



Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network

BEING HELPFUL: Session Plan

Small Group Conversations, Anne Bailey coordinator

smallgroups@westhartforduu.org

Universalist Church of West Hartford, CT

(TOPIC READINGS start on p. 4)

OUR SMALL GROUP MISSION

These Small Group conversations are offered as a way to get to know each other better, as we explore the various topics selected by our Small Group Team, related to our life experiences, questions, joys, and challenges. We are free to share our thoughts and feelings, joys and struggles, as we choose, and are here to listen to and care about each other. (We are NOT here to be a therapy group ~ or to tackle “church politics”!)

We look forward to building closer connections with each other, as we spend this time together, and form new or deeper friendships and build our sense of community.

OUR SMALL GROUP COVENANT

As members of this Small Group of the Universalist Church, we covenant with each other to help make this experience both personally and spiritually rewarding, to nourish our sense of community, and to learn and practice right relationship.

We will try to arrive before the beginning of each session so that it can start on time. We will try to attend all of the meetings of our group unless we are ill or away, and will let the group know in advance when that will occur or by contacting the facilitator:

Facilitator Contact information:

We use these guidelines for sharing, as a pathway to a caring community:

- We will deeply listen and ask honest and open questions.
- We will respect confidentiality. What is said here stays here, unless we agree to share something outside of our group.
- We will allow others to speak without interruption.
- We will not try to fix, save, advise or correct.
- We will honor time for reflection and quietness and respect a member’s right to remain silent, as they choose.
- We will treat others with respect and without judgment.
- We will honor the diversity of thought and feeling and values among us.

CHECK IN

Check-in is a time to deepen our connections with each other by sharing joys, sorrows, challenges, and changes in our lives. Sharing is not required. Only share if you are comfortable. What is shared in group is confidential.

Connection is the energy created between people when they feel seen, heard, valued and understood. One of the goals of small group is to move out of our heads and into our hearts in order to deepen our connections with one other.

Authentic sharing from a place of honesty and vulnerability allows us to build a community of trust, caring, and belonging. The connections we build with one another become contagious. They grow and spread and infuse our larger church community with life and vitality.

1. WELCOME / INTRODUCTIONS :

Let's remember to **Silence cell phones! Speak up clearly, so all can hear.**

Remind folks to let us know and to remind us if they have a hearing issue or if we aren't speaking up enough, so we can be aware.

• At FIRST SESSION of the series: Let's introduce ourselves:

"Tell us a bit about yourself, for example:"

- Your name, where you live and how long you've been in this area
- How long have you been a UU, coming to our church
- Your family, what you do (or did) for work, any special passions or hobbies
(Model this by starting with yourself.)

Distribute MISSION/COVENANT/CHECK IN handout.

- Read the MISSION statement orally - volunteers read COVENANT
- Remind folks to contact the facilitator if you are unable to come to a session (if not included, give them your contact info. to add to their copy)
- Read the CHECK-IN orally, in turn.
- "Since time has been spent on introductions today (tonight), we'll keep our check-in short"; ex. "Might you have a joy or feeling of gratitude you can share with us?"

2. CHECK IN: (at 2nd and later sessions: repeat names again, if needed, and read the following aloud, as you choose):

Check-in is a time to deepen our connections with each other by sharing joys, sorrows, challenges, and changes in our lives. Sharing is not required. Only share if you are comfortable. What is shared in group is confidential.

Some CHECK-IN PROMPTS:

- *How have these past couple of weeks gone for you?*
- *Can you share some of your "highs" and/or "lows"?*
- *Has anything brought you a sense of gratitude or accomplishment? - of joy - or sorrow?*

3. OPENING: Use "chime" or bell to quiet folks; LIGHT CANDLE:

(3 reading choices below, you might vary this from session to session)

- *May "our separate fires kindle one flame" as we gather in this circle—bringing our stories, our reflections, our hopes and our struggles.
May our candle flame lend light and promise for our time together.*

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- *May we know once again that we are not isolated beings, but connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe, to this community and to each other.*

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- *May our time together bring learning, understanding, compassion, encouragement, and hope as we share about our life journeys and passions.*

4. CENTERING: In preparation for our conversation, let's take a few moments to center ourselves and be thankful for this time we have together in community.

Please get comfortable, place both feet solidly on the floor, rest your hands on your thighs and let your shoulders drop. Gently close your eyes or focus on a spot a few feet in front of you on the floor. Bring your attention to the flow of your breath.

*Breathing in I calm my body.
Breathing out I smile.*

*Dwelling in this present moment,
I know this is a wonderful moment.*

Our life's path is not one we travel alone. We are in it together, and the company of spiritual friends helps us feel our interconnectedness.

Ring the chime: *"Slowly open your eyes."*

5. DISTRIBUTE READING:

Ask for **volunteers to read the paragraphs aloud, in turn.** You might include a **pause after the reading**, to allow time to reflect before responding.

6. POSE QUESTIONS to prompt sharing, invite folks to respond if and as they choose; If you choose, you can **split readings into sections**, with questions/conversation as you go along (some readings are already done this way).

Encourage silent spaces between reflections; be comfortable with silence.

You might prompt: **"Take some time to think about that."** - or the like.

FEEL FREE TO ADJUST or ADAPT THE QUESTIONS PROVIDED

You may not get to all of them, or you may want to modify them slightly or skip around a bit, even make up a new question, depending on what comes up in the conversation, to keep it moving along.

KEEPING YOUR GROUP ON TRACK: If a group member should go on and on, or responds inappropriately so that **conversation needs redirection**, gently ask that they give others an opportunity to share or say something like:

- **"Let's reconsider the question"**
- **"Let's stop now and take a moment to reflect."**
- **"Thank you for sharing your thoughts. Now let's move on".**

You can also make reference to the covenant.

(If you are co-facilitating, work out a collaboration system with your partner, such as: when the other is facilitating, feel free to help guide the conversation, step in if you see a need to redirect.)

If the conversation has slowed down, you as facilitator can model responses to help the conversation along. **Some prompts could be:**

- **What are your thoughts about that?**
- **Can you say more about that?**
- **How does it make you feel?**
- **What does it make you think of?**

If the topic is really not going well, turn it back to the group:

- **"What do you want to do with this topic?"**

TOPIC READINGS start on next page:

BEING HELPFUL

It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself. ~ *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little. ~ *Edmund Burke*

Nothing makes one feel so strong as a call for help. ~ *Pope Paul VI*

The true meaning of life is to plant trees, under whose shade you do not expect to sit.
~ *Nelson Henderson*

“I don’t want to live in the kind of world where we don’t look out for each other. Not just the people that are close to us, but anybody who needs a helping hand. I can’t change the way anybody else thinks, or what they choose to do, but I can do my bit.”
~ *Charles de Lint*

“Non nobis solum nati sumus. (Not for ourselves alone are we born.)”
~ *Marcus Tullius Cicero*

“If you want happiness for an hour, take a nap. If you want happiness for a day, go fishing. If you want happiness for a year, inherit a fortune. If you want happiness for a lifetime, help somebody.” ~ *Chinese Proverb*

“If we always helped one another, no one would need luck.” ~ *Sophocles*

“When you become detached mentally from yourself and concentrate on helping other people with their difficulties, you will be able to cope with your own more effectively. Somehow, the act of self-giving is a personal power-releasing factor.”
~ *Norman Vincent Peale*

QUESTIONS:

- What comes to your mind as you read these quotes? What are some of your experiences in giving and receiving help?
- Do you think it is part of human nature to want to be of help?
- Do some of us resist or deny the need for help and have difficulty asking for help? Can this deny others the joy they receive in being helpful?
- What awareness do you think people need to have to feel comfortable asking for help?

READING #2 and questions on next 2 pages:

READING #2:

There's a better way to help than asking 'How can I help?'

~ *PBS NewsHour, In My Humble Opinion; Sept. 15, 2017*

Karen Walrond is a former engineer, an attorney, photographer and writer. Three weeks ago, Hurricane Harvey destroyed her home in Houston. She and her family are now living with a friend, figuring out what to do next.

Tonight, Walrond shares her Humble Opinion on the best way to help storm victims, in fact, **anyone who is facing a crisis:**

"At first, it wasn't that much, a couple of inches or so. But, by the time it was over, we had almost three feet of water sitting in our home.

My husband and I evacuated our daughter to the safety of a friend's house early on. That's her in the pink raincoat. But when it became apparent that we couldn't save our home, we realized that we needed to get back to our daughter fast.

Unfortunately, by that time, most streets had flooded, so that meant wading through chest-deep water for about a mile. As we started on our way, a young woman approached us, and told us to wait. There were three guys with a boat shuttling people to safety. So, we waited.

And while we waited, we witnessed people who were using their gifts and their skills to address specific needs, in service of others. That young girl? She lived in a second-story apartment nearby, and after watching cars continuing to drive into the dangerous floodwaters, she put on a raincoat, walked out into the storm, and for two days waved cars away from the deep water.

The three young men who took us to our friend had taken their bass boat out of storage and opened their own ferry service to help. And a restaurant owner who showed up to check on his cafe, instead of returning to the security of his home, opened his restaurant to the volunteers, giving them free coffee and water and a place to warm up.

Each of these people took a moment to consider what they had to offer, and then, without hesitation, simply helped. But **they helped with specificity.**

It's human nature to ask, how can I help when someone is in a difficult situation. It's admittedly something I have said countless times in the past. But the truth is that, when people offered, I was in crisis, and couldn't even begin to think about what I might need, far less consider what they might have to give.

More powerful have been the offers from people who have been specific, like the friend with impeccable organizational skills who offered to be a single point of contact between us and friends who wanted to donate clothing and tools to help deal with the damage to our house, or chef friends who have offered us hot meals at the end of long days of mucking out our house.

They have taught me that specific is more meaningful than general every time.

People face crises all the time. Heartbreak, grief and loss, these are facts of life. So, I would challenge us all, when we're struck by the need to help a friend going through a difficult time, that, instead of asking, how can I help, let's mine our own gifts, talents and skills that we have been entrusted with, and instead declare: I can help you, and here's how."

QUESTIONS:

- Have you received offers to help that have been specific? Did you find this helpful?
- If the offer was simply “What can I do to help?”, were you able to respond in a meaningful way?
- Can you think of some specific ways you could best offer to help? What specific skills might you could offer?

As CONVERSATION comes to an end, you might ask for **last thoughts on the topic**:

“Do you have a thought from this conversation that you will carry home with you?”

CLOSING: Ask volunteer who brought a Closing, to read it to the group.

RING CHIME and EXTINGUISH CANDLE (Choose one of these or one of your choice)

As our time together comes to a close, we give thanks for one another, for the chance to share our lives, and to renew our spirits in the company of friends. May we go forth enriched by our gathering, committed to living life fully, to loving life with more passion, and to supporting one another.

OR

Remembering that the universe is so much larger than our ability to comprehend, let us go forth from this time together with the resolve to stop trying to reduce the incomprehensible to our own petty expectations, so that wonder -- that sense of what is sacred -- can find space to open up our minds and illumine our lives.

ANNOUNCE NEXT SESSION’S TOPIC: (unless last session)

Ask for a volunteer to bring in a CLOSING reading (if needed) for this next session (It can be something they particularly like, doesn’t necessarily have to relate to the topic.)

if providing SNACKS, ask for a volunteer