

Communication Guidelines – Circle of Trust

A foundation of this program is practicing listening to and understanding the “Other”, and at the same time, listening to and understanding ourselves and our “inner teacher.” The core of this practice is the Circle of Trust, created by Parker J. Palmer (Center for Courage and Renewal) and adapted by the Educare Unlearning Institute. We invite you into a circle of trust as a foundation for listening and sharing honestly and respectfully. These guidelines apply both to conversations with trip participants as well as other groups with whom we meet.

1. We give and receive welcome.

People learn best in hospitable spaces. In this circle we support each other’s learning by giving and receiving hospitality.

2. We are present as fully as possible.

We are here with our doubts, fears and failings, as well as our convictions, joys, and successes, our listening as well as our speaking.

3. We speak our own truth.

We speak from our own center to the center of the circle, not from our intellect or ego directly to the intellect or ego of someone on whom we hope to have an impact. We are not trying to achieve a result or pre-determined outcome. We are not trying to teach anyone anything. We will avoid making broad generalizations or ask others to represent or defend an entire group. We will make “I” statements rather than “we” or “you” statements.

4. We listen receptively to the truth of others. This means there is no fixing, no saving, no advising, and no setting each other straight. We take in whatever is said. We can allow brief, reflective silences to fall between speakers, rather than rushing to respond in order to allow me to absorb what has been said. Our goal is to create a safe, non-judgmental space “to hear each other into speech.” We will listen with resilience, “hanging in” when we hear something that is hard to hear. We will take personal time if we find that we’re no longer able to listen with a clear mind and an open heart.

5. We ask each other honest, open questions

This helps the speaker hear more deeply what he or she is saying. It helps us listen for our inner truth. We don’t have an agenda that we are trying to get another to accept. Honest, open questions are ones in which the questioner can’t possibly know the answer, nor are they trying to guide the speaker toward an intended outcome.

6. When the going gets rough, turn to wonder.

If we feel judgmental or defensive, we can ask ourselves, “I wonder what brought her to that belief?” “I wonder what he’s feeling right now?” “I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?” Set aside judgment to listen to others—and yourself—more deeply.

7. We observe confidentiality.

Nothing shared in a circle of trust will ever be repeated to other people.