

Group Norms - A Summary

Heather Lynn Hanson, Manhasset, NY, *Covenant Group News*, May 5, 2000

Written while the Rev. Heather Lynn Hanson served as a two-year interim for the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock, Manhasset, NY. During her second year she will be focused on helping the congregation develop and train small group ministry facilitators for covenant groups.

In preparation for that, she has collected and modified materials from her files going back nearly 30 years to her work as a lay member of a conflict training and intervention team in the Pacific Northwest in the early 1970s. Recognizing that each Covenant Group will develop its own covenant concerning how to be with each other, she offers the following covenant as something people may work from, changing, adding, or deleting as they wish.

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Norms are shared expectations about appropriate behaviors that help a group create an atmosphere of mutual support.

STAYING IN THE HERE AND NOW
Members talk in the present tense about what is going on in the group as it is happening right here, right now.

STAYING WITH THE PERSON All members of the group remain attentive to the individual who is expressing something, responding in ways that are intended to provide support and to help the speaker work through his/her issue, rather than changing the subject, or shifting attention away from the speaker.

SPEAKING TO THE DATA Talk about data generated by the person talking, i.e., behaviors and expressed feelings. Report observable information about behaviors and expressed feelings of group members without being judgmental.

CHECKING WITH THE SPEAKER Check your perceptions and guesses to see whether or not the speaker agrees. It may also help the speaker to clarify his/her thoughts.

REPORTING FEELINGS Naming and sharing feelings is helpful. Suppressed feelings cause misunderstandings. Expressed feelings need to be accepted by the group. "You shouldn't feel that way" is a denial or "putting-down" of a real experience for that person.

CRITICIZING IDEAS - NOT PERSONS
Judging a person, i.e., "You sure are stupid," is not a helpful stance. A person can learn and grow when you deal with his/her specific ideas, behaviors or feelings.

NOT GIVING ADVICE Rather than tell a person what to do, consider the possibilities to help the other person explore his/her questions and find his/her own answers.

MAKING NO ALIBIS Say what is on your mind rather than softening up the group with excuses and explanations.

EXPERIENCING WIN-WIN OUTCOMES
A collaborative or helpful stance in which everyone wins; as opposed to a win-lose or competitive stance.

SILENCE IS OK (MAYBE EVEN GOLDEN) Allowing a pregnant pause may give birth to fresh ideas.

SENSITIVITY AND RESPECT, NOT CONFIDENTIALITY Therapy groups often have a rule that says, "Everything expressed within the group setting is assumed to be confidential and will not be discussed with people outside the group." Language about respecting privacy would be more appropriate for Covenant Groups.