

Conversation 2: A Reflection on How We Support Members in Distress

**** Green font is action for the facilitator****

Print Handout: LISTENING ASSESSMENT

Time: 90-120 minutes

Preparation for the group:

- **Decide on a date and time**
- **Reserve a venue** for the group for at least 2.5 hours (for set up and take down)
- **Advertise** the discussion group in your community using this invitation **template**
- Review the **facilitators video** ahead of time
- **Read** the relevant info sheets ahead of time
- **Practice** the conversation outline a few times
- **Select 2 prayers for the opening and closing**
- **Make sure you have enough copies** of the handout for each member
- **Take a sign-up sheet and pen** with you
- **Arrive early and set up chairs** in a circle before everyone arrives
- **Warmly greet** everyone when they arrive

Starting the session:

Say: During this group there will be times of reflection, silence and prayer as well as times of sharing.

Gather the group together. Open with a reading or a short prayer. (4 minutes)

"I adjure Thee by Thy might, O my God! Let no harm beset me in times of tests, and in moments of heedlessness guide my steps aright through Thine inspiration. Thou art God, potent art Thou to do what Thou desirest. No one can withstand Thy Will or thwart Thy Purpose." - The Báb

Ask everyone to share their name with a warm up activity/Icebreaker (10 minutes)

Introduce yourself (your name) and share, IN ONE SENTENCE, an act of kindness or generosity that someone else showed to you at some point in your life.

E.g.1 My name is Sharon. When I was 6 my friend helped me up after I fell off my bike.

E.g.2 My name is Hugh. When I was travelling in Europe, I met some Irish pilgrims who befriended me and were generous to me in sharing meals with me.

Emphasize that this is only an icebreaker and although stories can be interesting, please only say the act of kindness in one sentence.

Prepare the group (2 minutes)

- **Tell the group:** *In this group we are going to be talking about how each of us can take ONE step forward to be supportive of each other and others in our community*
- **Make this request from the group:** *Let's try to listen to each other non-judgementally. Everyone's experience is different with a range of meanings. Our goal is to simply encourage each other to take one step forward.*

Introduction to Healthy Support

We are going to explore the concept of Healthy Support.

Healthy support is side by side support given to another person in distress

Demonstration:

Say to the group: *I am going to demonstrate what Healthy Support is NOT and what it IS.*

Ask for a volunteer and go through these steps with them:

- Ask the volunteers to stand up

- Stand behind the volunteer and **push** them ****gently****

- **Say:** *this is not Healthy Support it's pushing a person to action before they are ready*
- **Now stand in front of them and point your finger.** Then **shake your fist at them.**
- **Say:** *this is not Healthy Support its giving advice and telling them what to do and what not to do.*
- **Now stand side by side,** stand with them. **Ask them to take a step** when they are ready. As they step, **step with them.**
- **Say:** *this is Healthy Support - It is asking questions, listening and watching for the right time, and moving with the person forward.*
- **Now instruct the volunteer** to demonstrate Healthy Support for you -- The volunteer would ask you to take a step when you are ready. **Explain** to them that as you (the facilitator) take a step, the volunteer steps with you.
- **Say:** *this is Healthy Support and friendship - mutual giving and receiving.*

We are now going to consider all of the postures taken in the demonstration:

- (1) Pushing
- (2) Advice giving
- (3) Healthy Support

1. PUSHING instead of PATIENCE

Tell the group: this is a silent exercise, I will ask you some questions, just answer in your heart - making an effort to be honest with yourself.

Say: *think back to the demonstration*

Ask: *Have you experienced someone trying to push you to do something you were not ready to do?* **pause 10-20 seconds**

- *What did it feel like?* **pause 10-20 seconds**
- *How did you respond?* **pause 10-20 seconds**
- *What was the end result?* **pause 10-20 seconds**
- *How did it affect the relationship?* **pause 10-20 seconds**

Say: *We continue in silence.*

Continue: *Now scan your current interactions, don't be too hard on yourself but search to see where are you currently pushing someone? It might be over a seemingly small matter.*

Pause in silence (30-40 seconds to allow group members to bring a situation to mind)

Now ask - (giving examples of subtle actions that may be pushing another person):

- *Where do you find yourself repeating a request or action?* **pause 10-20 seconds**

- *What interactions leave you feeling frustrated?* **pause 10-20 seconds**
- *Where is an expectation not being met?* **pause 10-20 seconds**

Say: *We are not going to share these interactions, rather we are looking for root causes.*

Ask the group: *Consider, why do you think people push others? Use your own experience to help you think about this question.*

Ask the group to share their responses.

If the group is not coming up with answers, **help them with Cues**/Possible responses:

- Fear
- Unrealised Expectations
- Anxiety
- Lack of control
- Loss of Faith

Ask: *What are ways that God helps us to develop patience with each other?*

Think about scripture passages that point to God's way of teaching us. Here are two examples:

- Parallel experiences: I learn what it's like by being put in someone else's situation (Jacob/ Esau and Jacob/Laban) - (Bible references: Genesis 27; Genesis 29)
- Delaying the outcome to teach us: (1) about the consequences of impatience/grumbling; (2) to love each other; and (3) to wait on God and trust Him for the outcome (Israelites waiting to enter the promised land) -(Bible reference: Acts 7: 36- 45).

2. ADVICE instead of LISTENING

Tell the group: *this is a silent exercise, I will ask you some questions, just answer in your heart.*

Ask: *Bring to mind someone in your life that kept giving you advice and telling you what to do. pause 10-20 seconds*

- *What did it feel like?* **pause 10-20 seconds**
- *How did you respond?* **pause 10-20 seconds**
- *What was the end result?* **pause 10-20 seconds**
- *How did it affect the relationship?* **pause 10-20 seconds**

Give the hand out on the "Listening Assessment" to the group.

Ask everyone to take 3 minutes to read the Listening Assessment.

Instruct the group: find only ONE in the list that you have the most challenge with.

LISTENING ASSESSMENT

(By Dr. Rod Wilson, 2014)

1. I make a great effort to enter other people's experience of life.
2. I do not presume to know what the other person is trying to communicate.
3. My close friends would say I listen more than I speak.
4. When people are angry with me, I am able to listen to their side without getting upset.
5. People share freely with me because they know I listen well.
6. I listen not only to what people say but also for their nonverbal cues, body language, tone of voice, and the like.
7. I give people my undivided attention when they are talking to me.
8. I am able to reflect back and validate another person's feelings with empathy.
9. I am aware of my primary defensive mechanisms when I am under stress, such as placating, blaming, problem-solving prematurely, or becoming distracted.
10. I am aware of how the family in which I was raised has influenced my present listening style.
11. I ask for clarification when I am not clear on something another person is saying rather than attempt to fill in the blanks.
12. I never assume something, especially negative, unless it is clearly stated by the person speaking.
13. I ask questions when listening rather than mind-read or make assumptions.
14. I don't interrupt or listen for openings to get my point across when another is speaking.
15. I am aware when I am listening of my own personal "hot buttons" that cause me to get angry, upset, fearful, or nervous.

Tell the group: *Each person turn to the person next to you and talk about how your relationships would be different if you were able to gain that one skill? (the one that you found is most challenging for you from the list)*

Keep time with your cell phone or a timer. Each person gets 2 minutes to talk. Total 4 minutes.

Give the group a 5 minute stretch break.

3. Healthy Support: SIDE- BY-SIDE SUPPORT

Tell the group: *I will ask you some questions again for silent consideration, just answer in your heart.*

Ask: Have you experienced Healthy Support in a relationship - like in the demonstration we saw at the beginning - side by side? **pause 10-20 seconds**

- What did it feel like to have someone take a step with you? **pause 10-20 seconds**
- What did it feel like to take a step with someone else? **pause 10-20 seconds**

Explain: Every person has different gifts to give each other in the support journey. Some come in the form of actions, some in the form of love, some in the form of different perspectives. Each person at different times in our lives can give varying gifts in the support journey.

Acknowledging the limited role of support

Explain to the group that you will be reading the acknowledgments and giving time to reflect in between.

This is an exercise that requires short responses.

Read each quote slowly and clearly and allow at least 10-20 seconds of quiet reflection between each acknowledgement and then invite a one sentence response from those who wish to.

Choose three of the following quotes to read out for group reflection:

- *"As a supporter I am not responsible for the behaviour of my friend."* **pause 10-20 seconds, invite short response**

Example of response: *I cannot stop my friend from taking unnecessary risks.*

- *"As a supporter I am not responsible for the recovery of my friend."* **pause 10-20 seconds, invite short response**

Example of response: *I cannot force my friend to attend an Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) group.*

- *"I will respect my friend's time, I will respect my time."* **pause 10-20 seconds, invite short response**

Ending: (10 mins)

Talk about a possible date for the next discussion.

Collect participants contact information for advertising next discussion topic/date/time.

Hand around sign up sheet. Make sure you say that they can share their contact information on a voluntary basis if they are interested to be contacted for the next group.

Close with this passage from the Universal House of Justice:

“In relationships among the friends, then, this development in culture finds expression in the quality of their interactions. Learning as a mode of operation requires that all assume a posture of humility, a condition in which one becomes forgetful of self, placing complete trust in God, reliant on His all-sustaining power and confident in His unfailing assistance, knowing that He, and He alone, can change the gnat into an eagle, the drop into a boundless sea. And in such a state souls labour together ceaselessly, delighting not so much in their own accomplishments but in the progress and services of others. So it is that their thoughts are centred at all times on helping one another scale the heights of service to His Cause and soar in the heaven of His knowledge. This is what we see in the present pattern of activity unfolding across the globe, propagated by young and old, by veteran and newly enrolled, working side by side.”

- Ridvan 2010