we will build a "**Community Based on Honesty, Respect & Caring...**"

...in other words: a *good group!*

## 9. (Beefed-Up) “Buy-In” Brainstorm

Usually a brainstorm involves a “scribe” writing group responses to a given topic on a board, or large posted paper. People call out thoughts “pop-corn” style (in no particular order). Facilitators don’t argue; they clarify meaning & write exactly what they hear (or ask for simplification, if wording is too long.) “Beefed-Up” means facilitators will add concepts too; a lively way to share information!

There are other creative ways to do brainstorms [see “Sunshine & Clouds” page 72]. With ongoing groups, using various brainstorming methods keeps people from getting bored.

There are also **brainstorms in two parts** (or more). If you’re exploring a topic through brainstorm (“Stigma”, e.g.) you can ask everyone to call out definitions. Those are written on board or poster. Then follow up with another pertinent question (“What do we do that keeps stigma in place...?”, e.g.) You can even follow that up with another (What are some “Stigma Buster” ideas... e.g.) It’s always helpful to end on a positive note.

At any point, you can invite volunteers to come up & literally draw connections between ideas; explaining why they made them (i.e. “I’m connecting ‘over medication’ with ‘people are judged’... A lot of times people seem weird because they’re heavily medicated...”) The idea is to do whatever it takes to get a thorough picture of whatever topic you’re exploring.



### **Some “How to Get Buy-In...” Beef:** **(You know the drill...)**

- ♥ *Clear orientation; particularly on shared ownership & power*
- ♥ *Welcome diversity – in gender, race, culture, sexual orientation, religion... behavior! ...even when it’s challenging!*

- ♥ Design our own 'safe space' with Cooperative Agreements
- ♥ Invite in a generic "Transforming Power"
- ♥ Create a shared understanding of group purpose, values, etc.
- ♥ Co-create content; inviting all to design, contribute &/or co-facilitate (Use consensus)
- ♥ Make a habit of affirming ourselves & others!
- ♥ Honor all! Those who don't choose to 'actively' lead, are leading...  
...for their style!
- ♥ Strive to express our authentic selves with one another
- ♥ Strengthen our belief in recovery & notice we're doing it!
- ♥ Affirm for each other that we have our own answers – inside!
- ♥ Share a commitment to "hang in through the tough times"
- ♥ **Come back**; even after we've run out of the room screaming!
- ♥ Support one another in our diverse goals
- ♥ Invite every new person who joins the group to affect change
- ♥ Facilitators learn to **step back!** & tolerate silence...  
**Group success means we're all talking to each other!**
- ♥ Expect & allow our minds to be blown by our growth!

**Notice & affirm every success... & celebrate!!!**



### What 'Buy-In' Sounds Like:

- "I'm coming to believe I can have the life I want"
- "I'm feeling encouraged... inspired... connected..."
- "I'm gaining skills such as listening... co-facilitating the group..."
- "I'm gaining comfort sharing my story..."
- "I'm assisting others to heal..."
- "I know I have a say..."
- "I'm becoming more authentic..."
- "I'm believing the people in the group care about me..."

# 10. Groupies...

## On Small Groups & Other Exercises

This exercise invites folks to consider what group purpose & format they themselves would find engaging & delightful!

*(Chock up another one for "Buy-In!")*

"Groupies" & other small group exercises provide a break away from the "big group." The energy is different, the level of intimacy increases... Interpersonal dynamics such as "who's got the power" become more noticeable. Small groups also offer the opportunity for a lot of people to experience something in a shorter time frame.

There are lots of ways to break people into small groups... "counting off" by the number of groups you want is most common: If you have 20 people, e.g. & want 5 groups of 4 people, count "1,2,3,4,5." around the circle to assign numbers & then direct "the 1s" to one area of the room, "2s" to another area & so on. (Or use common groupings; i.e. The Beatles: "All the 'Pauls' over there..."]

Assign the amount of time groups have, to do whatever direction or task you invite them to do. (In this case, 20-25 minutes to create an ideal group purpose & format.) Invite everyone back into the big circle, encouraging them to sit next to the people in their smaller group & debrief.



# **Boredom is a leading cause of death** **for the psychiatrically labeled!**

Over the top???

In case it's true, variety in groups could save lives!

## **A Sampling of Exercise Types**

**Gathering:** a.k.a. Go 'Round. Each, in turn, completes a statement. Begin each "session" with this foundational opportunity for all voices to be heard

**Affirmation:** "I've Got Your Back," e.g. Tape paper on everyone's back; mill about with colored markers writing positive things we notice about each other. Take turns introducing each other's positive qualities to the group [page 58]

**Dyads or Pairs:** "Affirmations in Twos," e.g. Up close & personal opportunity to bring forth treasure within, gain listening skills; heal & be healed! [page 22]

**Common Ground:** "Seeds of Equality," e.g. Noticing: "*We really are One!*" [20]

**Cooperation:** "Cooperative Art," e.g. Small groups make art in silence, with newspaper & masking tape. We debrief, describing the process; the excitement of co-creation & our insights into power & other interpersonal dynamics

**Trust:** "Trust Walk," e.g. People take turns touring their blindfolded partner over & around obstacles. We take gentle risks to dissolve the wounds we carry

**Light & Lively:** "Mrs. Mumbly," e.g. We ask, in turn around the circle, "Have you seen Mrs. Mumbly?" & related questions... showing no teeth! We have fun!!! ...& release any painful energy through play

**Role Play:** A pair portrays "bad" listening, e.g. Role plays offer a flesh & blood experience that makes concepts real & gives opportunity to practice skills

**Conflict Resolution:** "Hand Push," e.g. Partners, numbered 1 & 2, stand, facing each other, hand to hand. Ask 1s to push on 2s; notice how 2s react. Debrief. (Generally 2s push back.) Have them try it again w/out pushing back, what happens then? (Sometimes people end up hugging!) Debrief

**Closing:** "Gift Share," e.g. People share, in turn around the circle, a gift they see in the person to their left... An affirming closing provides a satisfying sense of completeness & some emotional nutrition to take home! [page 12]

# 11. ...& Guppies!

## The Value of “Anonymity”

A **good group** is one in which everyone comes to feel welcome to express our entire selves authentically (...& together we learn to do it in ways that don't offend!) In the recovery movement this is often called having “voice.”

Many of us have trouble with “voice.” Expressing what we feel, particularly what we consider the “bad stuff,” ...but even the “good stuff,” can make us feel terribly vulnerable. We may call this “personal style” ...but often keeping mum is a coping tool we've adopted to stay safe. Unfortunately, the price of this kind of “safety” can be our sanity!

It's painfully alienating to participate in a group when BIG feelings are cutting up our peace! Learning to sit with, reframe &/or release these feelings are all **good group** goals, and there are exercises that help! But for truly enjoying all the benefits of “shining” as only YOU can... having “voice” is essential!

Using anonymous exercises that invite **all** of our voices safely into the circle for the community's consideration, can take us a long way toward experiencing a truly **good group!**

Common fears that keep us from having “voice” include:

**“I'm an oddball – no one else is troubled by this...”**

Most often if you share that you're troubled, someone else will relate!

**“People won't like me if I complain...”**

You may trigger some feelings. You are also likely to invite some gratitude.

People often value the courage it takes to express personal truth.

**“What's troubling me is not that important/not worth expressing...”**

This is generally a recipe for disliking &/or dropping the group!

**“If I tell this person how I feel: Hello world war three!/I'm gonna get my ass kicked, etc.”** Depending on your skill level, you may be right!

Work to gain the skills!

...& In the meanwhile, utilize anonymous exercises that **gently** get to the truth *without* direct confrontation [pages 66 & 67]

**P.S. Practice tolerance for yourself & each other while we grow!**

# 12. Evaluation...

If any group entity – be it family, community, business, service organization or **good group** – wants to establish & maintain optimal “wellbeing,” it keeps an honest eye on itself.

That's evaluation! The **Alternatives to Violence Project** way is to try to evaluate after every “session.” Facilitators hang a poster & ask for feedback on each exercise; both “positives” & “negatives.” The responses are recorded without comment, defense or argument. Participant's “brilliant ideas” are welcomed!

## evaluation poster



<b>Intro</b>	informative	dragged	wear tutu
<b>Gathering: Value...</b>	brought insight	was redundant	use timer
<b>Seeds of Equality</b>	great equalizer	messy	cook 'em up!
<b>Affirmation in 2s</b>	fun, intimate	scary, too intimate!	more time
<b>Buy- In Brainstorm</b>	learned a lot	etc...	etc...
<b>Groupies...</b>	etc...	etc...	etc...
<b>...Guppies</b>	etc...	etc...	etc...

Adopt **AVP's** method, of using a poster to capture participant reactions to exercises or create other means. When changes are suggested, honor them... & when BIG changes are considered, make sure you have **consensus** [page 30].

This is one more way to be assured buy-in is achieved & maintained. It's also a way to guarantee that the quality of the experience keeps getting better!

P.S. It never hurts to ask...

**Any final questions or thoughts???**

# ...& Planning

If you're using this tool-kit to train trainers, consider asking:

**“What did we just do???”**

## We...

- ♥ ...Used a group to create a group experience
- ♥ ...Solicited input to create safety
- ♥ ...Offered an opportunity to explore the value & purpose of the group
- ♥ ...Learned from one another what would make a good group that we would enjoy or “buy-into”
- ♥ ...Experienced a variety of types of experiential exercises: a gathering or go ‘round, common ground, dyads, a brain storm, small groups & an anonymous exercise that uncovered hidden information
- ♥ ...Critiqued the process with encouragement to believe that our input will make a difference...
- ♥ ...& now we're debriefing the whole thing! **How'd that feel? Are you engaged? Do you think others might find it engaging too? Did you learn anything about yourself or others? Do you feel like your feelings count? Would you willingly participate in a group that ran like this?**



## What's Next???

Each group will come up with their own answers to this question. As a rule, a certain number of participants are going to feel really jazzed about the process; others may hang back... It's ALL good! Plans might include dates & times for the next **good group**... Ways to implement aspects of the experience into other areas, i.e., deciding to open community meetings with a “Gathering” question, or making plans to get further training by signing up to experience an **Alternatives to Violence Project**, e.g., workshop!

**Whatever you decide, aim to do it consensually!**

# What is Consensus?

(AVP-based Description)

- A consensus decision is agreement by discussion
- ...& one in which each member of the group accepts the solution & is willing to support it
- Everyone participates
- It's not (necessarily) everyone's favorite choice
- Every person's point of view is entertained & understood
- Any person can choose to "stand aside" (be neutral)
- "Coming to consensus" can be time consuming; a group may opt to spend a set period of time on a decision & revisit it the next group, if no agreement is reached
- It involves listening, responding, being open & seeking out differences
- It potentially offers solutions that honor multiple perspectives
- It's a win/win, **good group** way to find solutions!



## Consensus is not!

- A vote
- An opportunity to argue your position repeatedly
- Changing your mind to avoid conflict
- A win-lose method

# 13. Templates for Shorter Groups

Always determine your “Cooperative Agreements” first...  
Ideally, they’re posted & read before each group

## **PEER SUPPORT? OR PEER SUPPORT!!!**

Peer support groups can provide safety for risk-taking & genuine grieving.

They can inspire, encourage, broaden vision... in a word: HEAL!

If, however, we’re using our “air time” ONLY to keep old wounds open, blame others, bemoan our fate & catalog symptoms & side effects...

Peer support groups can ...in a word: SUCK!

Here are some loose guidelines for a peer support group that may not suck!

Rotate leadership (volunteers), for inspiring contributions, evaluation, etc.

### **“Peer Support!!! Group”**

**Inspiring reading:** Sets the tone [page 79 or topic related?] &/or

**Brief meditation:** Relaxes folks for a more supportive experience

**Gathering:** Suggest – don’t mandate – that people share a “New & Good”; something positive currently going on in our lives. This practice helps us to notice those things! (Consider time limit.)

**General Share:** Whatever’s “on top...” reactions to the readings or whatever needs to be said to feel fully “present” & authentic. Facilitators model this by going deep into their own suffering & joy. Consider “No cross-talk” (talking in turn without comment) & using a timer for fair attention sharing.

**Evaluation:** If agreed to, ask: “How’d that go? Improvement ideas?,” etc.

**Closing** (Go ‘Round): “Something I love about us is...” e.g.



# **SEVERAL GOALS IN A SINGLE GROUP? YES!!!**

If the purpose of your group is to help individuals meet chosen goals, use your initial group to decide those goals & consider this format...

## **“Diverse Goals Group!”**

**Gathering Check-in:** “Something I did this week that felt great was... &/or a brief report of progress with my goal...” e.g.

**Group Guidance:** Distribute time fairly to assist individuals with particular goals. Either everyone gets a short turn each group, OR a couple of people are “spot lighted” in rotation.

Help might include group support for practicing skills, role playing, brainstorming ideas & resources, practical assistance with chores (filling out applications, etc.), offering advice, if asked for, reflecting strengths...

**Light & Lively:** Toss in as needed to keep the energy up & playful

**Evaluation:** “What helped the most today was...” e.g.

**Closing:** An affirming “go ‘round.” Each person tells the person to their right (or left) “A change I’ve noticed in you is...” e.g.



# WE WANT BETTER “PEOPLE SKILLS?” GREAT IDEA!

## “People Skills Group”

**Gathering:** Choose a question related to the skill of the week, i.e. “A time I was assertive was...” &/or share related successes since the previous group, e.g.

**Skill Development Exercise:** Listening, e.g. There are exercises in this tool-kit, on the internet, or order an **AVP** or other manual [page 107]

**Light & Lively** (Time permitting)

### Evaluation

**Closing-Skill Reflection:** Tell person on your left “I notice you're better at...” Or... “I appreciated when you...” e.g.



# **DISCOVERING OUR COMMUNITY TOGETHER!**

Let's help one another explore the world around us...

Let's buddy-up to gain ease & comfort

doing the things we want to do...

...but don't yet know how, or feel comfortable, doing!

**Rotating partners try unfamiliar & desired activities in the community**

## **“SKY DIVER’S CLUB”**

**Gathering:** Quick check-in (New & Good?) &/or relating to current “dive”

**Dive Reports:** Pairs or trios, etc. share experiences with larger group

**Discussion & Planning:** On upcoming dives

**Evaluation:** Ongoing to improve process

**Closing:** Robust celebration of courage!!!



# 14. Diversity Delivers!

*I cannot be whole* while I'm afraid of... feel superior to...  
feel inferior to... think I understand without asking, etc.,  
the part of myself I perceive as "the other."

***I am not an "us" or a "them"***

***I am me!***

***There are no "us" and "thems..."***

***There are only "mes"!***

***And "mes" are we...***

***And we are...***

***One!***

-Colleen Sheehan



Many believe this to be capital "T" Truth & if you don't agree... at least you know it's true in many ways: One specie, one planet, one experience of being alive at this point in time, together, NOW! As we begin, in a **good group**, to explore our diverse circumstances; our feelings about gender, race, sexual identity, culture of origin, etc. We experience the paradox of deeply appreciating differences while also discovering the Oneness of our shared humanity beneath the conditions of our lives. Empathy develops. "Us" & "them" become "We" ...& eventually, anyone's challenge is looked at with compassion, because it becomes everyone's challenge & anyone's success is celebrated as everyone's success. This is a viewpoint from which to heal a group... & a planet!

## ...& Another Short Group

A diversity group would, ideally, have diversity! Different genders, different races, different languages (interpreters if needed), different sexual orientations, different religious affiliations & philosophies, different politics, different tastes, different interests...

### ***A schmorgasbord of treasures to share!***

Think well on “Cooperative Agreements” & tweak as needed

Consider **HUGE TOLERANCE** for mistakes!

Consider starting the group with a common ground exercise like “Seeds of Equality” [page 20]

### **“DELIGHTING IN DIVERSITY”**

**Gathering:** “Something valuable I learned from someone from a different culture is...” e.g. (Always use an affirmative statement.)

**Exercise:** Use diversity exercises from **AVP** or other sources. “Speakout” [page 69] is a great example. Also consider taking turns doing a “culture share”: history, food, artifacts – anything! – to encourage understanding & empathy.

**Light & Lively:** If time permits, include “fun & light” activity! (Ask participants, they may have some to share from their culture!)

**Closing “Same Difference” e.g.:** Each person, in turn, tells person to their left something you love about him or her, that’s the “same” & something you love that’s “different”



# 15. Transforming or Higher Power

**Many of us** in recovery, because we've had mystical adventures ...or because of Twelve Step groups ...or due to individual seeking, etc., credit our healing to a growing connection with a "Higher" or "Transforming" Power. This is something we define for ourselves, yet often find common ground about.

Recovery itself, for many of us, could be defined as *finally* forming a nourishing connection with our "Source" & offering ourselves in service to it.

Some of us experience what could be called a sense of "knowing" within ourselves. It has a Universal quality... speaks a Universal language... & provides great joy in the sharing!

Whether or not we call this "Source" by a particular name or participate in a particular religious or spiritual tradition, when we come together in a "non-denominational" way we experience tremendous benefit & joy!

The **Alternatives To Violence Project** work is founded on the concept of **Transforming Power**. It asserts that a power for transformation is *always* available, if we're open to it. We in recovery already KNOW this! Recovery = transformation! Claiming this power for our groups can be highly productive!

The **AVP** focus is on violence, which may not immediately seem applicable to your situation, however...

- ...If you spend too much time feeling miserable (i.e. any!)
- ...If you dwell on horror; dredging up past hurts or imagining future torment
- ...If you suffer pain from the judgment of yourself &/or others
- ...If you literally are, or if you feel, imprisoned
- ...If you sense you are functioning way below your innate capabilities
- ...If you are not serving the mission your heart knows you have
- ...If you get in angry conflicts frequently, or...
- ...If you hide the truth of your feelings to avoid conflict
- ...If you feel alienated, isolated, judged, shameful, etc.

...If you're not **Living!**

**...that's violence!!!**

While Transforming Power (TP) is self-defined, **AVP** manuals have lovely tales to describe examples of TP in action. The following are some helpful guidelines...

# Alternatives to Violence Project's Guides to Transforming Power

1. Seek to resolve conflicts by reaching common ground
2. Reach for that something good in others
3. Listen before making judgments
4. Base your position on truth
5. Be ready to revise your position, if it is wrong
6. Expect to experience great inward power to act
7. Risk being creative rather than violent
8. Use surprise and humor
9. Learn to trust your inner sense of when to act
10. Be willing to suffer for what is important
11. Be patient and persistent
12. Build community based on honesty, respect & caring

# ...& One More Short Group

## ***SUSTAINENCE FOR THE SPIRIT***

...IF & only IF you're with a group of like-minded &/or willing souls:

Pay special attention to your "Cooperative Agreements"

Aim for an attitude of open-minded & gentle inquiry

### **"Sharing Spirit"**

**Gathering & Brief Meditation:** "This week's miracle(s)..."

**Gift Bearing:** Folks take turns sharing favorite materials, exercises [pages 75 & 76], practices, rituals, guided meditations, "peak" or Transforming Power experiences, guest speakers, etc.

**Unwrapping Our Presents:** Follow up with discussion on each gift, if appropriate

**Affectionate Closing:** "Something about you I love is..." e.g. &/or an inspiring reading



# 16. Trauma & **AVP**



The **Alternatives to Violence Project**  
was born out of the trauma of the Attica riots...

*...& there's just something about it that makes it safe  
for all sorts of people who've been through the wringer!*

It was created in 1975 at Green Haven Correctional Facility, a maximum security prison in NY State, out of a desire to keep children out of the criminal justice system. **AVP** & its derivatives operate in prisons, schools & communities all over this country & in a whole slew of other countries! Many people have adapted it for specific purposes: as a mediation tool to help support reconciliation in war-torn areas; as a healing tool to support victims of sexual abuse; as an educational tool in places of higher learning & on & on...

(We're doing it now!)

There have been (so far as I know, & I asked) two **AVP**-related tragedies – both of which have informed changes in the process. To the loved ones of the people involved, two is way too many! Yet, considering the time it's been operating, the number of people involved & the severity of their issues, it's a remarkable number. We're not allowed to share specifics about prison events, but I will say:

One incident, it is believed, involved a "role play" that was not properly debriefed... which means someone left the room carrying a lot of "conflict" energy that could & should have been released at the time...

The other incident (in a school) involved a person who had been suffering in isolation & came to feel so bonded, so quickly with the group, that she shared too much personal information too soon for her emotional safety. It is thought that when she reflected on it later, she felt painfully exposed & chose suicide.

In a **good group**, you can enhance safety by being **very thorough** collecting “Comfort Agreements” & debriefing!

All the precaution in the world will not guarantee that people won't be triggered, in fact we often are! Along with agreements & debriefing, another wonder of this process is...

***...when hit with a tsunami of pain energy in one exercise,  
we can release it playfully in another!***

“To be enlightened is to ‘lighten up.’”

--Mike Myers

Some people think “**Light & Lively**” exercises are goofy! Well, yes they are!!!  
***They're also incredibly powerful agents of wellness.***

If we spent every moment of our lives belly laughing, with goofy looks on our faces & maybe milk coming out of our noses, would it be worse or better than what we're doing now!?!

But of course that's NOT all we do in a **good group!** We also join to express the wounds that still need healing, the grief that still needs grieving, the injustice that still needs forgiving... & we help each heal, grieve, forgive\*...

***...between the guffaws!***

In Summation:

Yes! Be careful... &

Our trauma histories are no fun!

Most often, the “coping tools” we've used to survive are no fun!

(Or if they're fun now, like the tool: “**Party!!!...**” any day now they'll be no fun!)

Sporting a psychiatric label (without a sense of humor) is no fun!

Our symptoms are no fun!

The devastation in our lives these symptoms cause is no fun!

Often the “treatment” we receive is no fun!

It's no wonder we've assumed healing *has to be* no fun!

**NO TRUTH!**

\*note: If that “forgive” word turned you off... *you don't have to!*

# 17. Advice Giving/Cross Talk & Other Pitfalls

Most of the exercises are structured with a time to “chime in” with our impressions at the end (when debriefing)...

However, if you use or create a shorter group template that includes “personal share” time, or if you use a “Talking Stick” [page 73] format, many of us will struggle with an enormous compulsion to “help,” “soothe,” “inform,” “advise...” or bring up our own experiences when another person “shares.” This is called “cross talk.”

As well-meaning as these impulses are (& most often they are well-meaning & very common!) **Try hard** to squelch ‘em... particularly when sharing is personal & deep.

Generally speaking, when others insert themselves into our deeply personal moments, we feel unsafe. What we really need is to be heard... while we allow the wisdom inside of ourselves to bubble up **& provide us with our own answers!**

If you have practical information to offer (i.e., “You said wanted to move & I know of a place.”), or want to connect on some common ground, etc., the safest bet is to ask the person’s permission to talk about what they shared,” after the group.



**At all costs, avoid the deadly phrase: “You know what you should do!!!???”**

# 18. Loose Ends & ...an Invitation!

Most important is the invitation!

The contents of this tool-kit come from personal experience & represent the “best of” what I understand... Now! If something strikes you as off-base &/or you have further insight into anything, please clue me in!

Also, as you gain mastery over the process, it's likely you'll be creating exercises & gaining insight of your own.

Your gems have tremendous value to the greater community... They're truly needed! Can we come up with a means for sharing them? Contact information is in the Resource Section [page 107].



Now, some loose ends...

- ✓ **Asking...** A swell, power-sharing habit when facilitating your part of a good group, is: “asking!” If you sense energy is flagging; or something painful needs expression; or some policy question comes up... see if you can get a general consensus on what's needed & do it! If you're working with co-facilitators, ask when you need help setting up an exercise & get in the habit of asking if they have anything to add when you're leading an exercise... Ask!

- ✓ **Feelings...** If we've had a lot of challenges, we may have protected ourselves, in one way or another, from our feelings. *They can hurt!* Sometimes that means we don't have a clue about them. Some spiritual teachers say there are two basics: Love & Fear... Others teach about four:

**“Mad, Sad, Glad & Scared”**



Making peace with our feelings is a crucial part of overall wellness... In on-going groups you can help people to identify, embrace & heal the range of their feelings by: regularly asking (during “check-ins,” while debriefing, etc.), “What are you feeling?.” Also, utilize feeling-related exercises in this tool-kit & in **AVP** [page 107] & other manuals.

- ✓ **Group Size...** Ideally, 8 to 20; try all sizes! See “Timing of Exercises”
- ✓ **Skills vs. Pills...** Personal Tale: “Mental illness” in my life means: If I don't get my feelings (energy) out, they stockpile & blow!  
**Alternatives to Violence Project** workshops were the **good groups** that taught the interpersonal skills that help me express feelings without creating a world war! The hope I received doing **AVP** motivated me to explore other energy-releasing healing techniques. I knew I was getting better. I quit taking medication & landed in the hospital. I tried again... weaned slowly the next time. I've been hospital free just shy of 20 years (& off meds. most of that time.)  
 A moral of this story: *Believe healing is possible, because for scads of us (if not all) it is... **& to avoid that last hospitalization, tread very carefully!***
- ✓ **Supplies & Props...** Markers, pencils/pens, Index cards, pads &/or scrap paper, poster paper or some kind of reusable writing board & tape are the basics... & some means to keep track of time. Certain exercises in the **Alternatives to Violence Project Manual** call for specific items (Tinker Toys, e.g.) or tools you can make, or copies of provided handouts.

If you enjoy the “fun & dramatic...” get yourself an assortment of props! These can be made or bought at Dollar Stores or yard sales, etc. Sometimes a wonderful prop will inspire the creation of a wonderful exercise!



- ✓ A **Timer** or some means of keeping time is needed when facilitating listening exercises, “personal share time,” etc. Timers ensure everyone gets equal attention when any of us in the group have a compulsion to talk & talk & talk & talk... We may have said “Yes” to the Cooperative Agreement: “Keep it Short & Simple” but sometimes we just can’t do it! (Yet!) Agree upon an amount of time & let the timer do the policing! If you opt to use a timer, you might let folks know that it will likely become less necessary. One skill that develops in a **good group** is the ability to share attention fairly!
- ✓ **Timing of Exercises...** **Alternatives to Violence Project** workshops can comfortably handle as many as 25 people; 20 is considered ideal. Most groups within the mental health system are smaller; 8 being considered ideal. The times suggested in the description of exercises are approximations, based on 8 – 20 participants.
- ✓ **Twinkling...** If, during an exercise, you are thrilled with something someone has shared, a quiet, unobtrusive way to show it is to “twinkle.” Both hands go up & you wiggle your fingers, as if you were a twinkling star! (Okay, it sounds corny... but wait until someone twinkles at something YOU said!)



- ✓ **Trust the Process...!** This is wisdom from the **Alternatives to Violence Project** & in all matters of concern, whether logistical or emotional, it's helpful to recall! If there is a Higher or Transforming Power, trust that a group, working together for collective healing, is getting all kinds of help from IT!
- ✓ **Unanswered Questions...** Sometimes questions come up & it's not the right time for an answer/or nobody knows the answer/or we want to avoid the "expert" role/or there's a chance the answer will come out of an exercise, etc. Consider collecting these on a poster or board & processing them in the group during the evaluation.



- ✓ **Volunteering...** In a prison-based **Alternatives to Violence Project** "workshop" facilitators & participants are all volunteer... That fact creates a special feeling; we're all there because we value what's going on! **good groups** within the mental health system, may not, initially, work this way... but it's a worthwhile goal to keep in mind. Once **good group** skills are attained, consider moving your circle out of the mental health system!

*"It's impossible not to believe what you see...  
It's equally as impossible to see what you don't believe..."*

-A Course in Miracles

# A Summary of What Heals...

In the context of relationships & groups

-Anonymous observations from a wise tool-kit editor

- Developing interpersonal skill
- Understanding & getting in touch with one's feelings
- Expressing one's feelings; letting go of bottled up feelings
- Feeling part of a community
- Having your feelings – in some way – validated by the listening attention of others; i.e. listeners imagine what speaker is feeling
- Overcoming low self-esteem/gaining self-acceptance through acceptance of others
- Learning to be thankful for small blessings
- Learning how to be useful in the healing of others
- Group meditation; a tool to control anxiety?
- Exercises involving “motion” [Light & Livelies] can release pent up energy
- Talking about feelings tends to clarify them & dissipate negative energy
- Groups can develop a positive identity; members of a group can identify themselves with that positive identity
- Groups can be support systems
- Groups can be a source of enjoyable activity
- [Seems to me] doing positive things with people in the present diminishes the importance of past, negative experience with people
- “Relationship is a primary tool of recovery”; you can develop relationships in groups!

# 19. Some Exercises... ...to Get You Started

## Affirmation Beach Ball ( & Gathering Topics)

The following statements can be used one at a time for Gathering (go 'round) topics... &/or you can incorporate them in "**Affirmation Beach Ball**"

**You'll need:** a large beach or other ball, with (some number of?) the following statements written (permanent marker) or affixed, at odd angles, all over it. [10-20 minutes or use as people are taking their seats or during other gaps]

**How it works:** We toss the ball one to another, each finishing the statement that lands directly in our line of vision when we catch it... until everyone has had a turn... Or toss it to a few people to fill time gaps when people are settling in, etc.



**Something I love is... I tend to feel good with people who...  
A dream that's come true is... Something unique about me is...  
Something I used to do that I'm happy I don't do anymore is...  
Something that gives me hope is... A sustaining belief I hold is...  
Something I love to do is... Something unusual I can do is...  
A wellness tool I think everyone would like is... I have faith in...  
I always wanted to be a \_\_\_\_\_ when I grow up...  
A peak moment for me was... I time I did a great thing was...**

I place I love to be is...            A time I took care of myself was...  
A major factor in my recovery is... An activity I enjoy doing is...  
Something I value in a friend is...    A fear I faced was...  
Something that makes me laugh is...    When I was a kid I liked to...  
Something I do for others that makes me feel good is...  
Something that helps in the dark times is... I feel lovable when...  
Something that relaxes me is...            Something creative I do is...  
Something that makes me a great friend is... I feel rich when...  
A time I stood up for something or someone was...  
A time I took care of myself was... I feel competent when...  
Something I've gotten better at is...            A talent I have is...  
Something that encourages me is... I feel peaceful when...  
A favorite aspect of nature is...            A strength I have is...  
I feel satisfied when...                            I feel playful when...  
I feel supported when...                            I feel trusted when...  
If I was going to brag I'd tell you... My favorite music is...  
An interest I have is...                            Something I love to eat is...  
An animal I love (or have loved) is... Some advice I love to offer is...  
People who love me would tell you I... A time I felt courageous was...  
Something that always makes me smile is... My "mission" involves...  
Something positive I do regularly is... I always wanted to try...  
A time I surprised myself was... My favorite season is... because...  
Something I think is beautiful is... A happy memory I have is...  
A gift I gave or received that still makes me feel good was...  
Something that changed everything for the better was...  
A time I did the "right thing" was... Something I'm proud of is...  
I helped someone feel better when... I was generous when...  
Something I've always been good at is... A skill I've developed is...

# Angels & Devils

## Communication/Common Ground



**Angels & Devils:** is an exercise that deepens the level of trust in a group & points up our shared humanity. It offers a playful way to explore our dual nature

**What you'll need:** Ideally you'll have a few props – they make for giggles (energy release) during a “risky” level of sharing. Around Halloween time, dollar stores sell devil tridents, devil horns, angel wings & halos. All or any are great... Or, make your own! [30-60 minutes]

**How it works:** In the circle (or small groups for larger numbers of participants) we pass our props around with an invitation to play. The person holding the prop responds to one set of questions (one “devil” & one “angel”) at a time, without interruption. Debrief between each set of questions or at the end... One question: “How different did those two questions feel in the body?” Be mindful of energy levels - & cut as needed; too much talking can be tedious.

1. Devil: A time I did the wrong thing, even though I knew better
2. Angel: A time I did the right thing, even though it was hard!
3. Devil: Something I took from someone that wasn't mine
4. Angel: A gift I gave someone that meant a whole lot
5. Devil: A time I felt I hurt someone badly
6. Angel: A time I know I was of genuine service

# Belief Ball

## Common Ground

**Belief Ball:** is another means of creating safety & cohesiveness by determining the level of common ground in the group. When a statement is made, the ball is in play for any who relate

**You'll need:** A large, light ball & the following (or your own) list of statements...  
[15 minutes]

**How it works:** Explain that you'll read statements, one by one. When we hear a statement that is, or has ever been, true for us, we raise our hands. The ball gets tossed around between everyone the statement is true for. When everyone with their hands up has had a chance to catch the ball, read the next statement. Explain there is no judgment & there are no "right" or "wrong" answers associated with this... just an opportunity to notice what is or has been true for us. Remind people about the "right to pass." Have folks tune into themselves...

Do I now, or have I ever believed...

- ...There is or something wrong with me that can't be fixed
- ...I am bad
- ...I am the victim of all kinds of horror
- ...Others are out to get me
- ...The darkness/sadness will never lift
- ...I am unlovable
- ...I have no purpose
- ...I am unsafe
- ...I am untrustworthy
- ...I have no hope
- ...There is nothing to be grateful for

Debrief...

Do I now or am I to willing believe...

- ...I am whole, worthy and lovable
- ...I am good
- ...My potential is unlimited
- ...I am lovable
- ...I've overcome a lot & I will continue to overcome more
- ...I have special gifts for a special purpose
- ...I am safe
- ...I have hope
- ...I am grateful

Debrief...

# Blind Faith

## Communication/Dyads

**Blind Faith:** is a listening exercise involving pairs of blindfolded people, speaking in turn, about what they have faith in

There are all sorts of listening exercises for two (& some for more than two!): Exercises that focus on remembering what was heard. Exercises that reflect back what was heard in different words. Exercises that reflect back the emotional content of what was heard & exercises that require 100% presence, with no agenda whatsoever...

Some listening exercises involve lining people up in pairs... another exercise involves pairing people in “concentric circles.”

There are various means for pairing people: Counting off by twos, e.g., or simply asking folks to turn to the person next to them...

However you choose to go about it, listening exercises are **pure gold!**

It helps to give a little instruction on what good listening is &/or what type of listening you’re looking for. [See listening handouts pages 103 & 104]

**You’ll need:** A timer or other means to keep time, enough blindfolds for everyone... or a sincere promise from everyone to keep eyes shut! [20-30 minutes]

**How it works:** Everyone but a couple of “sighted” facilitators is blindfolded. Remind people of the “right to pass.” Ask participants to mill about gently until they “bump” into someone... That someone is their listening partner. Facilitators gently guide people into pairs as needed & keep people out of danger.

Once everyone has a partner, tell them they’re to take turns speaking for 3 minutes each on the topic: “Things I have faith in...” Let them know you’ll call time when the first three minutes is up.

**Debrief:** You can choose to debrief this between turns or after, as you’re led. Both the topic & the sightless aspect tends bring up a lot of feelings & insights.

# Fishbowl...

## Conflict Resolution



**“Fishbowls”** are used to move through group conflict or to delve into controversial topics. To borrow from A.A., they provide a safe way to debate “principles” without wounding “personalities.” Chairs “fight,” not people! Fishbowls can bring tremendous insight into everyone’s thinking... they can also heal rifts in the community.

**You’ll need:** Two chairs are set facing each other. The rest of the chairs are arranged in a half circle; audience to the two chairs. [30-40 minutes]

**How it works:** One chair represents the point of view of one side of a conflict or controversy, the other chair represents the other.

Two people are seated in the chairs. These could be two in conflict or two who represent two sides of a conflict. Cases are stated in turn (perception of the issue, what the person thinks is problematic in the other person’s stance, etc.) Someone taps the shoulder of one of the participants & takes over that seat, expressing the feelings & thoughts they perceive the chair represents. Then another taps the shoulder of the opposing stance... & so on until everyone who wants to has had a chance to fight for either or both sides of the issue – including (if applicable) both “combatants.” Ideally, at the end, the original pair argues the position of the other. **Debrief** as needed.

Once the group has experienced a fishbowl, any participant might ask for one when they notice a need.

# “Grounding” Exercises

## Inner-Conflict Resolution

When things get emotionally intense & you're concerned that folks may be “checking out” in some way... reliving a trauma, etc., activities that bring us solidly back into our bodies & the present moment are a good idea! If you've opted to use a “buddy system,” as in, if you've paired people up to assist one another in case an emotional “land mine” is tripped, educating folks about grounding exercises beforehand is a good idea, too! It's recommended that a person in distress be offered the option of leaving the circle with a helper.



**Who's Calling?** Tune in (or ask your partner to) to the physical body... Ask “Who's calling?” What part of the body is calling for attention? Pay attention; a.k.a. answer the call! In a few more moments, tune in (or ask) again & see what (other?) part of the body wants attention. Repeat as needed.

**5 Things:** Look around (or ask your partner to look around) at 5 round (e.g.) things... 5 green (e.g.) things... 5 old (e.g.) things... & so on.

**Backwards:** Recite things backwards: your address... spelled out, your pets names, any phone numbers you recall, birthdates, etc.

**Toe Breathing:** Tune in (or ask your partner to tune in) to the toes... breathe in & out of the toes. Tune in to the feet... breathe in & out of the feet... tune into the ankles... breathe in & out of the ankles.. tune into the calves... & so on...

**Take a “Noticing Walk”:** Walk while keeping scrupulous attention on everything including how the body feels every step.

# Heart Art Affirmation



**Heart Art:** is a simple art project wherein we make much of one another! A great foundation for working together!

**You'll need:** Scraps of paper, any art medium (colored markers, crayons, pencils, water colors, etc.) & a large piece of paper... [20-40 minutes]

**How it works:** We each get a scrap of paper & write our name on it.

We swap names and keep our name secret.

We do a collective art project... (around a big table or on the floor) each of us drawing something (or things) positive that speaks to us of the person whose name we chose.

When the art project is completed... we point to our part of the picture, in turn, & describe why the person whose name we choose, inspired us to draw what we drew...

# I-Message Imagining

## Conflict Resolution/Empathy

An "I-Message," also known as a "Feeling Statement" offers the possibility of expressing "negative" feelings about a situation without making things worse. They require courage & vulnerability & they don't always "work," as in convince the other person to change behavior. A good I-Message usually does "work" to help you feel better, because you've expressed your truth & done your best to resolve the situation! Often they do help the other to become more open to your experience by creating an "empathy bridge" between your two hearts. I-Messages involve growing skill that takes practice... & they're well worth it!

**I-Message Imagining:** is an entertaining & insight producing way to practice the I-Message/Feeling Statement formula, using our imaginings of what "nature" would like to communicate to humans.

**You'll need:** Posted I-Message "Formula" (see next page), Index cards & pencils [30-45 minutes]

**How it works:** Hand out cards & pencils. Ask everyone to write a conflict between an aspect of nature (animal, plant, element, etc.) & humankind... Offer the example of the whale scenario below, or another example: i.e. the way a turkey feels about Thanksgiving. In turn, we express the feelings in our conflict, using the "I-Message/Feeling Statement" formula. Ask for group help to redo any statement that sounds like it might escalate the conflict...

**I-Message/Feeling Statements follow a formula you can adapt as needed:**



**When** \_\_event/situation\_\_\_\_\_ **happens....** (relate facts/avoid blaming)

Example: "When someone sticks a camera right up next to my nose..."

**I feel** \_\_mad/sad/glad/scared\_\_\_... (Stick close to the four "source feelings")

Example: "I feel angry..."

**Because... &/or I imagine** \_\_\_\_\_...

Example: "I imagine I'm seen as a curiosity & my feelings don't matter..."

**What I would prefer is** \_\_\_\_\_...

Example: "What I'd prefer is to be asked first, & if say no, please respect that."

Try hard to avoid personal blame & the "YOU" word as much as possible.

Also avoid defining the other's motivations.

**Only talk about how the experience affects you!**

If you feel comfortable sharing any background ("Cameras in my nose are a real trigger for me! I was a whale-child star & was constantly hounded by the paparazzi! I never had a moment's peace!") it can help others to understand.

The closer you get to the true "core" feeling, the more likely the "I-Message" will work. Saying "I feel disrespected" for example, is not as powerful as saying "I feel hurt..." because "hurt" is a more honest reflection of the actual feeling.

Ouch!



# I've Got Your Back

## Affirmation

**I've Got Your Back:** involves the logistic challenge of writing positive traits we perceive in one another on (paper taped to) each other's backs.

**You'll Need:** Large index cards, washable markers, tape. [20-40 minutes]

**How it works:** We each have a large index card taped to our back & a magic marker. We stand, mill about & our task is to write 1 or 2 affirming things about each of the others on their backs... (as they write on ours) & to the best of our ability, to do it concurrently. Once this feat is accomplished, we swap cards & introduce the other, whose card we have, as though we'd never met before. (i.e. "This is Howard; he is tremendously driven to help the planet," "This is Linda; she has a heart that loves to give, etc.")



# Light & Livelies

## Energy/Bonding/Fun!

**Pass the Angry (e.g.) Face** (variation of pass the face): Think about an angry face you'd like to disempower (your own or another's) Try to duplicate that angry face (caricatures are welcome) & show your neighbor (to left or right). That neighbor must imitate your angry face.... Once you're satisfied with the effort, s/he comes up with a new angry face to pass on....

**Dancing Dan** (offered at A.V.P.'s 2012 annual conference)  
The facilitator makes a dance move. The next participant repeats that move & then adds his or her own move. Then the next person repeats the first two moves, & adds their own. When the sequence has passed around the entire circle, everybody does the dance together.

Alternate: Everyone does the moves all the way around the circle as each new person adds a new move...

**Wellness Tool Waltz:** We find meaning, balance & healing in individual ways. One might value talking to a friend, while another might find peace through gardening, etc. Pat Deegan (a titan in the recovery movement!) coined the phrase "Personal Medicine" to describe these personalized "doings" that keep us healthy. Stand in a circle, describe & act out **your** personal wellness tool ... Ask everyone to act it out with you... Then invite the next person (to left or right) to go & so on...

**Daring Duets:** Pair people up & give them 5 or so minutes to come up with a song or other performance piece. If one in a duo suffers stage fright, s/he can keep the beat, e.g. (This is great for overcoming stage fright!)

# Love Loves

## Guided Meditation/[Inner] Conflict Resolution



Certain exercises, like “Love Loves,” take us into deep waters...

It’s safest to do these when the group feels strongly bonded.

Explain it may be challenging for some. Recall the “right to pass,” & affirm it’s important to honor our feelings. These feelings provide insight when debriefing.

**Love Loves:** uses guided meditation & the analogy of a number line to explore our “positive” & “negative” reactions & the possibility embracing both!

**You’ll need:** Index cards & pencils. Large posted “number line. [50-60 minutes]

**How it works – Part I:** Ask people to be still a moment, tune inside & choose an “identity number,” negative or positive & write it down on their card.

**Ask for one example number (or use your own) & write it on the poster**

Discuss: (In your own words or read as written...)

“A number is a symbol that contains attributes... for example, 17, is made up of straight lines. It represents 17 ones. If we’re applying it to something, it represents 17 units of whatever that thing is. The “thing” can be relatively simple, as in 17 rocks, or complex, as in 17 personality traits. For the purposes of this exercise, all that is YOU is represented by your number. Feel inside yourself all that number represents. Get a sense of your personal attributes &/or imagined “liabilities”... your total unique “ness.”

**Point to the number-line, stretching into infinity in both directions**

Ask folks to consider: “Our identity, as we understand it, is a finite thing – like a number. We know ourselves to be this & not that, based on things like comparison & judgment. 17 is less than 46 & greater than 6. Yet spiritual teachers & these days even scientists tell us of Oneness & that contrary to our perception, we are in fact all part of One interrelated Whole. If this is true, we might more aptly be described as the whole number line rather than a solitary number.

**The question then becomes; how do we shift our perception to identify with the entire number-line – which contains all numbers stretching into infinity - instead of the single number we perceive ourselves to be?**

**Part II:** Have people consider something that they value tremendously... It could be a hero they admire, a nurturing relationship, a pet, a natural setting, a state of being they've enjoyed, an activity, a situation, etc. Choose one that brings a sense of pleasure, peace & joy.



Ask people to assign a number to that "thing," & write it on their card. This can be called their "pleasure" number.

Write an example pleasure number that corresponds with the example identity number on the poster.

For example: I had a dream involving a bright light that felt blissful. In relation to my identity number of 17, I'll assign that experience a pleasure number of 9,596,211.

- 1) Ask people to call up the feelings related to their particular pleasure. Give a minute or so for this. Ask them to notice the feelings (lightness, happiness, peace, etc.) & to notice where & how it manifests in the body. Ask them to notice that their pleasure number has been designated as a number apart from their own identity.
- 2) Then ask, to the extent they are able, for folks to imagine themselves big enough to contain both numbers... Suggest they extend love to their pleasure number from their identity number. Can they surround, embrace & permeate the pleasure number with love; absorb it as a part of a newly claimed part of a larger identity? Debrief

**Part III:** Have people consider a particularly triggering relationship of any type. This could be with a person, a condition (an illness, e.g.), a belief ("I'm stupid," e.g.), a thing, or situation (impending war, e.g.). Choose one you know causes you pain or judgment or sorrow, is perceived as evil, etc.

Ask people to assign a number to that "thing," & write it on their card.-  
This can be called their "pain" number.

Write an example pain number that corresponds with the example identity number on the poster.

For example: The idea of children on psychotropic medications triggers me. In relation to my identity number of 17 I'll assign that a pain number of -9,042!

- 1) Ask people to call up the feelings related to their chosen pain number. Give a minute or so for this. Ask them to notice feelings (grief, helplessness, frustration, rage, etc.) & to notice where & how it manifests in the body. Ask them to notice that their pain number has been designated as a number apart from their own identity.
- 2) ***Have folks consider – just for now; just for the purposes of this exercise:***
  - a) ***That Love is the ether from whence this entire number-line & all single point identities, triggers, etc. emerge...***
  - b) ***Love is the common denominator of all numbers on it...***
  - c) ***Love is the ether into which all points return...***
  - d) ***Love Loves! (Judgment judges, Fear fears, Rage rages, etc.)***
- 3) Ask people, to the extent they are able, to imagine themselves big enough to contain both numbers... Suggest they try, if willing &/or able, to extend love to their pain trigger number from their identity number. See if they can surround, embrace & permeate the uncomfortable, pain trigger feeling with love; absorb it as a part of them self. Could they allow the pain trigger condition to exist, without resistance (just for now)... even welcome it as part of a newly-claimed sense of a larger identity.

If things are feeling heavy, you can choose to guide people to integrate another "pleasure number," call on Transforming Power &/or follow up w/light & lively.

Debrief... Ask about feelings first.... Ask people to consider what it might feel like to relinquish our "This is bad!" judgment of our pain numbers & extend Love to the whole number line... What does this question stir up?

# “Masks II” a.k.a. “Blindfolds”

## Power Dynamics/Cooperation



**Masks II:** is an A.V.P. exercise (Masks) modified for “mental health system” use. It “Explores In-Group/Out-Group Attitudes & Feelings” & provides a valuable experience of the loss of power that often becomes the *most* disabling issue for people with psychiatric diagnoses. Half the group will be blind-folded & following one set of “rules.” The other half will have the lion’s share of power, & a very different set of rules. Together, they have a task to perform. Rich! particularly cross role involving mental health workers and recipients.

***A.V.P. issues this warning: Don’t push too hard. This exercise explores some of our most emotionally charged areas. Allow the participants their defenses!***

**You’ll need:** Enough blindfolds to cover the eyes of half the group. Poster paper, on wall or easel (for brainstorm), markers & scrap paper [50-60 minutes]

**How it works:** Chairs are in a circle. Explain this is a challenging exercise; a ‘dramatization’ for learning purposes. Some may experience some vulnerability. If people want to pass, have them form an outer circle of witnesses, but let folks know it’s most productive for people to experience it for themselves.

**Sequence:** 1. Divide the group in half without prior discussion. Send one half out of the room (i.e. count off by twos & take the ones).

2. Briefly join the half of the group outside the room.  
Explain: "When you go back into the room, in a couple of minutes, the people in it will be different than you." Leave them outside.
3. Reenter to room to address the second group, still seated.  
Remind them of the right to pass. Ask them to take off their shoes & place them at a distance, in front of their seat, so it's clear whose shoes are whose. The scrap paper is for under their feet, if desired.
4. Hand out blindfolds & ask folks to put them on so they're unable to see anything.
5. Bring other, unblindfolded participants back in the room & have them resume their seats.
6. Explain: "You're a special committee formed & invited to improve your community... There are two classes of people: blindfolded & unblindfolded...."

### **INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP**

- A. The blindfolded folks may only speak if they have gotten permission from one of the people without a blindfold
  - B. Those without blindfolds may speak at will
  - C. The blindfolded must address the unblindfolded formally, i.e., Sir or Mam
  - D. The unblindfolded may address each other informally
  - E. Violation of the rules on a repeated basis will result in the participant being asked to remain silent
7. Ask an unblindfolded volunteer to lead a brainstorm of community building ideas & then facilitate choosing one priority issue. (If no one volunteers you can facilitate it yourself.)  
Let them know they have 15-20 minutes to accomplish this task.
  8. Enforce the rules whenever a blindfolded person speaks without permission or without giving a respectful address to an unblindfolded person (Notice how hard it is to do this & share that during debrief.)
  9. After the task is accomplished tell folks you're going to touch some of the blindfolded folks on the shoulder (tap every other one

around the circle), then tell them those who were touched can peek under their blindfolds & get their shoes. [They tend to fly!]  
10. For the remaining blindfolded, ask for volunteer unblindfolded to help put the shoes on the blindfolded [They also tend to fly]



**AVP NOTE:** Watch all the interactions carefully. They will be complex and subtle. Make careful notes. They will be useful in the discussion. Watch for things like: Which group speaks more often? Do the blindfolded become quieter as things progress? Noisier? How about the unblindfolded? Are they acting naturally? There is a good chance some unblindfolded will take on the role of “liberal” saying such things as “You don’t have to call me Sir,” It is important to note that such behavior, however kind or gentle in its intent, it still keeps the unblindfolded in control. The unblindfolded is giving permission to change the rule!

When doing this in the mental health realm, all sorts of control & power dynamics are illuminated... Most often, communication flows best between unblindfolded... Their decisions carry the most weight... Masks often act out, in an effort to get attention from unmasked... In one experience the entire “blindfolded population” was staff, while the unblindfolded were all people “receiving services.” That was the only time I saw the unblindfolded defer the blindfolded.

The shoe aspect often points up how much we value “doing for ourselves” & how much people value “helping.”

# Outing Innies

## Anonymity/Conflict Resolution/Empathy

**Outing Innies:** helps to clear the air when members of a group are not addressing grievances against one another directly. It involves sharing the grievances anonymously & then voluntarily “owning” associated behaviors.

**You'll need:** A bowl to represent an “innie” belly button, index cards & pencils.  
[40 -60 minutes; or decide to do whatever number of grievances time allows]

**How it works:** Acknowledge that you've noticed certain people expressing anger about others in the group & you suspect they may not have confidence or skill or desire to confront the situation directly. Express your concern that behind the scenes backbiting undermines a **good group**; unaddressed hostilities can ferment & explode &/or people may leave the group in order to avoid unpleasantness.

Explain that you have a relatively safe way to “clear the air” using an anonymous exercise. Affirm the courage & willingness of participants to do the challenging work of growing interpersonal skills that help with resolving issues. Issue a warning: “This may smart at times... but that's just your ego shrinking. Go into this exercise with the attitude... a shrinking ego is GOOD!”

Hand out index cards & pencils. Invite everyone to write, as generally as possible, about the most challenging relationship(s) or dynamic(s) they're experiencing in the group & associated feelings. If someone doesn't have any issues or simply wants to, they can write what's working! Offer these examples:

Someone doesn't return my calls... hurt

Someone tends to control things... annoyed

Someone doesn't have time to be a real friend... sad

Someone is quick to anger... frightened

Someone doesn't let others have their feelings... angry

Collect cards & ask volunteers to randomly select one & share a time they experienced a similar hurt & a time they did the behavior & feelings about both. Ask for ideas for making peace around this behavior. When the volunteer is done... invite others in the group chime in... “I do this a lot, etc. Or I used to do this, I overcame it by...”

Debrief

# Proclamations in the Pond

## Anonymity/Empathy/Cooperation



**“Pond” exercises:** offer an opportunity for all sorts of information to be brought to light safely; great for creating a deep connection.

**You’ll need:** A “Grand Poobah” hat/crown of some kind (could be home-made), A big bowl to represent a pond, index cards & pencils.  
[30-60 minutes or decide whatever number of Proclamations time allows]

**How it works:** Proudly wear the Grand Poobah hat/crown, while handing out index cards & pencils.

Ask for “anonymous” responses the suggestion: “If I was Grand Poobah of this group (e.g.)...something I’d proclaim to improve our community is...”  
If the proclamation could be interpreted as critical, word it as gently & as ‘from the heart’ as possible.

Explain that there may not be enough time to fully process every card (though they’ll all be read out loud) & advise folks hungry for change to “star” theirs.  
Process starred comments first.

When folks are done, collect & shuffle the cards. Volunteers read a random card as if it were their own proclamation, & argue from the position of the writer for what is being asked for. **TRY** to get into the mentality of the author of those wishes, make a case for those needs being met & offer your best ideas for how that change could come about.

When the energy starts to wane, or as time dictates, pass out the remaining cards to volunteers to read out loud (or you do it...) Consider saving the rest of the cards to be processed when next your group meets)

[This can also be done as “Perceptions in the Pond, Problems in the Pond, etc.]

# On Role Plays



**Role Plays:** can be used in all sorts of ways, for all sorts of purposes: for fun, for practicing skills, for inviting an experience of Transforming Power into a conflict situation... In the **Alternatives to Violence Project** process, role play is central.

For people who still have **BIG** past-trauma energy stored, role plays, particularly those dealing with conflict, can be triggering.

One safety measure is to ask that no one plays a role in a conflict that they've experienced in real life. Playing another role is okay; it can bring rich insight!

Consider: Holding off on doing conflict-based role plays until you & your teammates feel comfortable with debriefing in general...

When & if you do chose to do role plays & conflict arises, the **Alternative to Violence Project** method for debriefing is as follows:

**You'll need:** Masking tape or other "name tag" & markers [30- 60 minutes]

- ✓ Make sure everyone wears a name tag with the name of their character
- ✓ If the conflict starts to get out of hand call "cut"
- ✓ Have actors sit in chairs
- ✓ Determine which characters are most agitated... debrief in that order
- ✓ While actors are still in character, talk them through the experience they just had: i.e. "Killer... you seem very angry! What upset you so much...?"
- ✓ Invite them to share feelings with the other characters to release energy
- ✓ Listen & validate every feeling; DON'T argue or "educate"
- ✓ When the character has calmed down ask the actor if s/he is ready to come back to being \_\_ (say actors real name) \_\_
- ✓ If "No," continue debriefing; if "Yes" have the actor stand, take the tag off of the actor, & place it in sight on the chair back...
- ✓ Ask the actor, by name, if he has anything he'd like to say to the character, now represented by the chair.
- ✓ Move on to the next actor (or better yet, have a team member go next)

# Speakout

-From the **Alternatives to Violence Project Manual** with 2 cents

## Communication/Empathy

**Speakout:** helps people who feel oppressed to "speak out" & receive the support of the group. It helps participants feel empathy for members of oppressed groups... & P.S. some wisdom ("Re-Evaluation Counseling," a wonderful alternative healing modality, e.g.) suggests that every group carries its own, internalized oppression (psychiatrists have an above average suicide rate.) Speakout can be used to gain understanding cross culture, gender, role, socio-economic lines... etc. It's great for reducing "us" & "them" dynamics. If you go into it with a level of respect & seriousness, Speakout can really pack a wallop! Consider doing it when a level of trust has developed in your group.

**You'll need:** Posted list of questions (see below, #4). [40 -60 min]

### How it works:

1. Brainstorm a list of oppressed groups which are targets of stereotyping (e.g. people of color, people with psychiatric labels or who have sexual preferences, or identities out of the "mainstream," etc.)
2. Have the circle form a "horse shoe" & place one chair in front of the group. Explain that participants are invited to volunteer to represent the oppressed group of which they are a member.
3. If people are hesitant, be VERY prepared to go first (ideally you've gone to "the heart" of your feelings about being a member of your oppressed group.
4. Stand close to the volunteer; ask if they'd like their hand or shoulder held.
  - ♥ Of which oppressed group are you a member?
  - ♥ What do you like about being...?
  - ♥ What is hard about being...?
  - ♥ What do you like about others who are...?
  - ♥ What do you dislike about others who are...?
  - ♥ What do you never want to hear said about or have done to a member of your group again?
  - ♥ How can people who are not... be your friends or allies?

Debrief: AVP suggests people comment only on their own thoughts & feelings during the Speakout; **NOT** on what anyone said. (Avoids potential pitfalls!)

# Square Share

-Courtesy of a P.A.V.E. Participant, Rondout Valley High School

## Affirmation



**You'll need:** One roll of toilet paper [15-30 minutes]

**How it works:** Hand the toilet paper to a person next to you in the circle & tell them to take as many pieces as they like. Person takes as much toilet paper as they like and passes it on. You are last to take toilet paper (so as not to give any clue on what's "appropriate.") Once everyone has taken what they want, you explain that each person has to say as many positive things about themselves as they have squares of toilet paper. You go first...

[Note: This can also be modified to affirm others]

**“Proud to be a graduate of psychotic state!”**

-Off a Button

# Steam Release

## Guided Meditation/[Inner] Conflict Resolution



**Steam Release:** (inspired by The Sedona Method) helps with acknowledging & releasing uncomfortable feelings that are in our bodies right now. Encourage everyone in the group to request it when they notice the energy in the room or their own energy has gotten uncomfortably **BIG**...

**You'll need:** [20-30 minutes]

Read slowly; leaving plenty of silent space for people to follow your directions:

**Acknowledge energy has gotten intense. If Transforming or Higher Power has been accepted by the group, ask for its presence. Ask folks to notice their breath, entering & leaving the body... (be silent for a few breaths)... Ask folks to notice the sensations of the body interacting with the world around them; the temperature on the skin, the feeling of the bottom on the chair, the feet on the floor; the smells, the sounds, etc... Then ask "Are you willing to notice the sensations of the inner body (eyes open or closed)..." Offer: "If your answer is 'No' could you allow yourself to be with that 'No' fully... just rest in your resistance to feeling what you feel. If you're willing, go within & just feel what's there. Maybe you can name it, maybe you can't... but most important, you can feel it... even numbness is a feeling... Where is it in the body? Is painful or pleasant? Does it burn? Grip? Is it light or heavy? Just notice what's there... be with it... breathe in & out... Be with it some more...**

**Ask yourself: 'Could I invite the feeling I'm feeling to be here, right now, just as it is? If the answer is 'Yes,' continue to notice the feeling... If the answer is 'No'... could you allow the resistance to the feeling to be there as it is... (be silent for a few breaths) Now Ask yourself, 'Could I let any portion, even just a little bit, of this feeling or this resistance go?' Check in & ask if the physical sensation changed in anyway; did it lessen, change quality, or move? Repeat the process outlined in this paragraph as desired. Debrief**

# Sunshine & Clouds

## Cooperation/Brainstorm



**Sunshine & Clouds:** is one of many creative ways to brainstorm; variations help avoid “brainstorm-burnout!” A “sun” is placed on the floor in the center of the circle. Our challenges cover it & our brainstormed solutions uncover it!

**You’ll need:** Markers, a large drawing or other representation of the sun & “clouds” cut out of newspaper. Note: I made a large multi-colored sun out of felt with a white heart at the center. Optional - A friend suggested hiding a small, battery operated “press light” (dollar store sells ‘em) under the sun to push at the final “uncovering” for dramatic effect. [30-40 minutes]

**How it works:** Place your sun on the floor, in the center of the circle.  
Explain: The sun represents the ideal “something”: The ideal YOU (e.g.)... alive, joyful, playful! Or the ideal family relationship you’d like to see: Healthy, mutually supportive, inter-dependent, fun, creative, etc. What gets in the way?

We brainstorm answers & write on the clouds, & one by one, we cover up the sun. (“Lack of trust” or “low self-esteem” might be written on individual clouds. )

Then, one by one, we volunteer to tackle a cloud of choice, sharing our ideas on how to dissolve the cloud. When the volunteer is finished, others in the group chime in... When all are satisfied, the volunteer scrunches the cloud & tosses it over a shoulder. One by one, in this way, we throw all the clouds out of the circle, uncovering the glorious sun! Debrief as needed.

# “Talking Stick” Peace Kit

## Communication/Conflict Resolution/Empathy

### DIRECTIONS

- 1) Choose a meaningful object (stick, feather, etc.) to pass around.  
Ideally, sit in a community circle with nothing between you. For a grand air clearing, say you'll hang in until *everyone* feels enough has been said... for now.  
Or...  
Facilitators choose a number of times the object will go around - at this sitting.  
Be sensitive to those who are uncomfortable doing this...  
(remind folks of the "right to pass")
- 2) *Protection of the "object": The person holding the object...*
  - a.) ...**gets to** talk, the whole time **WITHOUT INTERRUPTION !!!** (maybe set a time limit/use timer maybe not) and then passes it to the next person in the circle - knowing it'll come back around if needed (if agreed to).  
Note: Always have the object go all around the circle; No back and forth.
  - b.) ...**gets to** be WELL listened to when talking. (Listeners, try to let go of your own viewpoint and defensiveness... and practice imagining what the talker is feeling.)
  - c.) ...**is** encouraged to get out their ENERGY IN MOTION (e-motion).  
Feelings (not always tidy) *will* come up. (Listeners, take a deep breath and listen well. Trust that the talker will eventually run out of emotional "steam." Notice that peace begins to blossom from the talker's clearer thinking.)
  - d.) ...**is** asked to do their best to say what they *really* feel - but in as kind a way as possible. Always try to stick to how certain things make YOU feel... and what YOU need for things to go better. (Use "I-Messages/Feeling Statements")  
Try *not* to focus on what another person needs to feel or do.  
And P.S. "I feel like you're a %\$#@#\*&%#%!!!" is not a feeling!
  - e.) ...**is** asked, on the final go-round, to share something positive about him or herself... and about each circle member (if time permits, or if not, something positive about the group).  
...also say if this was helpful... and whether you'd want to do it again

# SUGGESTED AGREEMENTS

1. Don't interrupt  
(unless you need to clarify or didn't hear something)
2. Try to be honest about feelings and needs
3. Try to lead with positives  
(i.e. "I really appreciate that you cook my noodles! But I do wish you wouldn't MAKE ME EAT EVERY BITE!!!")
4. When listening, avoid looking really mean and p\*\*\*ed off  
(remember, we're encouraging *voice*)
5. Try not to blame or attack anyone  
(find a nicer way to say it!)
6. If you discover you made a mistake, admit it  
(mistakes are the fertilizer for our blossoming souls!)
7. Be tolerant with yourself and others around these agreements
8. Humor's good!
9. Consider appreciating YOU and everyone else in your circle  
FOR DOING THIS!!!
10. Modify this list or the directions with your brilliant ideas as needed

This tool is a composite of ideas borrowed from Native Culture,  
**Alternatives to Violence Project** & Re-Evaluation Counseling

# Transforming Power Traveling Tales

-basic idea offered by I forget who, but **someone** at an **AVP** workshop!

## Communication/Cooperation



**TP Traveling Tales:** involves strolling through the Transforming Power Guidelines, laid out on the floor & choosing one to pontificate on for any reason.

**You'll need:** Each of the 12 Transforming Power Guidelines [see page 38] printed in large letters on individual sheets of paper & laid out on the floor... [20-40 minutes]

**How it works:** Spread the guidelines out, so all are visible, in the center of the circle... Ask people to take a stroll around, considering the guidelines until they feel motivated to choose one & talk about it. The choice can be made for any reason: Maybe they have a story to tell related to the guideline (a time they used surprise & humor to transform a moment of conflict, e.g.), maybe they disagree with a guideline, etc. You go first & model how it goes.

# Unicorn Stories

## Communication/Transforming Power



**Unicorn Stories:** Is a small group exercise in which people relate “peak” “Transforming Power” experiences; experiences that led to positive transformation in our lives. We define this however suits us!

**You’ll need:** The Unicorn handout [page \_\_\_] Unicorn props or not, to suit your style. [I pass a mirror with unicorns on the frame & show them all a Unicorn!] [30-40 minutes]

**How it works:** Have a volunteer read the handout... Separate folks into small groups of three or four, preferably folks who don’t know each other too well.

Ask people to take turns relating a peak or transformational “Unicorn Story” A “treasure” or adventure they have discovered or experienced on their unique & sacred path; it could be something mystical, practical; whatever it means to the individual.

Have small groups use consensus to decide which single tale to bring back to share with the larger group. Debrief as needed.

# You & Me & Our Relationship Makes Three

## Affirmation



**You & Me...:** offers an opportunity to see the best in others & discover whether or not seeing the best in others has an effect on how we see ourselves.

**You'll need:** Index cards & pencils [30 minutes]

**How it works:** Pair people up. Explain that there's power in relationship. What you see & believe has an effect on both of you.

In this exercise the intention is to combine to make a mutually beneficial relationship.

Direct folks to tune into their partner & write strengths, gifts, etc. they sense, know of, feel, see, etc. in the other."

When all writing has stopped...

Have everyone flip their cards & write strengths, gifts, etc. they perceive in themselves.

Give folks time to compare lists.

Debrief: Did you end up feeling a bit more positive about yourself than before the exercise? How would it been different if the person listed perceived deficits? Do you think people know if you have judgments, even if you don't share them out loud? etc.

# Closings

## Affectionate Closure for a Beautiful Process



**Gift Share:** One person at a time, around the circle. we turn to the person to our left (or right) & express a gift we perceive in them...

**Gift Bouquet:** One person at a time, around the circle, we turn to the person to our right (or left) & tell them what flower or plant they remind us of & why...

**Heart Circle:** Each person in turn, around the circle, shares a wish from the heart for the benefit of all people in the circle (& beyond)

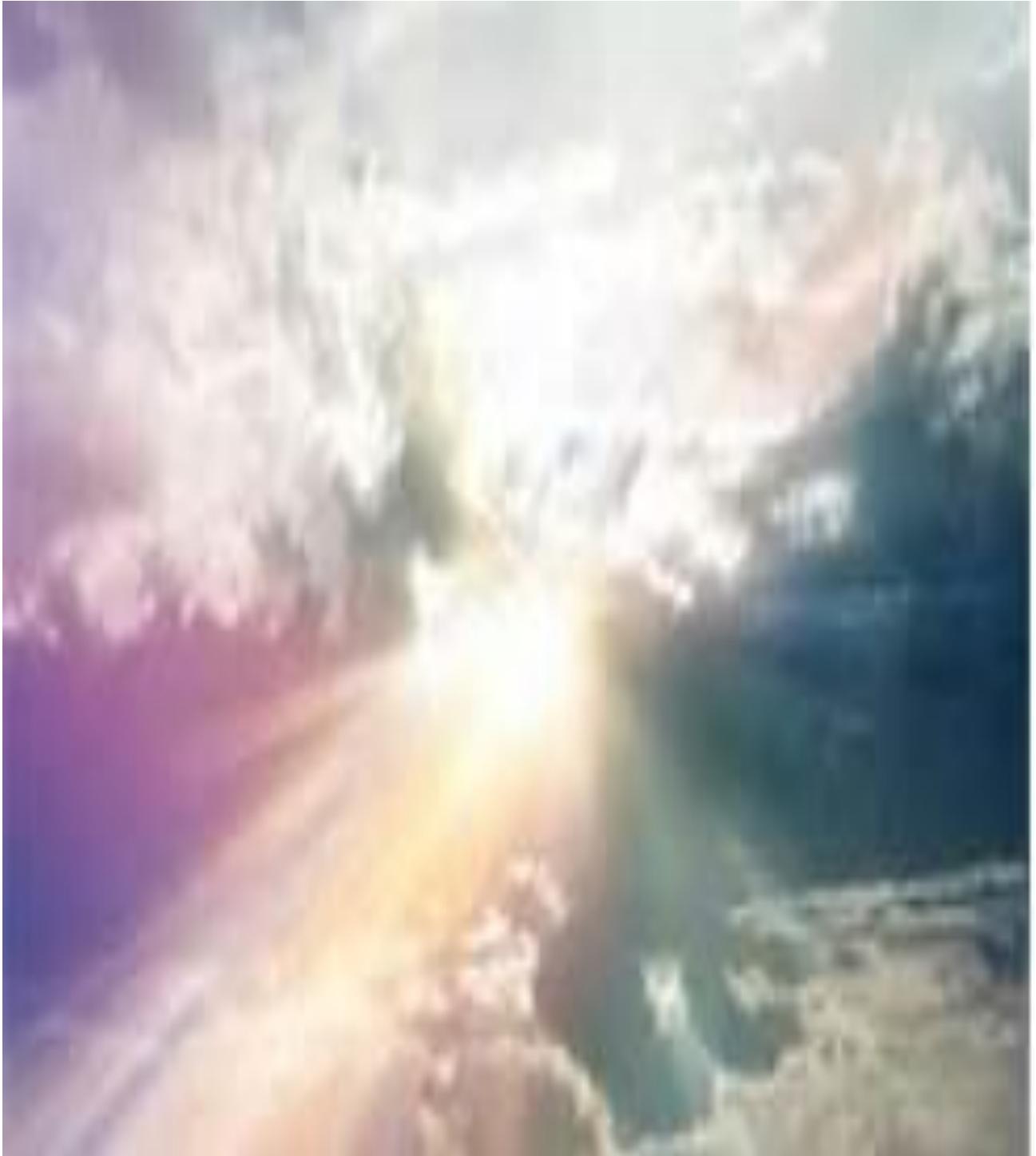
**Universe Buddies:** Everyone writes their name on a scrap of paper (or get fancy with cosmic wrapping paper cut in star shapes)... We mix names and let the Universe determine who gets which name. We share something about the person whose name we received that makes them “stellar.”

**Mighty Mission:** Imagining **everything is possible**, someone starts with their most grandiose “mighty mission” (“I’ll fly to all the countries where people are hungry & rain delicious food down on them... “e.g.) & the next person adds to that by saying... “And then I’ll...” ...all around the circle.

**“You’re a Natural!”** One person at a time, we turn to the person to our left (or right) & express some aspect of nature that person represents to us & why...

**Circle Pat (Quick):** Standing, celebrate the circle by asking for one person to offer praise for the group’s effort & then have everyone simultaneously pat one another’s backs

## 20. Handouts: Inspirational...



*Believe...*  
*& so Shall it Be*



I am without a roof for shelter;  
I am abandoned  
I am without a roof for shelter;  
The stars bless me!

I am without a special lover; I am lonely  
I am without a special lover;  
I am wooed by all Creation!

I am without health; I am dying  
I am without health;  
A sweet song calls me Home!

I am without religion; I am lost  
I am without religion;  
Love speaks to my heart and I am free to listen!

*Born of Love,  
Loved,  
I Am Love  
Loving  
Love!*



**When you hear your  
own voice saying,  
“You should...”**

(& your shoulders fold in self-protection...)

Close the door quietly behind you

‡ run to play in fresh air

with the One inside that’s always known:

**“You Can...!”**



**...Live the dreams  
of your heart!”**

# Embracing Humanness

-A knock-off of Emmanuel

The parts of us that make us squirm are okay, too.  
They call our attention... offer opportunity... nudge us...  
motivate us... remind us of our yearning for *Home!*

They provide a stark contrast to the Joy  
that each Soul knows, deep down, is its True habitat.

There's Loving to be done - HERE & NOW!

All of the colors & textures of our unique collages-of-self  
are needed, in this moment, *just as they are!*



Can we give up becoming the "perfection" of our imaginings?

...and rather love ourselves & one another NOW...

...thoroughly, tenderly, doggedly...

...maybe even *just for being*

the "total catastrophe" we human beings often are!

**Home... isn't, without every one of us in it...**

**...Forgiven at last!**

## The Guest House

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice.  
meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.

Be grateful for whatever comes.  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.

-- Jelaluddin Rumi,  
translation by Coleman Barks



# Holdíng the Key



Responsibility for my happiness and fulfillment  
is mine and mine alone  
Others may strive to assist,  
but I hold the key

Responsibility for overcoming despair, hopelessness and  
perceived limitation is mine and mine alone  
Others may comfort me to the extent they are able,  
but I hold the key

Responsibility for shining in this world as only I can  
is mine and mine alone.  
Others may offer their light in hopes I catch fire,  
but I hold the key

The key is mine and mine alone...

And when I am ready, I may choose to open the door...

...To Love.

# Joy

Do you feel it?  
Pushing from the inside?  
Do you feel it?  
Reaching from the inside?  
Do you feel it?

Do you feel it?  
Flowing from the One Source...  
Do you feel it?  
Growing from the One Source...

Hands coming together... Do you feel it?  
Hearts coming together...  
Do you feel it? Do you feel it?  
I feel it!

It's happening right, right, right **Now!**

Oh, let yourself feel it.  
It's important to feel it...  
We're needed to feel it... right **Now...**  
Now... Now... Now...

# Oh, How Lovely I Am!



Oh, how lovely I am! That's me!  
A glorious someone to love & be...  
There's nothing more I need because...  
I'm a lovely me... *with all of my flaws!*  
I'm a dream come true & the only one  
Who's *this* lovely "me," 'neath the whole wide sun!

You're a lovely you... & I love you too!  
& just like me, there's nothing to do...  
You're already fine... no matter your spice...  
To love you "as is" ...feels mighty nice!

From this place of "We're fine!" we get to choose  
What to keep of ourselves & what to lose...  
We get to play with the selves that we create  
& playing together feels mighty great!

The greater picture? That's just right too!  
Made of ALL the lovely mes & yous  
As we offer our Love to every part...  
Creation becomes one GREAT BIG HEART!

-In the spirit of Jai Josef's (better) lyric "I Love Myself" – look it up!

*Sit still with Me  
that thou may hear  
My instruction to thee  
Thou are fooled  
by a mind taut with fear  
of outcomes and future needs  
that I will take care of  
all in good and proper time  
Trust Me with your life  
and journey in this world  
and the world beyond  
Be not spiteful  
nor resentful at times of stress  
and seeming wrong doing  
Let people grow at their pace  
for all is under MY eventual control  
Demonstrate patience  
understanding  
and kindness  
to those who know not  
what they are doing  
Be MY example  
of forgiveness and compassion  
so essential to the healing path  
You are succeeding  
and doing well  
Of that I assure you  
Worry not  
for I am with you  
at all times and in all ways*

-channeled by Dr. Bob Weltman, Ph.D., Christian Laity Foundation, 11/22/11

*Clinging to the thoughts that Kill...*

As though I never had free will

Relax the grip that holds so tight

Release the Dove into the night...



And behold.... as the world begins to

*Sparkle*

*We*, who have experienced unusual states  
of consciousness, are...

# Unicorns



...laden with gifts of magical enchantment  
to bestow!

We've been to extraordinary places,  
developed unique powers,  
& are capable of facilitating enormous miracles!  
This works best when we stop viewing ourselves...

**...as horses with tumors on our heads!**

Metaphor borrowed from an anonymous Unicorn with a government job

... On Alternatives...



## **Alternative Modes of Healing**

More and more individuals are finding alternative ways to cope with &/or fully recover from severe symptoms of mental and emotional distress. Even some people with “big-ticket” labels like schizophrenia and bi-polar disorder (manic depression) are discovering ways to live full, healthy lives without medication or electro-shock.

This type of self-healing takes work! often involving a life-long commitment to gaining skills and self-awareness. People who are succeeding will tell you, it's well worth it!

**\*Note: Until you're confident with a new discipline, it may be safest to use alternative modes of healing as an adjunct to care you're already receiving.**

### *Consider One or Several of the Following:*

*--- & listen to your intuition! (Where your tailor-made answers reside!)*

... \* meditation \* developing a support system \* journaling  
\* full-spectrum lighting \* homeopathy \* working or volunteering  
\* peer counseling (based on Re-Evaluation or Co-Counseling) \*  
visualization \* Ayurveda \* alternative practices (E.M.D.R., Bryon  
Katie's "The Work" etc.) \* mindfulness \* peer support groups  
(12 Step & other formats) \* martial arts \* yoga \* belief work  
(practice believing brilliantly!) \* diet/nutrition (macrobiotic,  
vitamin therapy, etc.) \* various types of body work (Reiki, e.g.)  
\* aromatherapy \* exercise \* forgiveness \* focusing (getting to  
feelings behind issues) \* exploring comforting spiritual ideas \*  
drumming \* energy release work (chakra balancing, Sedona  
Method, etc.) \* biofeedback \* laughter yoga \* exploring  
available healing programs & tools (W.R.A.P., D.B.T., etc.) \*  
engaging in enjoyable activity (play, hobbies, nature walks, art,  
etc.) \* attention work (for dealing with voices)\*...

\* \_\_\_\_\_ (Your brilliant idea goes here!)

CAN I...?  
ALLOW THIS MOMENT  
TO BE EXACTLY AS IT IS?



CAN I...?  
LET THIS MOMENT GO?

What am I feeling... right now...? Can I allow myself to feel it, exactly as it is? Can I let it go? Notice

What am I feeling... right now...? Can I allow myself to feel it, exactly as it is? Can I let it go? Notice

What am I feeling... right now...? Can I allow myself to feel it, exactly as it is? Can I let it go? Notice

Inspired by The Sedona Method

# Laugh!!!

& laugh some more!



Your body doesn't care if something's funny or not!

- It produces the same healthy chemicals
- It provides the same internal workout
- It releases the same amount of stress
- It burns the same amount of calories...
- It promotes the same *HEALING!*

Go ahead... Laugh!!!

*Biography of a*

# Resistant Meditator

- "Gee, meditation sure sounds like a good idea."

**5 years later-**

- "Hmmm... a class on mediation. I might take it."

**2 years later -**

- "That was a well spent afternoon! Great teacher! I'm definitely gonna start meditating now!"

**15 years later -**

- "I can't stand this!!! How is this not 5 minutes????!  
Something must be wrong with this f\*\*\*in' timer!"

**7 years later -**

- "You know I actually *like* being in my own skin...  
When the heck did that happen???"

# *Tips from a*

# Resistant Meditator\*

*(\*Not to be confused w/real meditation instruction, but it's been working for me!)*

- Start with less than 5 minutes on the timer!
- Build from there
- Position yourself comfortably, but not so comfortably you fall asleep
- Close your eyes. (Unless you're doing walking meditation, then it's best to keep them open)
- If you want, pray on your intention for the time (i.e. "Please use this time for its most beneficial purpose.") &/or read spiritual material beforehand
- Attempt to stay present, in your body, experiencing what you experience (physical sensations, emotional sensations, etc.)
- Following your breathing, in and out, can be useful
- When your mind takes you on the 17 million tangents it will take you on... gently refocus your attention on your body/feelings/breathing
- When amazing insights bubble up, giving you great clues into the mysteries of the Universe, acknowledge your gratitude and... gently refocus your attention on your body/feelings/breathing
- Adjust your rear end if it starts to hurt. (This applies to other body parts as well)
- Trust that the acute anxiety you feel initially (if you're like me) - the horror of being alone and still within yourself -- will diminish over time
- Trust that the acute anxiety and horror will be replaced with a certain delicious yearning to spend time quietly in your own attentive company!
- Enjoy! (Well... as soon you start to...)

*The difference between...*

**HOLE**

(The endless black hole horror, bone-deep alienation,  
**alone-and-empty-forever** feeling of the soul)

*...and...*

**WHOLE**

(Smiling, light, balanced, peaceful, connected & cherished!)

*...is a...*

**“W”**



*(Double You!)*

The “you” that feels the pain & hungers to feel better...

& the **YOU** that knows exactly what you need,

& has the compassion to provide it!

## ...Interpersonal Skill-Related



“I don't suffer from insanity;  
I enjoy every minute of it!”

-Off a button

# Authenticity is...

*(...making boundaries obsolete)*



- ♥ ... a skill we develop over a lifetime!
- ♥ ... a means to address boundary issues in tailor-made ways.
- ♥ ...a fast-track for educating people about their effects on us.
- ♥ ...a fast-track for educating ourselves on what works best for us.
- ♥ ...a grand opportunity for modeling self-care.
- ♥ ...a way of behaving that fosters trust.
- ♥ ...a form of assertive action.
- ♥ ...something that gets easier with practice!
- ♥ ...a lot easier than playing a role.
- ♥ ...a means to reduce burnout
- ♥ ...a behavior that increases knowledge of ourselves & others.
- ♥ ...a form of self-love.
- ♥ ...a means for self-actualization.
- ♥ ...worth the risk!

# Authenticity vs. Boundaries

When I'm being me in our relationship...

**AUTHENTICALLY** me...

I don't need a lot of prefab rules.

I just need to go inside myself  
to see how I *feel*... and then tell you about it!

For instance:

If you asked me for money last week...

and it felt good to give it to you...

That's swell!

If you ask me again this week...

and it starts to feel bad...

(...like I'm turning into a big fat piggy bank!

Is there something we can do together to get you money of your own?)

I need to share that with you.

That way:

I honor me. I honor you.

You learn from me. I learn from you: We both grow.

***We both discover we're worth the truth!***

# Toward Our Genuine Community

-Consider these premises-

1) I count and my experience counts!

2) All change begins with ME!

My wellbeing, which is enhanced when I am encouraged to express my feelings, advocate for felt needs, explore passions and work toward dreams is essential to our genuine community...

***...no matter what role I have in it!***

3) Relationship is the primary tool of recovery

I am committed to developing relationship – enhancing skills such as affirming others, listening, gaining empathy, being authentic, sharing power, etc.

4) I'm willing...

...To encourage honest expression of other's experiences & feelings ...& to share my own

...To hang in through the difficult times

...To implement change as needed

5) I'm hopeful!

On Community:  
*"The Healthy Cell"*

*Community is a living organism made up of "us-cells"...*

When I express the truth of who I am: How I feel,  
what I think & my clearest understanding of what I need...

I act as a healthy cell!

When I can put aside, for a while, my own thoughts  
& really... listen, when others express... what they feel,  
think & need...

I act as a healthy cell!

When I hang in through the challenging times (times when  
I want to – & *sometimes do* – run screaming from the  
room!) ...& when I use those challenges to learn & grow...

I act as a healthy cell!

When I celebrate myself & others for engaging in this  
primary & essential work...

I act as a healthy cell!

And when enough cells are healthy...

*The whole earth sighs in relief!*

# Oh, the comfort –

the inexpressible comfort  
of feeling safe with a person –  
having neither to weigh  
thoughts nor measure words,  
but pouring them all right out,  
just as they are,  
chaff and grain together;  
certain that a faithful hand will  
take and sift them,  
keep what is worth keeping,  
and with the breath of kindness  
blow the rest away.

–Dinah Maria Mulock Craik

# Lofty Thoughts on Listening



Listening is the basis of what heals & invites Harmony...

- ♥ Listening is an improvable skill that warrants faithful commitment
- ♥ Listening & being listened to feels wonderful!
- ♥ Listening is what our Higher Power is always & forever doing for us, when we pray (or whine, or curse...)
- ♥ Listening is what we do to hear that Higher Power... when we cultivate our “still small Voice”
- ♥ Listening is a form of Loving attention; it’s the **“healing elixir!”**
- ♥ Being listened to, encourages us to bring to Light hidden aspects of ourselves, including distortions (for healing) & beautiful Truth!
- ♥ Listening facilitates purification from self-made distortion & returns us to an awareness of our & essential being
- ♥ Listening is a meditation unto itself that brings deep fulfillment – It shows me that I & my brother or sister, are equally precious
- ♥ Listening helps us to become aware that we are & always have been: **Whole!**
- ♥ Listening while remaining deeply present & non-judgmental, joins us with our sisters & brothers – which facilitates miracles for us all!
- ♥ Listening leads us to “mastery” – an experience of being truly & fully who we are! This is the state from which we are best able to fulfill our unique part in healing our wounded world.
- ♥ **Listening is Love!**

## Some “Principles of Peer-Assisted Healing” Insights:

(Take what you like & leave the rest!)

- ♥ YOU FIRST! Healers be healing! Model what you teach! Shine YOUR light to guide the way! Be an example of the miracles you promote!
- ♥ Think of mental states on a continuum. When a person is ill, they're at one end, in darkness say, feeling fragmented & alone... When a person is enlightened, they're at the other end, One with Everything! Sometimes a person considered “ill” visits the enlightened end & gets a peak at Heaven! Most everyone else operates somewhere in the middle of the continuum in the “normal” range. (Though everyone probably has little tastes of both ends!) The trick to moving up the continuum is to raise your consciousness – becoming more aware of Truth!
- ♥ Truth is an indwelling phenomenon. You know it when you hear it... It's the “Aha!” “I knew that!” feeling & it feels great!
- ♥ There are benefits & advantages to having emotional or mental health issues. They can force us to look within. They can set us on the road to healing, growth... and (maybe?) enlightenment!
- ♥ Peer Healing is about inclusion. It's a mindset that perceives that everyone, no matter how unusual, is essential & has gifts to offer – because everyone is a facet of “The Whole.”
- ♥ Peer Healing is about mutuality. **“Healing is a thought by which two minds perceive their oneness and become glad.”** – A Course in Miracles (ACIM). We help ourselves by helping each other! And we **“...see our value in our brother's eyes...”** – ACIM
- ♥ Peer Healing is about authenticity – Telling the truth (gently, as we learn how) about how we feel in a relationship is what fosters growth for both of us.
- ♥ Ideally, peers allow peers to release feelings. (We Listen!) Often, because we've “been there,” we're not as threatened by extreme expressions of emotional energy. Regular release of this energy HEALS!
- ♥ “Burn-out” can be a by-product of resistance to our own buried emotional pain. To be of use to our peers, ideally, we are disciplined about tending to our own emotional wellbeing (sharing feelings in a supportive environment, meditation/practicing mindfulness, exercising, etc.) Ideally, peers are able to remain permeable to one-another's pain. Burn-out can also be a symptom of lack of faith in another's ability to heal & experience improved circumstances.
- ♥ Ideally we BELIEVE in recovery for everyone! We buy into the notion that everyone is essentially whole & well. We don't dally down dark roads of thinking that our peer is a lost cause (especially when they do!) **“It's impossible not to believe what you see, and it's equally impossible to see what you don't believe.”** - A Course in Miracles

- ♥ Miracles of healing occur only in the NOW. Being FULLY present... & paying FULL attention is peer GOLD! **“Full attention implies full acceptance.”** - Eckhart Tolle
- ♥ Ideally, peers are culturally & otherwise sensitive BECAUSE they have learned to be fully present. Their interest, while listening to a peer, is IN the peer. They will tend to notice subtle cues & ask polite questions about how a person from a different culture, e.g., prefers to be treated.
- ♥ Ideally, peers maintain a fairly equal balance of power. We are not in a position to impose our will. This is a fortunate circumstance we should strive to maintain. It’s our art to find the balance between sharing our authentic feelings, experience, strength & hope, while avoiding advice giving & pushing our own agendas.
- ♥ We make a mistake with the judgmental statement: “He or she is ‘just doing that for attention.’” Yes!?!? Why else are we on the planet? Sharing attention is the peer’s “healing elixir.” As we heal, we learn to do it fairly.
- ♥ For many, the “Peer Recovery Movement” is a spiritual movement. We begin enlisting the aid of a “Higher or Transforming Power.” We begin to notice that we have a choice: **“[We]...can let the same force that makes the flowers grow and planets move run [our lives] or [we] can do it for ourselves.”** -Marianne Williamson
- ♥ As we invite this Higher Power in, we discover that our spiritual consciousness grows & our “insight factory” opens for business!
- ♥ We start noticing things like **“The Brilliant Function of Pain...”** – Milton Ward; that our struggles can also be viewed as signposts to enlightenment! We stop feeling like victims. We start taking responsibility for our circumstances & actions. 90% or more of people in the mental health system have experienced trauma. As we heal, we can actually come to value those former hurts as stepping stones to the “Self” we’re becoming... the Self we love!
- ♥ The recovery movement, defined by individual efforts to become healthy & aware, has world saving implications! When 100 monkeys learn to do something, the rest *“just know how...”* We’re the “100 monkeys” blazing the trail to a healthy new world!
- ♥ Research has determined that one of the “5 Best Practices” impacting mental health recovery is peer support services. Peers *really do* help peers heal! That doesn’t mean everyone in the mental health field has to run out & get labeled, but it might be helpful if service providers would free their own “inner peers!” Most everyone has grieved or suffered a trauma. Most everyone feels insecure & vulnerable at times. Most everyone works on correcting self-defeating behavior... AND... most everyone can learn to listen well & strengthen empathy & compassion.
- ♥ Peers share the truth of their humanity!

## 21. Arrows to More Resources...

**Me! I'm delighted to be utilized!**

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[heartcircle8@gmail.com](mailto:heartcircle8@gmail.com)

[www.heartcircleconsulting.com](http://www.heartcircleconsulting.com)

Promoting **good groups** as "**peace work**" & co-facilitating "The Circle"

### **A.V.P. & derivatives**

**Alternatives to Violence Project/USA** - [www.avpusa.org](http://www.avpusa.org):

**AVP** is the basis of this tool-kit & **AVP Manuals** are ordered through this office...  
Average price is \$30-\$40 (Cheaper for prison facilitators - Go ahead – sign up!)

Wonderful 15 minute video on **AVP**: <http://vimeo.com/37108812>

YouTube Link showing some **AVP** history & process:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlMrYDhsLul>

**Alternatives to Violence Project, New York State** - [info@avpny.org](mailto:info@avpny.org)

**American Friends Service Committee** - [www.afsc.org](http://www.afsc.org): American Friends (Quakers) co-created the **Alternatives to Violence Project**. Also see Help Increase the Peace Project (H.I.P.P.), a sister project for schools.

<http://afsc.org/resource/what-hipp>



[www.savethekidsgroup.org](http://www.savethekidsgroup.org)

Youth-related videos:

13 minutes:

[http://www.creducation.org/cre/homebase/content\\_video/2729/](http://www.creducation.org/cre/homebase/content_video/2729/)

3:39 minutes

[http://savethekidsgroup.org/?page\\_id=1899](http://savethekidsgroup.org/?page_id=1899)

# Mental Health Recovery

**Baltic Street A.E.H., Inc.** – [www.balticstreet.org](http://www.balticstreet.org): Brooklyn-based peer-run advocacy & support organization (whose delightful staff insisted “a book” be written! Here's the first incarnation!!! **Thank you all!**)

**Boston University Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation** - <http://www.bu.edu/cpr/>  
Inspiring research on recovery. Search for Courtenay Harding, Ph.D.

**Mary Ellen Copeland\* – Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) –**  
[www.mentalhealthrecovery.com](http://www.mentalhealthrecovery.com): **\*recovery titans!** Mental health recovery self-help strategy & more...

**Patricia Deegan Ph.D\* & Associates, LLC** - [www.patdeegan.com](http://www.patdeegan.com): **\*recovery titans!** Creator of “CommonGround” (strategies for succeeding with psychiatrists), “Personal Medicine,” tools to cope with voices & more...

**Mental Health Empowerment Project** - [www.mhepinc.org](http://www.mhepinc.org): New York State-based, peer-run, education, advocacy & special projects (like this one! Thank you ever so for the encouragement!)

**Mind Freedom** - [www.mindfreedom.org](http://www.mindfreedom.org) International human rights activist organization

**National Center for Trauma-Informed Care** <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/nctic/>

**National Trauma Consortium** - <http://www.nationaltraumaconsortium.org/>

**New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services, Inc.** -  
[www.nyaprs.org](http://www.nyaprs.org) NY-based advocacy & education organization (My alma mater!)

**MHA Village** - [www.mhavillage.org](http://www.mhavillage.org) The Village, integrated service agency; operating as a pretty darn “healthy pack” *with amazing* recovery outcomes. Illuminating free articles by Mark Ragins, MD & others

**Recovery Innovations** - [www.recoveryinnovations.org](http://www.recoveryinnovations.org) great information on power dynamics

**Debbie Trueheart\*** - [debtrueheart@gmail.com](mailto:debtrueheart@gmail.com) **\*recovery titans!** Her work: “Living into Wholeness” offers a healing perspective & tools to regain what we never truly lost. Enjoy her blog: <http://www.simplesite.com/debtrueheart>

**Voices of the Heart, Inc.** – [info@voicesoftheheart.net](mailto:info@voicesoftheheart.net) is a peer run education, rights & advocacy org. w/extra on voices & alternatives. (A home of my heart!)

Research your own **titans** & wonderful organizations... There are tons more!

# ***(My) Titans of Spirit & Healing!***

**Christian Laity Foundation** - [www.christianlaityfoundation.org](http://www.christianlaityfoundation.org): Inspiring, non-dogmatic spiritual information

**The Concord Institute** - [www.concordinstitute.org](http://www.concordinstitute.org): Further information about the Corona Process, mentioned on page 16

**A Course of Love** - [www.courseoflove.com](http://www.courseoflove.com) Inspiring, non-dogmatic spiritual information

**A Course in Miracles** - [www.acim.org](http://www.acim.org) [www.facim.org](http://www.facim.org) [www.miraclecenter.org](http://www.miraclecenter.org): Hopeful & non-dogmatic spiritual information

**DavidPaul & Candace Doyle** - [www.thevoiceforlove.com](http://www.thevoiceforlove.com): Tools for helping people to discern the “still, small voice” within.

**Nassim Hamein** - [www.theresonanceproject.org](http://www.theresonanceproject.org): Award winning astrophysicist  
Inspiring, hopeful, non-dogmatic scientific information

**The Jeshua Channelings** - [www.jeshua.net](http://www.jeshua.net) Inspiring, non-dogmatic spiritual information

**Byron Katie** - [www.thework.com](http://www.thework.com): “Alternative” healing tool/free resources promoting chucking your story of how things “should be” & Loving What Is

**Lasting Love Made Easy** - <http://lastinglovmadeeasy.eportalapp.com/login/>  
Katie & Gay Hendricks offer wonderful tips for “partnering” spiritually

**Laughter Yoga** – [www.laughteryoga.org](http://www.laughteryoga.org)

**Re-Evaluation or Co-Counseling** - [www.rationalisland.com](http://www.rationalisland.com): An alternative healing modality involving the trade of attention (a.k.a. “peer counseling” in the recovery movement). Great info on various types of “internalized oppression”

**The Sedona Method** - [www.sedona.com](http://www.sedona.com) Effective energy-releasing healing tool

**Shanti Christo Foundation** - [www.shantichristo.com](http://www.shantichristo.com): Inspiring, non-dogmatic spiritual information

**Eckhart Tolle** - [www.eckharttolle.com](http://www.eckharttolle.com) On the wellness value of “presence”

**Tools for Change** - [www.toolsforchange.org](http://www.toolsforchange.org): Great, free! community building handouts & other resources & support (Thanks for use of the “Power” handout!)

*“Don’t give up your grandiose delusions...  
Those are your goals!”*

-Off a T-Shirt



*Thanks for participating!*