TOUCHSTONES

Ideas that increase the likelihood of our creating a safe space for individual work in community.

1. **Be 100% present, extending and presuming welcome.** Set aside the usual distractions of things undone from yesterday, things to do tomorrow. Bring all of yourself to the work. We all learn most effectively in spaces that welcome us. Welcome others to this place and this work, and presume that you are welcomed as well.

2. **Listen deeply.** Listen intently to what is said; listen to the feelings beneath the words. As Quaker writer Douglas Steere puts it, “Holy listening to ‘listen’ another’s soul into life, into a condition of disclosure and discovery – may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another.” Listen to yourself as well as to others. Strive to achieve a balance between listening and reflecting, speaking and acting.

3. **It is never “share or die.”** You will be invited to share in pairs, small groups, and in the large group. The invitation is exactly that. You will determine the extent to which you want to participate in our discussions and activities.

4. **No fixing.** Each of us is here to discover our own truths, to listen to our own inner teacher, to take our own inner journey. We are not here to set someone else straight, or to help right another’s wrong, to “fix” what we perceive as broken in another member of the group.

5. **Suspend judgment.** Set aside your judgments. By creating a space between judgments and reactions, we can listen to the other, and to ourselves, more fully.

6. **Identify assumptions.** Our assumptions are usually invisible to us, yet they undergird our worldview. By identifying our assumptions, we can then set them aside and open our viewpoints to greater possibilities.

7. **Speak your truth.** You are invited to say what is in your heart, trusting that your voice will be heard and your contribution respected. Your truth may be different from, even the opposite of what another person in the circle has said. Yet speaking your truth is simply that – it is not debating with, or correcting, or interpreting what another has said. Own your truth by remembering to speak only for yourself. Using the first person “I” rather than “you” or “everyone” clearly communicates the personal nature of your expression.

8. **Respect silence.** Silence is a rare gift in our busy world. After someone has spoken, take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words. This applies to the speaker as well – be comfortable leaving your words to resound in the silence, without refining or elaborating on what you have just said. This process allows others time to fully listen before reflecting on their own reactions.

9. **Maintain confidentiality.** Create a safe space by respecting the confidential nature and content of discussions held in the formation circle. Allow what is said in the circle to remain there.

10. **When things get difficult, turn to wonder.** If you find yourself disagreeing with another, becoming judgmental, or shutting down in defense, try turning to wonder: “I wonder what brought her to this place?” “I wonder what my reaction teaches me?” “I wonder what he’s feeling right now?”

11. **Practice slowing down.** As Thomas Merton and others were already cautioning by the 1960s, even simply the speed of modern life can cause violent damage to the soul. By intentionally practicing slowing down we strengthen our ability to extend non-violence to others and to ourselves.

Prepared by formation facilitators with considerable help from the writings of Judy Brown, Parker Palmer and the Dialogue Group.
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Circle of Trust® Touchstones

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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.
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...
instead of counsel or corrections. With such questions, we help “hear each other into deeper speech.”
When the going gets rough, turn to wonder.

If you feel judgmental, or defensive, ask yourself, "I wonder what brought her to this belief?" "I wonder what he’s feeling right now?" "I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?" Set aside judgment to listen to others—and to yourself—more deeply.

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.

A Circle of Trust depends on knowing that whatever we say will remain with the people to whom we choose to say it — whether in small groups or in the large circle — and will never be passed on to others without our explicit permission.

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.

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.

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