

Empathy Circle Facilitation Training

PROJECT: Topics for Empathy Circles

Short url: <https://bit.ly/EmpathyCircleTopics>

Project to Explore different Empathy Circle topics.

- Develop A guide to topics to use in Empathy Circles.
- What makes good topics?
- What would make a good weekly ongoing topic?
- What topic would have the most positive effect and foster the most well being for all the participants.?

Personal Support (Edwin)

There are many [support groups](#) that meet on a regular basis. What are these support group topics?

Also, might there be paid facilitators who host these support empathy circles? Empathy Circles could be a less expensive and more accessible peer support resource as compared to a therapist.

- Grief and Loss
- Addictions
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Divorce
- Anger
- Family Support - Parenting
- Medical
- Weight Loss
- Mental Health/Illness
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Personal Development Topics (Cat Spence)

- Exploring Needs
- Exploring Boundaries
- Exploring Values
- Exploring Gratitude
- Exploring Skills/Talents
- Exploring Comfort Zone
- Exploring Limiting Beliefs
- Exploring Motivation
- Exploring Attitude
- Exploring Success
- Exploring Confidence
- Making personal development plans

Added 2021/March/04 by grahamberends@gmail.com

Mechanics of empathic processes, Exploring:

- What mechanisms create a sense of safety?
- What mechanisms create a sense of trust?
- What mechanisms create the space for vulnerability?
- Pragmatics: These are the mechanisms used in conversation like: turn-taking, asking permission to reflect, coping with losing connection through confusion or provoking defensive moves, making bids for connection?
- How to reflect feelings and needs (the focus of NVC)?
- How to reflect the tone of the speaker's words and thoughts?
- How to cope with irritation and anger expressed by either the speaker or the listener?
- How to know when to reflect the actual words spoken or the feelings and needs?
- How to reflect the reality of another; how to help the other comprehend your reality; how to explore common perspectives and acknowledge yet respect differences?
- Difficulties in listening: What happens when you are listening and the speakers words are carrying you away, and/or you are excited by their sharing?
- Difficulties in listening: How to harness your own thoughts and reactions while listening to another and preparing to reflect?
- Managing the effects of judgment and irritation arising as a listener reacts to a speaker.

Added 2021/March/04 by grahamberends@gmail.com

Exploring coping with cultural and gender attitudes to empathic processes. The premise is that expectations and habitual processes of others when communicating create a major hurdle to change. Exploring:

- How to extend your empathic processes into existing relationships?
- How to cope with overt biases towards empathic interactions?
- How to cope with instilled fears (from childhood) that emotions are dangerous to express, and that the speaker feels he/she does not have the right to talk from a vulnerable spot?
- How to introduce empathy into an existing spousal relationship with, say, the objective of creating further intimacy?
- What emotional stresses, strains, or positive experiences are attached to these cultural barriers?

Added Mar 6, 2021 by Cita Oudijk

Book discussions: I like the idea of using ECs for book group discussions. Any type of book could be chosen, depending on the group's aim or interest. The group could agree to read a certain amount before each meeting time and then discuss the book using ECs. An EC-style book group could also potentially serve as another sort of entry point into EC practice, just like the training cafes and cohorts are now.

March 7th by Lynda D, Wales,UK

I have had some deep involved responses to these themes:

- What feelings do you experience when you are invited to speak your truth?
- What feelings of anxiety & fear are alive for you right now?
- What does the future seem to look like for you right now?

March 11th by Anu Sukhija, Pune, India

I think Otto Scharmer's research and work can be utilised very well for EC. I also appreciate his willingness to openly share the tools he has been developing via Presencing website...some topics can be :

- [1] Challenges: Look at yourself from outside as if you were another person: What are the most important challenges or tasks that your life (work and non-work) currently presents?
- [2] Self: Write down 3 or 4 important facts about yourself. What are the important accomplishments you have achieved or competencies you have developed in your life ?
- [3] Emerging Self: What 3 or 4 important aspirations, areas of interest, or undeveloped talents would you like to place more focus on in your future journey ?
- [4] Frustration: What about your current work and/or personal life frustrates you the most?
- [5] Energy: What are your most vital sources of energy? What do you love?
- [6] The crack: Over the past couple of days and weeks, what new aspects of your Self have you noticed? What new questions and themes are occurring to you now?
- [7] Your community: Who makes up your community, and what are their highest hopes in regard to your future journey?
- [8] Helicopter: Watch yourself from above (as if in a helicopter). What are you doing? What are you trying to do in this stage of your professional and personal journey?
- [9] Letting-go: What would you have to let go of in order to bring your vision into reality? What is the old stuff that must die? What is the old skin (behaviors, thought processes, etc.) that you need to shed?
- [10] Seeds: What in your current life or context provides the seeds for the future that you want to create? Where do you see your future beginning?
- [11] Prototyping: Over the next three months, if you were to prototype a microcosm of the future in which you could discover "the new" by doing something, what would that prototype look like?
- [12] People: Who can help you make your highest future possibilities a reality? Who might be your core helpers and partners?

Values: Added 2021/August/09 by grahamberends@gmail.com

- Values, and how they change

Connecting: Added 2021/August/09 by grahamberends@gmail.com

Topics related to connecting. It is my impression that emotional shifts lead to a sense of connection. Further that emotional shifts are based on: feeling heard; feeling that you care; feeling safe; developing a sense of trust.

- How do we create a sense of feeling heard?
- What does the experience of feeling heard feel like?
- What does the sense of connection feel like?
- How do we create a sense of connection across the four or five people in a break-out room?
- What role does vulnerability play in creating a sense of safety for others?
- What is the effect on connection if we bring our own theme to the discussion and resist feeding off the ideas/concerns/interest of others?

- What is the effect of sharing a theme? Picking up on the themes that others share?
- Real Self: Something most people don't know about me. Something I hide about myself 'cos I fear judgment (from LZ). This is how I would like to be, but I fear the change.
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Trauma: Added 2021/August/09 by grahamberends@gmail.com.

This is a set of ideas which needs exploring and adding to such that spaces are “trauma informed”

- Exploring the factors which lead to a sense of the space being safe
- What does a group facilitator need to be aware of to create a safe space
- Modelling vulnerability in a manner which does not shock trauma victims
- Modelling connecting with the themes of others in a way which does not trigger reactions from trauma sufferers
- Exploring the mechanisms of trust (what are the factors which enable trust to be built)
- How to use the signs of insecurity, not feeling safe, and expressions of defensiveness in others (eg. video turned off, listener getting confused, speakers drying up, other signs of self-consciousness and nervousness) as a measure of the perceived level of safety prevailing in the group?
- Facilitator's attitude to people who keep their video switched off.
- Being aware of the presence of inequality, unequal use of group resources like time, expressions of superiority/inferiority, status, power, persistence, defensiveness, sourcasm, use of covert means of put-downs, role of questions in controlling directions of conversations. And, knowing how to address them.

Leadership: Added 2021/August/09 by grahamberends@gmail.com.

This is a set of ideas mirroring the set of topics above on connecting, trauma, and basically developing all aspects of empathic skills. It is my impression that emotional shifts lead to a sense of connection. Without the sense of connection there can be little influence (cooperative use of power, power-with). Leaders either seek to influence, or others may select you as a leader to influence them. The following processes appear fundamental to generating openness to influence: feeling heard; feeling that the leader cares; feeling safe; development of a sense of trust, and thus a willingness to cooperate.

Category:

LIGHT AND FUN Topics

Copied 2021/August/10 from Shoshannah Weinisch shoshtalks@gmail.com and Debra Maddex debramaddex@gmail.com

Suggestions...

- **Poetry** -My fave poet or poem/ What poetry means to me/ A poem i can recite
- **Singing**-The last time i sang/how i feel when i sing/my fave singer/karaoke stories/places i have sung
- **Music**- My fave song/how music shows up in my life/if i wrote a song it would be about.../is there enough music in my life?
- **Laughter** - Laughing energises or exhausts me/ Things that make me laugh/the time i got in trouble when i couldn't stop laughing/ The last time i experienced uncontrollable laughter/my fave jokes/When i am with.. We always laugh a lot
- **Covid Joy**-What silver linings have i experienced?/Things i discovered about myself and others/Books i read/projects i finished/skills i learnt/If the world opened up tomorrow and time & money were not an issue what would my tomorrow look like?
- **Current events**-Positive news/Celebrity gossip/funny animal videos/Retail is on sale!/Scientific discoveries/Cure for.../Performing arts/Movies/TV/Space the final frontier
- **Good feelings** Excited/hopeful/love/respect/bliss/Ecstasy/Peace/Tranquility/Joyful/harmony/achievement/ Satisfaction/Full
- **Play**- Do i have enough play in my life/Games i like to play/How i feel when i win or score a point/playful conversations/play with pets/play with children/I prefer Solo or team sports games/Play with my partner/I sphere room for play in my job/Am i a spectator or player?/ I want to learn how to play..
- **Travel/Holidays** My fave holiday/Best holiday experience/Family traditions/Best and worst holiday food/fave places to travel/Bucket list/Family vacations/Camping/Hiking/Cruises/Airplanes/Road Trips/Honeymoon stories
- **Hobbies**-My hobbies are../Hobbies i want to learn/The most unusual hobby
- **Wining/dining/parties** My fave foods/if i opened a restaurant/Fave type of restaurant/Most memorable dining experience/Hilarious or embarrassing dinner parties/Wedding and Bar mitzvah receptions/Dancing at parties/if i were a party planner
- **Misc** Pets/Lets get organised/Something most people don't know about me/I can be funny/I like or Hate to cook/puzzles

Middle of the Road Topics: Copied 2021/August/09 from Shoshannah Weinisch shoshtalks@gmail.com and Debra Maddex debramaddex@gmail.com (copied by Graham Berends)

- Life events: Birthdays, Learning to ride a bike, Adulthood, Leaving home, Graduations, Degrees, My first job, Career changes, Promotions, Retirement, Marriage, Children, Buying first home, Awards/Achievements

- Self care: Sleep, Relaxation, Healthy diet, Personal hygiene, Medical check-ups, Balancing work and play, Reading, Exercise, Meditation/prayer, Time with friends, Honest conversations, I need a massage, Vacations
- Personal development: I need friends, Goals for Health, Something new, Mindfulness, Caring for others, Journaling, Change my style, Clean my room
- Recent news which affects my life: I am concerned about ... Should I spend less/more time watching the news?
- Education: Home school, Public schools, Private schools, College Degrees, Self Learning:Autodidact, Courses Online/In person/Vulnerability is essential for learning
- Feelings: Being loved, To love, Feeling safe, Happy Memory, Joy, Undue Fears, How I experience feelings, How I communicate feelings, Should I be honest about my feelings? Do I stuff my feelings?
- Misc: Genetic traits have I inherited, My favorite first date activity, How I met my spouse/partner, My creative side, A time I was courageous, How much \$\$ is enough? Online dating, I have a dream, Something most people don't know about me.
- Empathy- is the antidote to shame

Heavier Topics: Copied 2021/August/09 from Shoshannah Weinisch shoshtalks@gmail.com and Debra Maddex debramaddex@gmail.com (copied by Graham Berends)

- **Soap Box:** Vaccinations, Religion, Culture wars, Politics, Class, Racism, Sexism, Ageism, Environment, Climate, Change, Abortion, Voter ID, 12 Step programs, Is the media Corrupt?
- **Feelings:** Forgiveness, Anger, Hate, Jealousy, Revenge, Depression, Anxiety, Apathy, Fear, Great loss, loneliness, grief, Isolation, arrogance, Shame
- **Family matters:** Marriage/Divorce, Separation, Pregnancy, Custody, Adoption, Caring for a dying relative, Family feuds, Inheritance, My family has no idea that I ...
- **Death/dying:** My first funeral, My last funeral, Caring for someone who is dying, Inheritance, Grief, Death of Partner, Death of Pet, My eulogy, Death of a Child, Death of a friend, Death of a celebrity/political figure
- **Misc:** I could do better, I want to care, I want to be more patient, Losing weight, Addiction, Workaholics, Status/wealth, Hard Conversations, The Future of Journalism
- **Education-** the teaching process is full of shame

Topics: From Rasha's email dated Wed Aug 4 2021; Rasha Kutty rasa@theempathyuniversity.com

- One-word Prompts like Clutter, Summer, Sunset, Warmth, Envy, Memories, Travel, Love, Boundaries, Friendship
- Respect (when do you feel respected, or what does respect mean to you; what does respect look like to you?)
- Serious Topics like Climate change, Government policies, Racism, Right to privacy, what makes a happy relationship, Artificial Intelligence - a boon or a curse, prejudice/racism, disenfranchising and/or disempowering sections of the community and genders, meaning of life/death to you.
- Positive Topics: What gets you in the zone? How do you experience flow? What is your relationship with "flow"?
- Professional Aspects: Career choices and impact on future, role of self-worth, attitudes to risk and social constraints in making major life choices like a career, Community building (What role do you play in the community, how can you better the lives of those in your community), Motivation, Limiting beliefs (What is holding you back from being the person you wish to be), skill and talents - acknowledging & celebrating the skills we have.

Your Life: From Rasha's email dated Wed Aug 4 2021; Rasha Kutty rasa@theempathyuniversity.com

- What's the most interesting thing about your life so far
- What do you want to learn next? (What we choose or care to learn about tells a lot about what matters to us.)
- If you could be anywhere right now, where would you be? (Home isn't always where the heart is. Sometimes you leave it behind on your travels.)
- If you could meet anyone you wanted, whom would you choose? What would you ask them? (Will they stay in this period or inhabit the future or past? Our choices make us.)
- If you could teach me one thing, what would it be?
- Who/What is your superpower? (We're all superheroes but do they know what their gift is yet?)
- What do you think people love and hate about you? (Perception vs. self-realization. Subjectivity vs. objectivity.)
- What's been your biggest failure till now? (Failures are the corpses of our dreams. And if or when we learn lessons from them, we build monuments.)
- Hard: Are you happy? (If they answer it in a binary, then dig deeper. Happiness never comes in a single shade.)
- Hard: How do you measure your life? (OKRs and KPIs exist for everything. But this is when it really matters.)

