

Handout for December 2023 Harnessing the Power of Talking Out Loud Workshop

Teddy Bear Talk Support is about getting to think better by thinking out loud. It's about creating opportunities for having a listener along for the ride who isn't "doing" much, while you talk out loud.

Teddy Bear Talk Support was inspired by this description of the Clearness Committee (which can be thought of as a Teddy Bear Talk Support setup where the teddy bears can only talk to ask open, honest questions) written by Parker Palmer:

Many of us face a dilemma when trying to deal with a personal problem, question, or decision. On the one hand, we know that the issue is ours alone to resolve and that we have the inner resources to resolve it, but access to our own resources is often blocked by layers of inner "stuff"—confusion, habitual thinking, fear, despair. On the other hand, we know that friends might help us uncover our inner resources and find our way, but by exposing our problem to others, we run the risk of being invaded and overwhelmed by their assumptions, judgments, and advice—a common and alienating experience.

...

Behind the Clearness Committee is a simple but crucial conviction: each of us has an inner teacher, a voice of truth, that offers the guidance and power we need to deal with our problems. But that inner voice is often garbled by various kinds of inward and outward interference. The function of the Clearness Committee is not to give advice or “fix” people from the outside in but rather to help people remove the interference so that they can discover their own wisdom from the inside out. Nothing is allowed except real questions, honest and open questions, questions that will help the focus person remove the blocks to his or her inner truth without becoming burdened by the personal agendas of committee members.

When you are taking a turn being the talker, here are some suggestions for what to talk about:

- working on getting started with something
- a conversation you need to have
- establishing a new habit or pattern
- something that's bothering you
- a decision you need to make
- getting your head in the space for something
- a topic as if you were talking to _____
- something you are working on writing
- a major life issue
- short-term and long-term goals and dreams
- ideas for improving your living space
- upcoming events and perhaps plans and preparations
- jobs, career aspirations, and recent work experiences
- ideas from books
- things you want to learn
- fitness and wellness
- food and cooking

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Guidelines for asking open, honest questions

A good description of an honest, open question is that the person asking the question could not possibly anticipate the answer to it. Open questions are broad in scope and require responses that are more than just one or two words. An example of an open question is: “What would you say to someone in your shoes?” Ask questions for the purpose of helping the talker rather than for satisfying your own curiosity. These questions are usually brief and have no preamble or explanation.

Such questioning may sound easy. But many people have trouble framing questions that do not impose what they think on the speaker. This includes questions that are suggestions, advice, or analysis in disguise. Perhaps the most important aspect of our sessions is that we provide a place where there is no danger of having someone else's agenda imposed on you. This rule is simple, but abiding by it is hard work because so much of this goes on all the time. That's what we're used to. But, here we're asking you to try not to do any reassuring, diagnosing, providing any logical arguments, or evaluating, be it positive or negative. It can be very difficult to keep these out of the questions that we ask the talker. But, by doing so, we can create space for the talker to work through his or her own agenda.

The talker always has the right to choose not to answer a question. If you are the talker, please do not hesitate to exercise this right. You do not need to provide any explanation for why you have chosen not to answer the question.

Note that learning to ask honest, open questions is a skill that these sessions can help us develop. So, we are also holding the space for being patient and compassionate with ourselves as we experiment with coming up with honest, open questions. Questions fall on a continuum, and we'll practice leaning as much as possible towards the open and honest end of the continuum with our questions. We'll be looking for ones that Parker Palmer describes as questions that allow us to “hear each other into speech, into deeper and deeper speech.”

Example for practicing asking open, honest questions

Anna is talking about wanting to have a different living space. If she were to dream big, it would be a house with a garden and a terrace. She has considered moving to another town near her current apartment. She talks about how she is both drawn to the other town because of things like getting to feel more connected to people and also finds it to be too much like a fairytale. She talks about how she is able to pay less rent with her current apartment because she is renting it from a friend. The apartment is both not big enough and lacking in other ways so that she is not able to work on her art.

In the space below, you can write down some open, honest questions that you could ask Anna. If you want, you can also write down examples of questions that aren't open and honest that someone might ask Anna.

This excerpt is from a compassionate listening training packet from:

https://sherrymccreedy.weebly.com/uploads/1/3/8/9/13896697/compassionate_listening-training-packet-intro2.pdf

Some Examples:

- Can you say more?
- How has this situation affected your life?
- What was that like for you?
- What is the source of your courage?
- What life experiences have helped you in this situation?
- Could you say more about that?
- If this situation were fully resolved, how would things be better for you?
- How has your life been shaped by these events?
- Can you tell us about the situation that concerns you?
- Disputes often reach the levels they do because of deep, unmet needs. What deep, unmet needs do you see at work in this situation?
- What is in your heart right now? If you were a wise fly on the wall, what do you think might work?
- Can you tell us what life experiences led you to feel this way?
- What are you yearning for?
- What do you most cherish about this relationship?

Characteristics of Deepening Questions:²

- **Create motion** – instead of “Why don’t you move to Seattle?” DQ: “What type of place would you like to move to” or “What is the meaning of this move in your life?”
- **Open up options** – instead of “Why don’t you move to Seattle”, DQ: “What are some places that you feel a connection to”
- **Evoke ultimate concerns, high points and deepest values** -
- **Avoid “why”** - why questions create defense and resistance. “How”, “What” and “Is” are good places to start instead. Why don’t you find a way to help the community on this issue?” vs. “What action might you take to help the community on this issue?”
- **Are empowering** - “What would you like to do to help your community?” (for example to high school kids) Assume that they want to help. Assume the goodness in people
- **Ask the unaskable** - “Are there any ways that you might be contributing to this conflict?” “What are you both prepared to do for the sake of your grandchildren?”
- **Are simple.** Asking more than one question at a time is confusing...keep your questions simple and one at a time.
- **Are respectful.** When we use inquiry we convey trust in the person that they are smart enough, courageous enough, to find their own solutions. This is change from the inside out.

² In part synthesized from Fran Peavey, **Strategic Questioning: An Experiment in Communication of the Second Kind.** Available from crabgrass@igc.org

Talking to the talker afterward about what the talker shared

- At the end of their time, talkers can indicate if they don't want to have the teddy bear initiate any further discussion with the talker at any point in the future of what the talker talked about.
- If no such indication was made, teddy bears who want to initiate further discussion of a talker's topic are asked to check with talkers to see if they welcome further discussion or not.
- As we will also emphasize when we cover how to ask honest, open questions, perhaps the most important aspect of our sessions is that we provide a place where there is no danger of having someone else's agenda imposed on you. So, we ask you to steer clear of providing suggestions, advice, or analysis to the talker.

Learning to Listen

Here is a piece by David Castro on Learning to Listen. It is called Empathy in 8 Minutes, and it is about how he experienced doing an exercise where you listen quietly for 8 minutes as someone tells you his or her life story.

When my partner started to tell his story, I wanted to ask a truckload of questions directing the conversation. I wanted to follow up on particular details, ask about things he hadn't mentioned, shortcut certain areas and learn more about others that interested me, like someone fast forwarding through a TV show.

After about three minutes, however, something remarkable happened. That incessant voice in my head began to quiet, and for the first time I began to listen at a deeper level. I observed my partner's body language, soaked in his selected words and stopped trying to control the conversation flow. In the remaining five minutes, I learned something profound about the person speaking. I began to see and understand him for the first time. I was actually listening to him instead of focusing on my bundle of projections about him.

Teddy Bear Talk Support makes it easier for the experience to be about only one person's agenda at a time. **Notice how natural it is to have the both surprising and not so surprising number of agendas that David Castro had as a listener in the first 3 minutes of this exercise.**

Feelings when your needs are satisfied

AFFECTIONATE	entranced	enthusiastic	touched	fulfilled
compassionate	fascinated	giddy	HOPEFUL	mellow
friendly	interested	invigorated	expectant	peace
loving	intrigued	lively	encouraged	quiet
open hearted	involved	passionate	optimistic	relaxed
sympathetic	spellbound	surprised	JOYFUL	relieved
tender	stimulated	vibrant	amused	satisfied
warm	INSPIRED	EXHILARATED	delighted	serene
CONFIDENT	amazed	blissful	glad	still
empowered	awed	ecstatic	happy	tranquil
open	wonder	elated	jubilant	trusting
proud	EXCITED	enthralled	pleased	REFRESHED
safe	amazed	exuberant	tickled	enlivened
secure	animated	radiant	PEACEFUL	reinvigorated
ENGAGED	ardent	rapturous	calm	rejuvenated
absorbed	aroused	thrilled	clear headed	renewed
alert	astonished	GRATEFUL	comfortable	rested
curious	dazzled	appreciative	centered	restored
engrossed	eager	moved	content	revived
enchanted	energetic	thankful	equanimity	

Feelings when your needs are not satisfied

AFRAID	AVERSION	numb	burnt out	hopeless
apprehensive	animosity	removed	depleted	melancholy
dread	appalled	uninterested	exhausted	mournful
foreboding	contempt	withdrawn	lethargic	unhappy
frightened	disgusted	DISQUIET	listless	wretched
mistrustful	dislike	agitated	sleepy	TENSE
panicked	hate	alarmed	tired	anxious
petrified	horrified	disconcerted	weary	cranky
scared	hostile	disturbed	worn out	distressed
suspicious	repulsed	perturbed	PAIN	distraught
terrified	CONFUSED	rattled	agony	edgy
wary	ambivalent	restless	anguished	fidgety
worried	baffled	shocked	bereaved	frazzled
ANNOYED	bewildered	startled	devastated	irritable
aggravated	dazed	surprised	grief	jittery
dismayed	flummoxed	troubled	heartbroken	nervous
disgruntled	hesitant	turbulent	hurt	overwhelmed
displeased	lost	turmoil	lonely	restless
exasperated	mystified	uncomfortable	miserable	stressed out
frustrated	perplexed	uneasy	regretful	VULNERABLE
impatient	puzzled	unnerved	remorseful	fragile
irritated	torn	unsettled	SAD	guarded
irked	DISCONNECTED	upset	depressed	helpless
ANGRY	alienated	EMBARRASSED	dejected	insecure
enraged	aloof	ashamed	despair	leery
furious	apathetic	chagrined	despondent	reserved
incensed	bored	flustered	disappointed	sensitive
indignant	cold	guilty	discouraged	shaky
irate	detached	mortified	disheartened	YEARNING
livid	distant	self-conscious	forlorn	envious
outraged	distracted	FATIGUE	gloomy	jealous
resentful	indifferent	beat	heavy hearted	longing

Ways to engage in Teddy Bear Talk Support that the TBTS website has to offer

From: <https://teddybeartalksupport.com/times>

With both bookable times and on-call times, we will be splitting the time between the participants so that everyone gets a turn to be the talker. That's one reason why there is no charge for any Teddy Bear Talk Support activities.

Bookable times

One-on-one times with Leeann for people who have questions they want to ask Leeann and/or are new to Teddy Bear Talk Support and want to learn more

- Learn more - Schedule a Zoom call with Leeann for 30 min, 45 min, or 60 min. You'll be able to choose the time duration when booking the call.

Times that allow multiple people to sign up to join a Zoom call

- In pairs - Pair off and take turns being talkers
- Co-working - Pair off and do 20 minute work periods interspersed with taking turns for 3 minutes each with being a talker
- Holding the Space Session - A modified version of the Clearness Committee where people take turns being talkers and teddy bears, and teddy bears are limited to only asking open, honest questions.
- Clearness Committee - With the traditional Clearness Committee format, there is only one focus person for a 2-hour time period, and teddy bears are limited to only asking open, honest questions.

On-call times

On-call times are times when someone is making themselves available for people to do calls with them with no advance notice.

Here are the on-call times that are currently being offered:

Teddy Bear Talk Support On-call Times

Every Saturday 6:00 - 7:00 pm Eastern

Every Tuesday and Thursday from 6:50 - 7:35 pm Eastern

Call 734-237-7676 to reach Leeann Fu, the person on call during these times.

If you would like to offer times to be an on-call person or offer bookable times that people could schedule with you to do a Teddy Bear Talk Support session, please contact Leeann Fu at teddybear@umich.edu.