

## **The Use of Silence**

by Diana Dorroh

Silence is a powerful tool for any facilitator. It can be used after a particularly moving sharing occurs. For example, if one member tells a story about the death of a family member, the facilitator can call for a moment of silence. This honors the sharing that just occurred and prepares the way for the next member, who may have been planning to share something joyful.

Some groups routinely allow 15 seconds of silence after each sharing. This honors each person and creates a clean finish of one sharing before the next begins, similar to passing a talking object. It's also like a small silent prayer after each person's sharing.

Silence can also be used when a difficult situation occurs. This could happen anytime during the meeting and is always a judgment call. In Baton Rouge, we tell our leaders that they should trust their instincts; if comments seem out of place, then they probably are out of place and, as leaders, they are authorized to address the situation. It could be over-sharing, when a member begins to sound like he or she is in a therapy session. Or it could be a "boundary" violation, when somebody says something that sounds unacceptable to the leader, such as a racist, homophobic, or over-sexualized comment. Admittedly, this does not happen often, but when it does, you, as leader will likely feel compelled to "do something." Calling for a moment of silence may be enough or it may allow you to think of something gentle to say, something beginning with "I" and followed by a loving statement to call everyone back to the model and the covenant.