



Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network

RISK and POSSIBILITY: Session Plan

Small Group Conversations, Anne Bailey coordinator

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(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.*  
~~~~~
- *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:

RISK and POSSIBILITY

I do not believe that the meaning of life is a puzzle to be solved.

Life is. I am. Anything might happen.

And I believe I *may* invest my life with meaning.

The uncertainty is a blessing in disguise.

If I were absolutely certain about all things, I would spend my life in anxious misery, fearful of losing my way. But since everything and anything are always possible, the miraculous is always nearby and wonders shall never, ever cease.

I believe that human freedom may be stated in one term, which serves as a little brick propping open the door of existence: Maybe.

~ *Maybe (Maybe Not): Second Thoughts from a Secret Life*, Robert Fulghum

... have patience with everything that remains unsolved in your heart. Try to love the *questions themselves*, like locked rooms and like books written in a foreign language. Do not now look for the answers. They cannot now be given to you because you could not live them. It is a question of experiencing everything. At present you need to *live* the question. Perhaps you will gradually, without even noticing it, find yourself experiencing the answer, some distant day.

~ *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rainer Maria Rilke

Kilgore Trout once wrote a short story which was a dialogue between two pieces of yeast. They were discussing the possible purposes of life as they ate sugar and suffocated in their own excrement. Because of their limited intelligence, they never came close to guessing that they were making champagne.

~ *Breakfast of Champions*, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

If we can just manage to take the first step, the rest will follow. Irish writer Frank O'Connor tells the story of how, as a boy, he and friends would make their way across the countryside, and when they came to an orchard wall that seemed too high and too difficult to permit their voyage to continue, they took off their hats and tossed them over the imposing wall. Then they had no choice but to follow them. May we go and do likewise.

~ *Freethinking Mystics with Hands: Exploring the Heart of Unitarian Universalism*, Tom Owen-Towle

We throw ourselves out of balance constantly in order to seek new and higher levels of personal integration. Were it not true that we purposefully unbalance ourselves we should never grow, or even find our true selves. Worse yet, we would never love or have any idea of what true loving is all about. Healthy people take risks in order to transcend themselves and to feel firsthand the rough beauty of their existence. It is exciting and, although not very restful, gloriously human. And it helps us to understand something of the Divine.

~ *adapted freely from Eugene Kennedy*

QUESTIONS:

- What especially resonates with you in these readings?
- What are some risks you have taken in your life that opened you to some new adventure, challenge, or deeper spiritual growth?
What doors opened as a result? How have these changed you life?
- Were some outcomes not successful? How did you deal with these?
- Did any of these unsuccessful outcomes lead you to thinking of a new risk you could take? If so, what was the outcome?
- What might you risk next to enrich your life?

EXERCISE (if time permits) - You might choose to do this orally, instead

Provide everyone with a piece of paper and pencil/pen.

Mention these words: "The Open Road". Give folks some time to jot down responses to the following questions:

In light of these readings:

- what **images** come to mind?
- what **feelings**?
- what **words**?
- what **pictures**?

Share your responses.

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:

"I am not afraid of storms for I am learning how to sail my ship."

~ Louisa May Alcott

NOTE: A nice book of essays that touches on dealing with change in life is published by UUA Skinner House (also available on Amazon): "Landscapes of Aging and Spirituality", Kathleen Montgomery, editor. Many of them are written by UU ministers.

(Topic developed using readings in session plans from River of Grass Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Davie, FL and Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA.)

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