

Touchstones for Circles of Trust in a Brave Space

(Adapted from AWARE-LA (www.awarela.org) and Touchstones by Parker Palmer)

1. **Be 100% present.** Set aside the usual distractions of things undone from yesterday, things to do tomorrow.
2. **Extend and presume hospitality.** We all learn most efficiently in spaces that welcome us. Welcome others to this place and presume that you are welcome, too. Strengthen the hospitality of the group by noticing and naming group dynamics in the moment. Be aware of how others are responding or not responding. Ask for a “time out” or dialogue if needed.
3. **Listen Deeply.** Listen intently to what is said: listen to feelings beneath the words. As Quaker writer Douglas Steere puts it, “Holy listening – to ‘listen’ another’s soul into life, into a condition of disclosure and discovery – may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another.” Listen to yourself as well as others. **Actively listen.** Use your energy to listen to what is said before thinking about how to respond. Notice when defensiveness and denial arise.
4. **It is never “share or die”.** You will be invited to share in pairs, small groups, and in the large circle. The invitation is exactly that. *You* will determine the extent to which you want to participate. This is not just a safe space, but a brave space. You can **take risks and lean into discomfort** choosing to challenge yourself to contribute.
5. **No fixing.** Each of us is here to discover our own truths, to listen to our own inner teacher. We are *not* here to set someone else straight or to help right another’s wrong.
6. **Suspend judgment.** Set aside your judgments. By creating a space between judgments and reactions, you can listen to the other more fully.
7. **Work to recognize your privileges.** Use this space to recognize and investigate your privileges (for example: class, gender, sexual orientation, ability). Honor the different experiences we all bring to this space.
8. **Identify Assumptions.** Our assumptions are usually transparent to us, yet they undergird our worldview. By becoming aware of our assumptions, we can open the sharing to greater possibilities. **Own your intentions and your impacts.** Respect each other’s experiences and feelings by taking responsibility for the effects of your words. On the other side, if you have a strong reaction to something, let the group know. Be open to dialogue.
9. **Speak your truth.** You are invited to say what is in your heart, trusting that your voice will be heard, and your contribution respected. Your truth may be different from, even the opposite of, what another person has said. Yet speaking your truth is not debating with, or correcting, or interpreting what another has said. A helpful practice is to use “I” statements.
10. **Respect silence.** Silence is a rare gift in our busy world. After someone has spoken, take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words.
11. **Maintain confidentiality.** Respect the confidential nature and content of what is shared. Be mindful to share the message, not the messenger.
12. **Be open to new discoveries.** A spirit of discovery helps us reconnect with our passions and embrace more creative ways of leading and nurturing community.
13. **When things get difficult, turn to wonder.** If you find yourself disagreeing with another, becoming judgmental, or shutting down in defense, try turning to wonder: “I wonder what brought her to this place?” “I wonder what my reaction teaches me?” “I wonder what he’s feeling right now?”

AN INVITATION TO BRAVE SPACE

Together we will create brave space.
Because there is no such thing as a “safe space” —
We exist in the real world.
We all carry scars and we have all caused wounds.
In this space
We seek to turn down the volume of the outside world,
We amplify voices that fight to be heard elsewhere,
We call each other to more truth and love.
We have the right to start somewhere and continue to grow.
We have the responsibility to examine what we think we know.
We will not be perfect.
This space will not be perfect.
It will not always be what we wish it to be.
But
It will be our brave space together,
and
We will work on it side by side.

by Micky ScottBey Jones