

COURAGE & RENEWAL TOUCHSTONES FOR TRUSTWORTHY SPACE

Facilitators of Courage & Renewal programs use these Touchstones to define clear boundaries in a Circle of Trust, the kinds of boundaries that create trustworthy space for the soul. While these Touchstones define how we relate in a retreat, they can be adapted to support workplaces, communities, and other groups – any place where we want to honor the integrity of the individual and build relational trust.

- **Give and receive welcome.** People learn best in hospitable spaces. In this circle we support each other's learning by giving and receiving hospitality.
- **Be present as fully as possible.** Be here with your doubts, fears and failings as well as your convictions, joys and successes, your listening as well as your speaking.
- **What is offered in the circle is by invitation, not demand.** This is not a "share or die" event! Do whatever your soul calls for, and know that you do it with our support. Your soul knows your needs better than we do.
- **Speak your truth in ways that respect other people's truth.** Our views of reality may differ, but speaking one's truth in a circle of trust does not mean interpreting, correcting or debating what others say. Speak from your center to the center of the circle, using "I" statements, trusting people to do their own sifting and winnowing.
- **No fixing, saving, advising or correcting each other.** This is one of the hardest guidelines for those of us who like to "help." But it is vital to welcoming the soul, to making space for the inner teacher.
- **Learn to respond to others with honest, open questions.** Do not respond with counsel or corrections. Using honest, open questions helps us "hear each other into deeper speech."
- **When the going gets rough, turn to wonder.** Turn from reaction and judgment to wonder and compassionate inquiry. Ask yourself, "I wonder why they feel/think this way?" or "I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?" Set aside judgment to listen to others—and to yourself—more deeply.
- **Attend to your own inner teacher.** We learn from others, of course. But as we explore poems, stories, questions and silence in a circle of trust, we have a special opportunity to learn from within. So pay close attention to your own reactions and responses, to your most important teacher.
- **Trust and learn from the silence.** Silence is a gift in our noisy world, and a way of knowing in itself. Treat silence as a member of the group. After someone has spoken, take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words.

- **Observe deep confidentiality.** Safety is built when we can trust that our words and stories will remain with the people with whom we choose to share, and are not repeated to others without our permission.
- **Know that it's possible** to leave the circle with whatever it was that you needed when you arrived, and that the seeds planted here can keep growing in the days ahead.

One of the gifts we are given in a circle of trust is a chance to see how abnormal violence is. Here, under conditions that evoke “the better angels of our nature,” we experience our innate capacity to honor, not violate, the identity and integrity of others. And we witness the remarkable things that can happen — within us, between us, and beyond us — as we learn to relate to each other that way.

-Parker J. Palmer, A Hidden Wholeness