# Peace and Power

*A Handbook of Transformative Group Process*

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CHAPTER 1

Getting Ready

The first challenge for any group considering Peace and Power is to figure out if this is for you! Making a change to act and interact in cooperative ways that build strong community requires a commitment from everyone, challenges many practices that are habitual, and requires new learning for everyone. If you use this process, be aware that you, along with everyone in your group, will be called upon to make significant personal changes.

As you and your group consider using Peace and Power, it will be helpful for you to think about the following questions. These questions provide a background from which you can clarify your shared intentions to bring about fundamental change.

- **Do we agree about our purpose?** It is common for members of a group to have different ideas about the group’s purpose. Identifying a simple statement that reflects a common understanding of what you are all about is a good foundation for the work of Peace and Power.

- **Do we seek to equalize the balance of power among everyone in the group?** If people in your group can answer “yes” to this question, Peace and Power processes are for you. This is easier said than done, and you will probably find that you will want to return to this fundamental value as a group over and over as you work out how to make it a reality.

- **How independent are we?** If your group is part of a larger hierarchical structure (for example, a school, corporation, or business) it will be more difficult to enact Peace and Power processes fully. It will not be impossible, but realize that you may have to make major adjustments (see Chapter 12.) If you are relatively independent of an external hierarchical structure (for example, a community activist group, spiritual community, or intentional community), you will still be influenced by everyone’s habits in hierarchical ways of working together in a group. But you will be relatively free to create your own processes consistent with Peace and Power.

- **Are we all committed to spending time together?** It is not possible to develop a community unless you spend time together. You may not be able to be together often, but you need to have some regular and agreed-on time to be together, either in person or using a virtual meeting room with both audio and video. Not everyone has to be present each time your group meets, but everyone needs to know when and where the group meets.

- **Is everyone willing to pay attention to the group’s process?** Peace and Power processes require taking time and turning attention to reflect on and discuss the group’s process. Bringing values and actions together is only possible if you take the time to discuss what
is happening in the process, and together carefully consider if your values and your actions indeed match.

- **Do we seek meaningful change in ourselves and in the world at large?** Peace and Power processes are designed to create practices that nurture and empower. These ideals are appealing to most people, but because they are rarely reflected in action, it is hard to anticipate what it will take to make them happen. A key to making this change happen is a shared vision that this is possible, and a shared intention to take the actions needed for it to happen!
CHAPTER 2

Peace

Peace is intent, process, and outcome. The intention of Peace is the commitment to chosen values and actions that consistently bring about harmony, trust, and constructive solutions to differences and disagreements. The process of Peace is what you do together. The outcome of Peace is the actual experience of harmony, trust, and constructive solutions to problems.

The kind of Peace that this book is about requires conscious awareness of what happens in a group and in a community. Peace requires that you know what you do as an individual when you interact with others. Peace requires that your chosen values guide your actions. Peace is the means and the end, the process and the product.

The acronym that follows defines the idea of Peace. Each letter of the word PEACE represents a commitment that guides the ways individuals can choose to relate to one another within the context of a group.

Praxis
Empowerment
Awareness
Cooperation
Evolvement

PRAXIS

Praxis is thoughtful reflection and action that occur in synchrony, in the direction of transforming the world. Most people have limited understanding of praxis because we live in a time when “knowing” and “doing” are rarely the same. In western cultures, the message “Do as I say, not as I do” is all too familiar. When you choose to convey the message that “I know what I do, and I do what I know,” you begin to live your values.

Praxis is values made visible through deliberate action. Your actions, chosen to reflect values of Peace and Power, become an ongoing cycle of constant renewal. As your actions are informed by your

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1 Charlene Eldridge and I adapted this definition of praxis from Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Freire (New York: The Seabury Press, 1970), p. 36. Our adapted definition emphasizes the synchronicity of thought and action.
awareness of values, your thinking and your ideas are shaped and changed by your experiences with those actions.

**EMPOWERMENT**

Empowerment is growth of personal strength, power, and ability to enact one’s own will and love for self in the context of love and respect for others. Empowerment is not self-indulgence, but rather a form of strength that comes from real solidarity with and among those who seek Peace. Empowerment grows not from an individual quest for personal strength and influence, but from active engagement with others whose values you share. Empowerment requires listening inwardly to your own senses as well as listening intently and actively to others, consciously taking in and forming strength. Empowerment is not power over other people, other creatures, or the earth. In fact, empowerment is only possible when individuals express respect and reverence for all other forms of life and ground the energy of the Self as one with others and with the earth.

**AWARENESS**

Awareness is an active, growing knowledge of Self and others and the world in which you live. This means tuning into the moment and valuing your own experience. This kind of awareness sees beyond the present to integrate the past and the future. This is a vital transformation in a society that treats the knowing and experience of minority and marginalized groups—and of women—as abnormal or nonexistent. With awareness comes a consciousness of double-speak, where what is defined as normal is really abnormal and what is defined as peace is really war.

**COOPERATION**

Cooperation is an active commitment to group solidarity and group integrity. A group’s commitment to cooperation grows out of mutually defined values, where each individual’s viewpoint and abilities are honored equally. It means moving away from any action that exerts power over other individuals or groups. Rather, cooperation means encouraging everyone to use their abilities, ideas, and energy to join in creating a coordinated, cohesive whole. As individuals excel in a skill or ability, their achievements are celebrated by all and shared with others according to need and ability.

**EVLOLVEMENT**

Evolution is a commitment to growth where change and transformation are conscious and deliberate. Evolution can be likened to the cycles of the moon where new and old, life and

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death, and all phases are ultimately one. What remains constant is the cycle itself. As you experience group processes based on PEACE, you are changed. A group changes as circumstances shift, as individuals move in and out or become more or less involved, and as purposes or activities change. Growth and transformations are valued and celebrated with each new cycle. You create your realities as you live them. There can be no mistakes, no disasters -- only opportunities for re-creation.

Peace Is Not . . .

PEACE, when you embrace Peace and Power processes, is very different from typical ways we have learned to “keep the peace.” It is important to recognize and move away from the old ways that actually create dis-ease and distrust. Peace is not:

- Letting things slide for the sake of friendship
- Doing whatever is required to keep on good terms
- Criticizing people behind their backs
- Being silent at a meeting only to rant and rave afterward
- Letting things drift if they do not affect you personally
- Playing it safe in order to avoid confrontation
- Manipulating someone to avoid open conflict
- Coercing someone to do what you want
- Hearing distortions of truth without refuting them
- Indulging another’s behavior when the behavior is destructive
- Withholding information to protect someone else

Having Good Intentions Is Not Enough

Having the intent of PEACE is critical when you enter a group interaction; however, intent is not enough. Actions that flow from intent are essential. Examine how fully your actions flow with your intent by asking questions like these:

- Do I know what I do, and do I do what I know? (Praxis)
- Am I expressing my own will in the context of love and respect for others? (Empowerment)
- Am I fully aware of others and myself, and do I bring these awarenesses to our discussions? (Awareness)
- Do I honor and encourage everyone’s opinions, skills, and contributions? (Cooperation)
- Do I welcome practices that encourage growth and change for others, the group, and myself? (Evolution)
CHAPTER 3

Power

Power is the energy from which action arises. The kind of power that energizes PEACE is different from power as it is used in the world at large.

Power-over reflects a hierarchical ideal, where power is the capacity to impose one’s will on others, accompanied by a willingness to apply negative sanctions against those who oppose that will. Power-over translates into a love of power, where the fact of having the power becomes more important, more critical, than what that power is used for or what results from the use of that power. Once people have power-over and get caught up in it, they behave as if any measure that is necessary to retain that power is justifiable.

The kind of power required to create and live PEACE comes from the power of love. What is valued is the capacity to be in harmony with others and with the earth, and to join with others in directing your collective energies toward a future you seek together. PEACE power reflects a feminist ideal where the focus shifts to chosen values that guide the exercise of power, and to considering what happens to people’s relationships when power is used.

Although PEACE powers are familiar, you may not be accustomed to thinking of them as power because of what you have experienced and learned in the traditions of the hierarchical power-over model. The PEACE powers are familiar because they are so central in the private world. Even though PEACE powers may seem idealistic when you read about them, when they become visible through action, they create dramatic changes. They become very real. In the Table that follows, you will see the contrasts between these two kinds of power.

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<tr>
<th>Power-Over Powers</th>
<th>PEACE Powers</th>
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<td>The <strong>power of Results</strong> emphasizes programs, goals, or policies that achieve desired results. Achievement of the goals justifies the use of any means: “I don’t care how you do it, just get the job done.”</td>
<td>The <strong>power of Process</strong> emphasizes a fresh perspective and freedom from rigid schedules. Goals, programs, and timetables are used as tools, but are less important than the process itself.</td>
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<td>The <strong>power of Tokenism</strong>&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt; – leaders give token gifts and token “promotions” to a selected few: “You deserve this special recognition.”</td>
<td>The <strong>power of Appreciation</strong> - everyone expresses gratitude for the people around them and for actions that promote well-being</td>
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<td>The <strong>power of Prescription</strong> imposes change by authority; vested interests prescribe the out-come. The attitude is paternalistic: “Do as I say, because I know what is best for you.”</td>
<td>The <strong>power of Letting Go</strong> encourages change emerging out of awareness of collective integrity; leadership inspires a balance between the interests of each individual and the interests of the group as a whole</td>
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<td>The <strong>power of Division</strong> emphasizes centralization, resulting in the hoarding of knowledge and skills by the privileged few: “What they don’t know won’t hurt them.”</td>
<td>The <strong>power of the Whole</strong> values the flow of new ideas, images, and energy from all, nurturing mutual help networks that are both intimate and expansive. Practices that nurture group solidarity are regular habits of the group</td>
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<tr>
<td>The <strong>power of Force</strong> invests power for or against others and is accomplished by a willingness to impose penalties and negative sanctions. One individual makes decisions on behalf of another individual or group of individuals: “Do it or else.”</td>
<td>The <strong>power of Collectivity</strong> values the personal power of each individual as integral to the well-being of the group. A group decision in which each individual has participated is viewed as more viable than a decision made by any one individual and stronger than a decision made by a majority.</td>
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<td>The <strong>power of Hierarchy</strong> requires a linear chain of command, where multiple layers of responsibilities are subdivided into separate and discrete areas of responsibility: “I don’t make the decisions, I just work here.” Or, “The buck stops here.”</td>
<td>The <strong>power of Solidarity</strong> shares the responsibility for decision making and for acting upon those decisions in a lateral network. This process values thoughtful deliberation and emphasizes the integration of variety within the group, while calling forth fundamental values embraced by the whole.</td>
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<sup>3</sup> The “Power of Tokenism” and the “Power of Appreciation” were added in consultation with Adeline Falk-Rafael on November 26, 2015 (U.S. Thanksgiving Day)
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<tr>
<th>Power of Command</th>
<th>Power of Sharing</th>
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<tr>
<td>Requires leaders to be aggressive and followers to be passive; leaders are assigned titles, status, and privilege (and higher pay): “I will tell you what to do.” And, “Tell me what to do.”</td>
<td>Encourages leadership to shift according to talent, interest, ability, or skill and emphasizes the passing along of knowledge and skills in order that all may develop individual talent.</td>
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<th>Power of Opposites</th>
<th>Power of Integration</th>
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<tr>
<td>Polarizes issues. Individual preferences and insights are subsumed by the requirement to make choices “for or against.” Language reflects the values of good versus bad, right versus wrong: “If you aren’t with us, then you are against us.”</td>
<td>Views all aspects of a situation in context. In the process of enacting self-volition, the individual integrates self-love with love for others and acts with respect for each individual’s entitlement to self-volition.</td>
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<th>Power of Use</th>
<th>Power of Nurturing</th>
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<td>Encourages the exploitation of resources and people as normal and acceptable: “If you don’t want to work for what we are willing to pay, then quit. There are plenty of people standing in line wanting this job.”</td>
<td>Views life and experience as a resource to be cherished and respected. The earth and all creatures are viewed as precious, deserving of respect and protection, and integral to the well-being of all.</td>
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<th>Power of Accumulation</th>
<th>Power of Distribution</th>
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<td>Views material goods, resources, and dollars as things to be used in one’s own self-interest, as well as items to gain privilege over others: “I worked for it, I bought it, I own it—and I deserve it.”</td>
<td>Values material resources (including food, land, space, money) as items to use for the benefit of all, to share according to need. Material goods are valued as means, not as ends in and of themselves.</td>
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<th>Power of Intuition</th>
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<td>Relies on technology to conquer without regard for the consequences that might be carried over into the future. “Oh, the pill is causing you to retain fluid? Here, take another pill. This will make you lose fluid.”</td>
<td>Senses which actions to take based on the perceived totality of human experience. Although technology is considered to be a resource, it is not elected for its own sake or merely because it exists.</td>
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<th>Power of Expediency</th>
<th>Power of Consciousness</th>
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<td>Emphasizes the</td>
<td>Considers long-</td>
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<td>Immediate reward or easiest solution. “Oh, radioactive waste? Let’s just ship it somewhere else or dump it in the sea.”</td>
<td>Range outcomes and ethical behaviors. Ethics and morality are derived from values that protect life, growth, and peace, and that are the basis for confronting destructive actions.</td>
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<td>The <strong>power of Xenophobia</strong> (the fear of strangers) rewards conformity and acquiescing to the values of those who hold the balance of power. “Be a team player. Don’t make waves.”</td>
<td>The <strong>power of Diversity</strong> encourages creativity, values alternative views, and encourages flexibility. The expression of dissenting views is expected and encouraged. All points of view are integrated into decisions.</td>
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<td>The <strong>power of Secrets</strong> relies on the mystification of the process, agents, and chain of command. The agent who actually has the power rarely implements decisions or takes direct action, but assigns the dirty work to someone else: “I’m just doing what I was told.”</td>
<td>The <strong>power of Responsibility</strong> focuses on demystification of processes and insists on naming and/or being the agent; open criticism and self-criticism are encouraged, motivated by love and protection for the individual and the group.</td>
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<td>The <strong>power of Rules</strong> relies on policies and laws to dictate what must be done and to prescribe punishments for breaking the rules. A very few laws or rules are beneficial, but runaway rule-making creates absurd contradictions. “Do it because the law requires it.”</td>
<td>The <strong>power of Creativity</strong> takes into account fundamental laws and rules that govern the society, but values actions and solutions created from ingenuity and imagination. Actions are created to fit each situation, with the knowledge that often there is a better way.</td>
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<td>The <strong>power of Fear</strong> focuses on imaginary future disaster, and extreme actions are taken to prevent that which is feared and to control the behavior of others. “Let’s bomb their cities: this will prevent terrorism.”</td>
<td>The <strong>power of Trust</strong> focuses on building genuine human relationships where honest exchanges of thoughts and ideas are followed by consistent action. If trust is broken, then the relationship is renegotiated.</td>
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CHAPTER 4

Making the Commitment

Peace and Power begins with individuals in a group who consciously choose values consistent with the PEACE values of Praxis, Empowerment, Awareness, Cooperation, and Evolvement, and values that are described as the PEACE powers. Here are examples of words and actions arising from PEACE power values:

**A commitment to the Power of Process means:**
- Giving yourself and everyone else in the group time to attend to a concern or issue that exists for any individual.
- Letting decisions emerge gradually, realizing that very few decisions are urgent.
- Inviting everyone in the group to express their ideas or concerns during the discussion.
- Acknowledging the things that happen that are consistent with the group’s values.

**A commitment to the Power of Letting Go means:**
- Acknowledging but setting aside your own interests, in order for others in the group to express their interests fully.
- Supporting others who are new, or learning something new, in their work of taking on something you are already skilled at doing.
- Expressing your misgivings or concerns about a situation in the group, but letting the sense of the group prevail when the group needs to move on to something else.

**A commitment to the Power of the Whole means:**
- Placing your own individual needs and interests within the context of the group.
- Seeking ways to do things together to equalize your power within the group.

**A commitment to the Power of Collectivity means:**
- Taking into account the interests of every member of the group, including those who are not present.
- Making sure that every concern is carefully integrated into every discussion and decision.

**A commitment to the Power of Solidarity means:**
- Addressing conflict openly and constructively, and, in so doing, working actively to strengthen the integrity of the group.
- Keeping the group’s principles of solidarity in conscious awareness as a basis for moving forward.
- Celebrating shared values and joys.
A commitment to the Power of Sharing means:
- Taking responsibility for leadership and tasks, including things you enjoy doing and can do well, as well as things you would rather not do but that need to be done.
- Encouraging others to join in passing skills and tasks along by assuming tasks from others.

A commitment to the Power of Integration means:
- Listening actively and deliberately to every concern or idea that others bring to the group, and taking active steps to understand and act on others’ points of view.
- Taking actions that encourage bringing things together, rather than polarizing them into opposing points of view.

A commitment to the Power of Nurturing means:
- Treating others in ways that convey love and respect.
- Acknowledging that each individual’s experience has uniquely qualified her to be where she is at the present.
- Affirming and rejoicing in the knowledge that each person in the group has power to use, and power to choose how to use it.
- Using critical reflection (see Chapter 9) to bring forth the best for every individual and the group.

A commitment to the Power of Distribution means:
- Taking actions to overcome imbalances in personal material resources among group members.
- Using resources that are available to the group - “Linda is willing to help us out of this tax mess” is a means, not an end.
- Working to make resources that are available accessible to all based on need, in the interest of the development of the group and each individual.

A commitment to the Power of Intuition means:
- Taking the time to think, feel, and experience the fullness of a situation.
- Taking actions that seem risky when your instinct tells you to go ahead.
- Paying attention to the intuition of others and taking their sense of things seriously.

A commitment to the Power of Consciousness means:
- Talking about the values on which you are building your actions so that everyone can be fully aware of your intentions.
- Exploring with others awareness of feelings, situations, responses, and meanings in your
experiences.

A **commitment to the Power of Diversity means:**
- Carefully considering another point of view when your immediate response is to reject it.
- Taking deliberate actions to keep yourself and the group open to welcoming others who are different or new.
- Paying attention to subtle assumptions that may not hold true for everyone in the group.

A **commitment to the Power of Responsibility means:**
- Keeping everyone in the group fully informed about anything in your personal life that might affect the group as a whole.
- Acting to make sure that nothing is mystified, that everything that concerns the group is equally accessible to every member.
- Actively checking in and closing in a spirit of contributing to the growth and development of the group.

A **commitment to the Power of Creativity means:**
- Imagining possibilities that have not yet been tried.
- Drawing on everyone’s ideas to craft new solutions to persistent problems.
- Making better use of time, resources, and energy to accomplish what needs to be done.

A **commitment to the Power of Trust means:**
- Letting everyone know your intentions and what you plan to do next.
- Keeping your promises.
- Taking time to assure others of your commitment to your relationship.
- Disclosing your underlying values when you speak or act.
**CHAPTER 5**

**Principles of Solidarity**

Principles of solidarity express the values and ideals that everyone in the group shares. They form your common ground that you intend to remain constant regardless of whatever happens in the group. In fact, all groups actually have certain ideals and principles that you can detect by watching what the group does and how its members interact. Principles of solidarity put these ideals and principles into a form that brings them into clear focus. Your principles of solidarity also provide a bridge between what the group shares in common and things that everyone recognizes as the differences everyone intends to honor.

When a group functions relatively well together and stays cohesive over a period of time, it tends to take on characteristics of a community. These groups give members a certain identity because of the values, customs, and concerns that they share.

Human beings share in common a yearning to belong somewhere—to find a place where we feel comfortable, relatively safe, and “at home.” Our communities can provide this kind of sense of belonging. However, communities that give people deep satisfaction over time require leadership, commitment, and extraordinary effort on the part of every member. It is this kind of group—a deeply satisfying community—that Peace and Power can help you develop.

**Why Do We Need Principles of Solidarity?**

The challenges of an increasingly complex and diverse world call for new approaches in the ways we live and work together. Groups that function effectively in modern cultures value both cohesiveness and diversity. This means that the members of the group work on ways to maintain all the things they share in common, but they also find ways to respect individual differences without these differences tearing them apart.

Putting the values of cohesiveness and diversity together into action brings forth solidarity. This means that you come together knowing that you will disagree, have different opinions, and see things differently from one another. Rather than seeking to agree, or pretending to agree, you acknowledge things that divide or that could divide you. You resolve to work together to understand one another and work toward mutual resolution of differences that get in the way, and you celebrate those differences that enrich everyone.

You also resolve to overcome fears, prejudices, stereotypes, resentments, and negative forms of competitiveness. Competitiveness that inspires fine performance and nurtures mutual
respect and admiration for one another’s accomplishments strengthens your group. However, when competitiveness nurtures jealousy, resentment, envy, rage, and hatred, your group experiences negative dynamics that are harmful. Peace and Power processes help you overcome fears of differences and provide constructive ways for everyone to understand all points of view, to respect one another without coercion to change, and to find genuine common ground that sustains your group as a whole.

**Principles of solidarity provide:**

- a grounding from which your group can focus its energies and resources,
- the ideals toward which your group builds,
- a guide around which to integrate all individual perspectives in forming decisions,
- a basis for giving one another criticism that is constructive and promotes growth, and
- a foundation for transforming conflict that inevitably arises in any group.

**How Do We Start?**

To get started, set aside time for members of your group to develop a written document that expresses all of the things all members of your group heartily agree upon. Typically this process requires a dedicated time—usually 2 to 3 hours—when everyone gathers to get the initial document written. It is best if every member of the group can be present for this discussion. If this is not possible, at least make sure, in advance, that everyone knows what is going to happen at this meeting, and how they can participate at some point. You will want to make sure that everyone knows they have an important “voice” in creating this document.

When the time comes to start, everyone shares ideas about the group, what interests them in being part of the group, and what they expect from the group. Each perspective is expressed as fully as possible. Then the group begins to identify those ideas around which there is common ground and those ideas that represent diversity from which to build common understandings.

Online groups have an advantage in forming principles of solidarity because of the ability to have every voice heard, to extend discussions of values beyond the limits of a face-to-face meeting, and to revisit principles at any time that the group’s actions and values seem to be at odds. For a group that meets face-to-face, you can extend your discussion online as well.

Although writing your principles down is important and they express lasting values, they are alive—they change and grow as the group changes and grows. New members will contribute valuable perspectives that can lead to shifts and changes in the principles, but the principles also provide a way for the group to convey to new members what is important to the group. The principles provide stability within the group as membership changes.

The written document that contains the principles of solidarity is kept before the group; each member has a copy and works with it constantly. If your group has a Web site, you can post your
document on the Web. The document is particularly important as a source for building decisions (see Chapter 8), forming critical reflections (see Chapter 9), and when the group is addressing conflict (see Chapter 10). When each member’s copy is almost illegible from the penciled-in changes that emerge over time, it is time to consider making a fresh copy!

**What Needs to Be Included in Our Principles of Solidarity?**

Your group needs to consider at least seven questions in forming principles of solidarity\(^4\). Each question becomes a section of the written document, but the specific principles will vary according to the needs and purposes of each group. (For an example of Principles of Unity, see the Friendship Collective Principles - [https://wordpress.com/page/peaceandpowerblog.org/29](https://wordpress.com/page/peaceandpowerblog.org/29))

**WHO ARE WE?**

The name of the group implies a great deal about your group. You may need to define some words in your name to be clear about your identity. For example, the word “radical” in a group’s name might be defined as “fundamental; going to the root,” to contrast your meaning with common assumptions about what it means to be radical.

Your group may also want to agree who the individuals within the group are or will be in the future. For example, a group formed to create and maintain a women’s center in the community may deliberately seek participation from a broad base of women in the community, including women of color, women of all sexual identities, women of differing economic classes, and so on. A group that is working on the rights of lesbian mothers may actively seek the participation of nonlesbian mothers and also lesbians who are not mothers.

An important dimension of defining membership is clarifying how open the group is to integrating new members and when and how this will happen. A group formed to accomplish a specific, detailed, and long-term task may need to limit membership initially to a few people who are able and willing to remain dedicated to the accomplishment of the task.

Although many groups will choose to be open, there may be times when the group needs stability in the membership, and the group might be open to new members only once or twice a year. Making a specific agreement about how long your group membership will remain stable is helpful in preventing misunderstandings within the group. This also helps communicate to people who are not in the group if, when, and how they can join if they wish to do so.

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\(^4\) Kathleen MacPherson first identified four components around which the Menopause Collective formed their principles of solidarity. Her experience is related in her doctoral dissertation, completed in 1986 at Brandeis University, entitled “Feminist Praxis in the Making: The Menopause Collective.” These Peace and Power components draw on Kathleen’s ideas, as well as the ideas and experience of the Friendship Collective, who worked extensively to develop principles of solidarity.
WHAT ARE OUR PURPOSES?

Defining who your group is provides a start in identifying the group’s purposes. However, your purposes in being together as a group give everyone a more specific understanding of what you are all about. For example, a women’s center group may have the immediate purpose of establishing a center and finding a space for the center, but then they need to identify the purposes for which that space will exist and how it will be used. If one purpose is to provide shelter for battered women, there are additional concerns to be addressed in relation to this purpose, such as whether to offer counseling or economic, legal, or educational services.

Consider your group’s purposes in light of what is realistic. The members of a battered women’s support group may want to see the group offer a full range of services to women and their children. However, the resources of the group may be such that the initial purpose needs to be limited to fundraising and educational work. Being clear at the outset about the limits of the group’s purpose can help your group use your resources and energies in productive ways, rather than in working at cross-purposes.

WHAT ARE OUR SHARED BELIEFS AND VALUES?

Values are fundamental to Peace and Power processes; stating your specific group values is important in helping each member of the group grow in understanding the meaning of these values. Having the beliefs and values stated provides a way for the group to examine how the values create changes in actions and group interactions.

If you begin to discuss beliefs and values and find that you have some big disagreements, set those beliefs aside for the moment. As you continue your discussion, you may find that you have so much in common that those beliefs you set aside are not things you need to agree on in order to maintain your group. Instead, these may be things that you will learn to appreciate about one another. Consider a group that comes together to establish a monthly talent showcase. Some members of the group say that they do not want to showcase rap music, but others believe that all forms of music need to be included. As they continue discussing the issue, they realize that the value that they all agree on is that they do not want music that demeans or belittles anyone, especially women; rap music itself is not the problem. The group decides to include a principle that makes clear their value about the messages contained in any art form related to respect for all people.

WHAT INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES DO WE NEED TO CONSIDER?

Some values that are not shared by everyone can affect your group in important ways and need to be acknowledged and respected by everyone. Different circumstances create different expectations and commitments. Different personal circumstances and experiences also influence what individuals need from a group to feel safe to speak, to act, and to be.
Some people in your group may need careful limits on time and other personal resources. Women who have been verbally abused may need an agreement from group members that people will be careful about how loudly they speak and take care not to use sarcastic or assaultive voice tones. A person in a wheelchair not only needs space that is accessible, but also needs the group’s awareness of the particular fears and challenges faced by someone in a wheelchair. A large person may not need specific physical arrangements, but needs the group’s awareness of the discriminations she experiences and how the group can overcome these.

Any person who is a minority within a group, whether based on race, age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, social class, or education, needs recognition and valuing of these differences. Once the group has openly explored the range of personal circumstances of each person’s life related to the group’s work, then the group can agree on a common set of expectations that everyone values.

WHAT DO WE EXPECT OF ONE ANOTHER?

Time, energy, and commitment expectations can take many different forms. For example, group members might be expected to attend a monthly meeting and contribute to the work of a task group that meets for about 3 hours each week. For another group, members might be expected to attend a yearly meeting and work on one project during the year.

Large groups that do not meet together but join in a network to promote communication might simply expect that every member contribute financially to the network, with the work of specific tasks done by smaller groups as they volunteer to assume a specific responsibility. Online groups might expect everyone to post check-in and closing messages every week, or whenever someone in the group calls for check-in or closing messages (see Chapters 6 and 9).

Bring to conscious awareness ways in which you expect each member to interact within the group. You have probably entered groups with an unspoken ideal or hope that everyone will be “open and honest.” In reality, most typical groups have agendas that are hidden from some members, and members’ ways of working together are not well understood by everyone. Making your group’s expectations of one another clear is one step in the direction of nurturing openness and honesty.

WHAT MESSAGE DO WE WISH TO CONVEY TO OTHERS?

Every group conveys a message to the rest of the world about who they are and what they are all about. Sometimes the message matches what the group intends to convey; other times the message is entirely different from what they intend. A group using Peace and Power forms their message with careful and deliberate intent and constantly examines the ways in which they are conveying that message.

For example, a group that exists to develop services for battered women may decide to form
a message that emphasizes women as physically strong, powerful, and resourceful. Another component of that message might be that women help other women, providing support and assistance in a variety of ways. These two messages become central in considering ways in which members of the group interact outside the group. These messages would grow out of the beliefs the group has about women in general, and also beliefs about women who are battered.

**HOW WILL WE PROTECT OUR GROUP’S INTEGRITY?**

Groups often encounter demands for time and attention from outside the group, particularly when their work creates social change. These demands may place unrealistic burdens on the group, and they may not always be consistent with the direction that the group wishes to take.

Conscious awareness and anticipation of these possibilities help a group to develop agreements that can guide responses to outside demands. For example, a group that has been successful at fundraising might be asked to share their experience and knowledge with another new group in the community. If this happens once, it would not be a burden. But if it happens often, the group’s energy could be drained responding to these requests.

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Demands that the group did not anticipate, but that the group must accommodate to accomplish their purpose, are especially difficult. Consider a group that is involved in establishing a community theater for children. The group finds an ideal building that they can use for a fee that they can afford. However, as they are getting started they find out that there are major requirements from the town related to fire and safety regulations that have to be met for each of their events. In order to meet these requirements, they must fill out several long forms, file the forms in the town hall, and wait at least 2 weeks for approval before they can actually plan a show. The group decides to figure out a way to meet these demands without distracting from their main purpose of providing an educational and cultural opportunity for children in the community.

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CHAPTER 6

Peace and Power Processes

When you shift to the ways of Peace and Power, you experience values in action:

- Every idea and every opinion is on the table.
- Everyone knows what is going on; if they do not, they have a chance to find out.
- All points of view are respected and given due consideration.
- How you do things is just as important as what you do.
- Leadership rotates and is shared according to who is willing and able.
- Everyone has a chance to learn new skills.
- Responsibility for what happens in the group is shared equally by every member.

What Is Different About Peace and Power Groups Compared to Traditional Groups?

When your group uses Peace and Power to its fullest extent, you do not have a structure of elected officers in the same way that many groups do. Instead, leaders emerge based on the needs of the group at any one time, and needs and leaders can shift at any time.

For example, group meetings are led by a convener, and the responsibility to convene a meeting shifts in a rotation that is agreed upon by the group. The more the group values everyone learning to be a leader, the more often they will rotate convening to make sure that every member of the group gains this important skill (see Chapter 7).

When a task requires specific knowledge, people in the group who have the knowledge or experience to do the task assume responsibility for it initially, but they gradually orient others to the task so that others can learn and assume the responsibility. For example, one or two members with experience in managing finances may perform financial management for the group initially, but they engage others with their work who do not yet know how to do this task, and gradually pass along this responsibility.

When your group needs to make a decision, you can take “straw votes” to get a sense of the whole, but your decisions are made using a process of value-based decision making (see Chapter 8). This is similar to what is commonly understood as “consensus,” but differs dramatically in that rather than getting everyone to agree, you make sure that everyone appreciates why one option is better than others. And most important, this process ensures that everyone is able to fully support the decision of the group even if it is not their personal preference.

When your group faces conflict, you work with the conflict in very different ways—ways that promote growth and learning (see Chapters 9 and 10). Everyone learns ways to deal with
difficult issues up front and how to prevent misunderstandings before they happen. When misunderstanding and conflict does occur, you learn ways to address the issues openly, then give one another time and space to consider all points of view, and finally arrive at a place of better understanding.

What Happens in a “Peace and Power” Meeting?

This chapter provides an overview of how face-to-face gatherings or online interactions are ideally conducted using Peace and Power processes. Chapters 7, 8, and 9 describe the major (more difficult) processes in more detail. Your group can form any number of ways to approach gatherings and online interactions, and can even use some of the traditional ways of conducting your business. Your most important concern is finding ways to work together so that how you interact and how you treat one another expresses your shared values and intentions.

The processes described in this chapter are well-suited to groups of 6 to 40 participants (face-to-face or online). Smaller groups tend to work in less formal ways than those described here. Larger groups need to adapt these processes, using smaller break-out sessions for some parts of the process, combined with large-group discussions and reports from smaller groups.

Four basic things happen in a Peace and Power meeting. They are:

- Check-in (described later in this chapter)
- Rotating chair (Chapter 7)
- Value-based decision-building (Chapter 8)
- Closing (Chapter 9)

Face-to-face groups sit in a circle so that everyone has eye contact. Usually one individual, the convener, prepares an agenda that provides structure for the group. This responsibility rotates among group members at regular times, such as every gathering or every month.

The convener opens a gathering or online discussion by beginning check-in, when each person becomes fully present in mind, body, and spirit. Check-in is a time for each individual to focus awareness on the purposes of the gathering, to share with the group any circumstances that might influence participation in the process, and to bring to the group intentions, expectations, or hopes for the time together.

Following check-in, the convener draws attention to the agenda and begins the process of rotating chair (see Chapter 7). In face-to-face gatherings, whoever is speaking is the chair. The primary purpose of rotating chair is to promote every viewpoint being heard, with each person’s unique contribution being valued and necessary.

Group decisions are reached using value-based decision-building processes (see Chapter 8). Value-based decision-building focuses on reaching a conclusion that is consistent with the group’s principles of solidarity and that takes into account all viewpoints and possibilities.
Value-based decision-building focuses on what each individual and the group as a whole gains by the nature of the decision the group reaches.

The final component is closing, which is a deliberate process to end a gathering or online discussion and at the same time begin movement toward the next stage of the group’s process (see Chapter 9). During closing, each person shares appreciation for something that has happened during the process of the gathering, a critical reflection leading toward growth and change, and an affirmation that expresses a personal commitment for moving into the future.

**Checking In**

Check-in is a brief (15 seconds or less) verbal statement by each individual that brings everyone together. For online groups, each person’s check-in message should be about 100 words or fewer. The time for online check-in typically happens when the group begins a new discussion. Check-in ensures that everyone’s concerns are considered fully by everyone in the group. At the end of check-in, everyone knows what needs to be on the agenda before the discussion starts, what the priorities are for the group and for individuals, and what the overall focus of a face-to-face meeting needs to be. For online groups, check-in usually addresses a time period when a specific topic or purpose is under consideration.

Each person’s check-in begins by calling (or typing) your name as a symbolic gesture of placing your Self into the circle, fully present in mind, body, and spirit. Then include at least one of the following:

- Share circumstances or events that are likely to influence your participation during the discussions.
- Reflect briefly on what you integrated or gained from the last gathering.
- State what you want on the agenda, and what you are prepared to contribute to the discussion.

In online groups, check-in can happen at any time from anyone, but from time to time the group might want to have everyone check in so that the entire group knows who is really present for the group, and how each individual in the group is doing. In virtual groups, it is very easy to lurk. This may not be a problem for a group that is not focused on a task, but in a group that has a task or a specific focus, lurking is not helpful and plants seeds of distrust. Checking in from time to time brings about a much better level of trust among everyone in the group and compensates for the difficulty of getting to know one another online. Checking in online can be more detailed than it is in a face-to-face group because there are no time constraints online and a lengthy check-in will not prevent others from speaking. However, be aware that everyone in the group will have to read your check-in message, and if it is unduly long and tedious, your readers just might check out!

For face-to-face groups, time is extremely valuable. Although it is important for everyone to
speak and express their intentions, everyone needs to keep in mind that the group has other things to discuss or do besides checking in! Prepare in advance what you want to share during check-in, and be very focused—and brief!

**HOW TO PREPARE FOR CHECK-IN: KNOWING WHAT TO SHARE**

If you are joining an established group, check-in might feel intimidating at first. A lifetime of hierarchical group processes creates doubts about speaking openly in a group. Until you feel comfortable in a group you may only wish to share who you are and your purpose for being present.

One purpose for checking in is to address your own ability or limits in participating during the gathering. If you are not sure how fully present you are able to be, you might say, “I am distracted tonight, but I want to hear the discussion and participate as much as possible.” You may choose to provide some details that will facilitate the group’s understanding, such as, “My dog got out of the yard today and I have not found her. I do have friends searching, and it is important to me to be here and help plan the opening of the Center. I will leave at some point to call home and check on things, but I want to stay present as much as I can.”

Or online: “I will be moving to a new apartment over the next week, and may not be able to be online as regularly as I would like. I will drop in as much as I can to check messages, and will let the group know when I am online. I am very concerned about keeping up with the information that the publicity group will be posting, so I will make sure and check on that when I can be here. I will let you all know when I have everything set up to be back online regularly as well.”

It is important to say something about what you expect or need at this time. If the group knows about circumstances that are influencing your ability to attend to the work of the group, the group can respond in a supportive and caring way. If something is bothering you, say something about it during check-in. Do not dwell on what is bothering you, but let the group know if this is something you just want everyone to know about, or if you would like to have some discussion or other action from the group.

Although every individual’s check-in differs in extent and detail, it is vital for everyone to share their intention for each gathering. Silence or online absence during check-in leaves others wondering what you are thinking and leaves room for doubts about your intentions. Silence at this time interferes with creating solidarity within the group.

**RESPONDING TO CHECK-IN**

Check-in does not occur in a vacuum. The group briefly focuses energy, time, and attention on what individuals share. When a person shares exciting good news, let your congratulations and shared joy erupt! When a person is preoccupied with some circumstance that may interfere with her participation (“My dog is lost”), someone in the group may ask, “How can we best
respond right now?” to find out what the person needs from the group. If someone shares a dramatic and important event—such as the death of a friend—the group may wish to suspend the agenda entirely or alter the agenda in some way in order to be fully responsive to the tragedy.

Everyone in the group needs to take care not to let someone’s check-in derail the meeting to a discussion that is not on the agenda. If discussion is needed based on someone’s check-in, the convener (or any other member) can step in and note that this topic will be added to the agenda, so that everyone can check in before any discussion begins.

**Checking OUT**

There are at least two types of check-out. First, if you are not able to participate in an active way, it is wise to check out entirely, either from the current discussion or from the group altogether. Sleeping or reading a book during a gathering does not constitute being present or participating!

Another kind of check-out occurs when you are present and committed to the group, but you have specific limits on your time and energy for this particular gathering or for a time period online. If you will not be able to be online for a while, let the group know when you will be away and when you will return. If you come to a gathering and have to leave before closing, then explain your situation during check-in and give the time frame to which you are committed. As the time nears, request the chair and share any closing comments. Give the group time to attend to your concerns or unfinished business or to make plans for finishing something in which you might be involved.
CHAPTER 7

Rotating Leadership and Responsibility

It may seem much easier, and perhaps more efficient, to just elect someone to lead your group. But our usual practice of electing group leaders, or even designating a single willing volunteer, sets up a dynamic where negative power imbalances can thrive, and where some people are less advantaged in the group than others. Just as important, members of the group may not learn the skills of leadership and do not have the opportunity to fully appreciate what it takes to be a group leader.

Using practices that rotate leadership and responsibility reverses the familiar and long-accepted customs of hierarchical structures: a linear chain of command, where a single individual or an elite few manages the group and assumes leadership and control.

Rotating leadership and responsibility turns over to each member of the group the rights and responsibilities for leadership, tasks, and decisions. It also opens the door for members to step back from leadership as needed, knowing that others in the group are able to assume this responsibility while they take some time off.

The leader at any one time is called a convener. When someone is responsible for leading a discussion, they can design a “SOPHIA” to inspire the discussion. Discussions take an orderly path using a process of “rotating chair,” instead of relying on just one person to keep order. Then there are the more subtle ways of conducting the group’s interactions—ways that create a culture of sharing and cooperation—that the remainder of this chapter describes.

The Convener

The one individual who comes to a gathering or who assumes leadership online with a specifically defined role is the convener. This role rotates so that each person in the group develops leadership skills. How often this role rotates depends on what the group needs, but the guiding principle needs to be “as often as possible.” Here are typical convener responsibilities:

- Make sure the group knows when agreed-on time limits are near.
- Remain mindful of requests made by individuals for shifts in the agenda, tasks, or processes, and make sure these are integrated.
- Help group members be aware of alternative possibilities throughout the discussion, such as minority viewpoints that have not received full attention, hearing from people who have not spoken to an issue, or choices that have not been considered by the group.
• Suggest group processes that can move the group along, such as calling for “circling” or “sparking.”
• Remain attentive to possibilities for decision-building, and provide leadership for the group to do so.
• When it is time to end, shift the focus of the discussion to closing so that the group devotes the time they agreed upon for this part of the process.

In advance of a gathering, or a period of time approaching for online discussion, the convener can consider the following preparations:

• Review notes from the last gathering or from recent online archives.
  ○ Are there items from other gatherings or in the archives that need to be addressed or items that the group decided to carry over for discussion?
  ○ Does the group need any new resources or information related to issues brought forward?
  ○ Has anything happened that will affect the decisions made in the past?
• Review group process.
  ○ What individual concerns or needs have people expressed that should be considered in planning for this gathering or time frame?
  ○ What group issues have people identified that need to be considered?
  ○ What strengths does the group possess that need to be sustained and supported?
• Plan the agenda.
  ○ What announcements need to be shared?
  ○ Are there special time considerations or individual needs to be taken into account?
  ○ What new items need to be introduced?
  ○ What specific tasks or responsibilities need to be completed before the gathering or before beginning the online discussion?

At the beginning of the gathering or online discussion, the convener gets things going by starting the process of check-in. Next, the convener confirms with the group that all items are included on the agenda.

In face-to-face groups, the agenda can be written on a chalkboard or large sheet of paper (shelf liner or freezer wrap will do!) and posted before the time the gathering is scheduled to begin. The convener also identifies announce- ments or items that need to be mentioned without discussion and presents these just after check-in. In online groups, the convener posts the agenda in a message and calls for others to contribute to building the agenda.

During discussion, the convener actively attends to the process. For example, when the convener notices that some people have not had an opportunity to speak in a face-to-face gathering, she might request a circling process (see Chapter 7) to give everyone a chance to speak. Or, when she senses that all viewpoints have been heard, she begins the process of
value-based decision-building (see Chapter 8).

Other members of the group can assume leadership roles at any time, but the convener remains particularly attentive to group movement. This does not mean that the convener behaves like the traditional “Chairman of the Bored”—calling time limits, reminding people to use rotating chair, or calling on people to speak. Once the discussion begins, the convener participates in the discussion using the process of rotating chair, just as any other member of the group.

For groups that meet online, how you adapt the role of convener and the process for checking in depends on the kind of virtual structure you have (or do not have) for your interactions. An email or discussion board group that is formed to accomplish a task can benefit from forming a structure that includes a time frame within which they want to complete their task, identifying the individuals who are responsible for different tasks necessary for completing the work, and an agreed-upon approach to discussing issues as they arise in the group.

The online convener might be anyone who takes the lead on a certain discussion topic, with several conveners going at the same time on different topics. If an issue comes up that is controversial or difficult, one or more members of the group can post a SOPHIA to help focus the group’s attention on ideas and possibilities related to the issue.

SOPHIA

Speak
Out
Play
Havoc
Imagine
Alternatives

A SOPHIA is a 5- to 10-minute “essay” (about 500 to 700 written words) that comes from your own inner wisdom. Sophia is a Greek word for female wisdom; Sophia was wisdom in ancient western theologies. In groups where discussion is a primary focus, a SOPHIA can be prepared by the convener or another group member in advance, and presented after check-in and after the group has agreed to the agenda.

A SOPHIA is intended to focus the group’s attention on the topic of discussion. A SOPHIA is particularly useful in a class, a book discussion group, when a group is facing an important decision, or when a group is in a muddle about principles of solidarity. If the group has reviewed documents or shared readings in advance of the discussion, the SOPHIA draws on those readings, but brings the perspective of the speaker to interpret possible meanings of the readings.
for individuals and the group

An important purpose of a SOPHIA is to raise questions for all to consider. The questions are also called subjectives (not traditional objectives). Subjectives are critical questions that arise from varying perspectives on the issue under consideration. There are no answers to subjectives; rather, there are many possible responses, all of which will be respectfully considered in the discussion. The SOPHIA, and the subjectives that it contains, offers to the group many possibilities to consider.

**Discussion: Rotating Chair Processes**

**Key features of Rotating Chair:**

- The agenda is built and affirmed by everyone during check-in.
- The convener facilitates announcements, focuses the discussion, and provides leadership for the process.
- Whoever is speaking is the “Chair.”
- Everyone in the group listens actively to the person speaking, and does not interrupt.

The chair is passed to someone who indicates a desire to speak, has not spoken already, or has not spoken recently (not the first raised hand). Following check-in, the convener focuses on any announcements. The group then reviews the agenda and identifies any items that need to be included that are not on the agenda, or reorders the agenda based on what people shared during check-in. If anyone has a brief item that simply consists of sharing information, this is a good time to mention that item. The group may set time limits and priorities on the agenda items.

In discussion groups, the convener (or someone in the group) then shares a SOPHIA that has been prepared in advance. The subjectives (questions) at the end of a SOPHIA often spark discussion. In task-oriented groups, the convener focuses the group’s attention on the first item of business. Then, in face-to-face groups, the chair rotates to whomever wishes to speak, and discussion begins. The chair continues to rotate to members of the group who wish to speak.

Once the discussion begins, you express your desire to speak by raising your hand (or another signal the group creates). The person who is speaking (not the convener) is responsible for passing the chair to the next speaker. You pass the chair by calling the name of the person you are recognizing. If more than one person wants to speak, pass the chair to the person who has not spoken or who has not spoken recently— not the person who first raised a hand.

Passing the chair by calling a person’s name is an important tool for a large group to help everyone learn everyone’s name. In any sized group, it is a symbolic gesture that signifies honoring each individual’s identity and respecting the presence of each person. Calling the next speaker’s name is a clear signal that you have finished speaking, and that you are indeed passing the chair along.
You are not obligated to pass the chair to someone else until you have finished the ideas and thoughts you wish to share. At the same time, you have the responsibility to make way for all who are present to speak to each issue. Avoid making long, repetitive, or unrelated comments that prevent access to the chair for other people. If you tend to ramble and notice that others are not having time to speak, organize your thoughts and ideas in a journal and practice speaking more briefly in conversations outside the group. Then ask the group to give you specific feedback about how you are doing.

During the discussion, make notes of your own thoughts and ideas about what others are saying. Listen carefully to people who are speaking, allowing them time to complete their thoughts before you indicate your desire to speak. Frantically waving your hand in eagerness to share your thought is just as distracting and disrespectful as verbally interrupting.

At first, raising your hand can feel as if you have gone back to kindergarten. The benefits, however, soon become apparent. You can be confident that you will have a chance to speak, that you can complete your thoughts without interruption, and that someone with a louder voice will not intimidate you. Each person who wants to speak is assured of being able to do so. If you have a soft voice, you know that you don’t have to shout to get attention. If you are unaccustomed to speaking in a group, you are assured of having encouragement and the time to practice those skills. If you speak slowly or often pause to gather your thoughts, you are assured that nobody is going to jump in and grab the attention of the group before you complete what you have to say. If you are someone who tends to dominate a discussion by being either long-winded or loud, you begin to learn the value of not speaking so much or so loudly, and of hearing what others have to say.

Active Listening

Active listening is a vital part of the process of rotating responsibility. In a face-to-face group, active listening means being fully tuned in to a speaker and verbally confirming your perception of what you heard. It requires deliberate awareness of how you perceive what other people say.

When you are ready to confirm what you heard, request the chair and paraphrase in your own words what you understood. The speaker can affirm your perception or clarify any misunderstanding. Other people in the group can also contribute to helping everyone become clear about the intended message.

In online interactions, use the same practice of confirming what you read in someone’s message. Share in your own words what you understand, and ask others in the group to help clarify.
Discussion in Online Groups

Online groups have a distinct advantage in making it possible for everyone to express their thoughts and ideas; however, this can result in an overwhelming amount of e-mail or discussion board messages. Just as people vary in their comfort and ability to speak in a group, people have varying degrees of comfort and ability to communicate online. Some people send very brief, to-the-point messages; others prepare book chapters.

In an online group, every participant can compose messages that are short or long, with no limits. However, long and drawn-out messages in an online group are disruptive and annoying; they are difficult to wade through, and discourage others from focusing on other aspects of an online discussion. Group members may tolerate an occasional long message, but if you routinely post long complex messages, others will eventually barely scan what you have to say, or simply tune you out.

Very short messages leave people thinking that something is missing, or give the impression that you are not putting your energy and attention into the group. Give reasonably detailed information or content to your messages so that people know what you are all about.

Online discussions have the risk of overloading your inbox with scattered messages that wander through many avenues and sideline ideas. You can help avoid this for the whole group in several ways. As you read the messages that others in the group have posted, keep running notes to use when you form a response. Rather than responding to every message individually, you can form a single message that addresses several of your thoughts and ideas related to the discussion, and avoid repeating yourself, which can happen easily if you respond individually to every message. In your response, use people’s names to identify a specific response to a message posted by that person.

Keep a notebook, or set up a folder on your computer, for your personal memos as you think about the discussion. When you read something that is important to the discussion, make a note of it or file it where you will be prompted to return to it. Or, you might have an idea that you want to contribute to the group. Compose a single message that summarizes ideas that have come to you over a period of a day or more.

Consider having someone set up a blog or a discussion forum online so that all the messages that relate to a certain topic get clustered together. These kinds of tools may not be necessary for a temporary group or a very informal group that exists just for socialization. But if your group has a focus and purpose that requires active participation over time, you will benefit from setting up a more advanced forum for discussion.
Passing It Along: Notes and Minutes

Everyone who participates in a group, either face-to-face or online, takes personal notes. These notes facilitate the process of rotating chair. They are not a record of the discussion and are not generally shared with the group. They are used as a personal tool to remain in touch with thoughts you have while you are paying attention to what others have to say. Your notes:

- Provide a log of thoughts and feelings you have during discussion, without interrupting the group process at the time you think of it.
- Form a personal journal that you can refer to when you are closing, or if an issue becomes a source of conflict.
- Remind you of things you agree to do or accomplish for the group.
- Help you focus on things to include in your closing.

For task-oriented groups, at least one individual can assume the responsibility for recording what happens at the time of a gathering in the form of minutes. For gatherings that last longer than about an hour, passing this task along to different individuals in the group is helpful. Other kinds of groups may or may not decide to have group minutes.

Like all traditional groups, some Peace and Power groups keep detailed records of all ideas and comments, including who spoke and a summary of what was said. Other groups keep simple records of who was present at the gathering, the decisions made, and the major factors that contributed to each decision. The group’s needs may even vary from one gathering to the next.

Challenges of Peace and Power

The primary challenge of Peace and Power is to become comfortable with the new ways of doing things. Peace and Power seems simple, but when you try to start using the process, you may find it harder than you expected. If you have the opportunity to join a group that already uses the process, you will learn by example how things work. Entering a group using Peace and Power can feel like you are in a foreign country, and in many ways you are! Things happen very differently than they do “back home”!

If you and everyone in your group is beginning this process with very little introduction to it other than this book, you may find that you grow into it gradually. You will benefit from frequent reflection on how you are doing (see Chapter 9) so that you can gradually shape your practices to be consistent with the values you have chosen.

The following sections describe some of the typical challenges that all groups face when they use Peace and Power consistently, and give some ideas for how to move forward in meeting these challenges.
Getting Things Done

Because the process itself is so important in Peace and Power groups, sometimes it seems like things will never move along! And if you have tasks to accomplish, you may wonder when you will ever get to the actual tasks of getting things done. One of the challenges that is especially hard for new Peace and Power groups is to find ways to include everyone in the process. In traditional groups, this indeed would bring everything to a halt. In Peace and Power groups, it actually helps things move along because everyone benefits from being fully aware of what is happening, improves their skills and talents that contribute to the group, and feels the genuine support and connection that the group shares with one another.

The value of including everyone does not mean that every individual has to be present and involved at all times. This, of course, is unrealistic. So over time, your group develops ways to make sure everyone knows what is happening, has a way to let the group know their ideas and feelings, and is able to contribute in any decision-building process.

Groups that are formed to accomplish a task need to establish guidelines and timelines for their work. If your group uses an online social media service that provides Web page capability, notes, minutes, membership lists, photos, and documents related to your work can be posted on the Web site. Accessibility to information online is wonderful for groups using Peace and Power; it ties into the powers of sharing, distribution, nurturing, and many others.

You can develop task groups for specific or ongoing work. Task groups not only help you get things done, but also facilitate the process of helping people learn new skills. A task group usually gets involved in doing intensive work that requires special skills and knowledge. Learning a skill is done by participating in the work, not by simply hearing about the results of the work. Hearing or reading a finance task group’s report, no matter how detailed, does not help anyone learn how to balance the books!

Task groups that are most effective in getting the job done and in passing along skills are those that have a balance of people who are experienced at the task and those who are learning. This requires a gradual shift over time in who is involved with any task group so that the work and responsibility rotate.

The Tyrannies Of Silence And Repetition

Interacting as a group is difficult, if not impossible, if some people in the group consistently do not speak up and share what they are thinking. When you do not express your viewpoint, your silence deprives the group of the benefit of your ideas. Silence, or online absence, also leaves people wondering what you are really thinking, or even worse, making assumptions about your thoughts and opinions.

Remember: this process does not function on the notions of majority and minority. Even if you are the only one who holds an opinion, the group is committed to the value of taking your
ideas and thoughts seriously. The group considers every viewpoint, regardless of how many or how few hold that view- point. Even more important, Peace and Power processes are based on valuing each individual, and others can only know what you uniquely offer to the group when you share your opinions, thoughts, and ideas.

At the same time, it is not necessary for every individual to address every issue. If someone has already expressed your viewpoint, you need not repeat what someone else has already said, although it is often important that you indicate to the group that you agree with that person. If you agree but have a different thought or concern to add, you need to share your additional thought so that it can be considered in the discussion.

**Shifting To “Every-logue”**

When two people are together, dialogue is highly desirable. It is important for both people to contribute to the discussion; otherwise, it is not a discussion. In a group larger than two, the same principle holds: everyone needs to contribute to the discussion. Otherwise, it is not a discussion.

However, in a group of more than two people, dialogue is like a monologue in a twosome—one or two people dominate the discussion so that other voices are not heard. Any form of domination in a group discussion models power- over tactics of traditional groups. Monologue in a twosome or dialogue in a group alienates others, promotes argument and debate between and among individuals, and prevents other viewpoints from being heard. Rotating chair is designed to facilitate “every-logue,” ensuring that every person speaks, with a sufficient balance of attention devoted to every point of view.

When two people become engaged in energetic opposition to one another’s ideas (face-to-face or online), it is especially important for other voices to come forward. Conflict can be fruitful and desirable (see Chapter 10), but when two individuals in conflict get caught up in the conflict itself, others in the group cannot participate in the discussion in a constructive way. As other people speak, the group can define what the issue really is. Also, the two people who are in conflict have an opportunity to stop speaking, and to reflect on their own positions, consider the thoughts and feelings of other group members, and decide if their thoughts and feelings are helping or hindering group process.

When you notice that two people are engaging in dialogue to the exclusion of others, request the chair or post a message. Share your observation of what is happening and convey your perspective on the issue. Then invite others to speak as well. Almost always, when other people speak, everyone gains insight and clarity about the issue, and many creative possibilities begin to emerge.

Sometimes one or two individuals have specific information about a certain issue. Directing a question to an individual and engaging in information exchange is different from exclusive
dialogue. Information exchange is simply that—information exchange. The pitfall to watch for is when a group consistently defers to one or two individuals as the “knowledgeable ones.” This is a signal that sharing of information and skills is not happening, and the group needs to give attention to providing the opportunity for everyone to share points of view or information.

VARIATIONS ON DISCUSSION

Rotating leadership and responsibility can be done in many different ways, and you will create ways not included here. The idea is to find ways that are effective in expressing the values and intents of Peace and Power (see the value-based actions at the beginning of Chapter 6). Variations are often needed when the group is small (fewer than 6) or large (more than about 40). Small groups tend to be less formal, and often rely on “dinner-table” styles of discussion. When this happens, everyone gets to speak, but the discussion may wander. In large groups, some people may not have the opportunity to speak, and shy people may find it very difficult to speak. Here are some methods for promoting discussion that are consistent with Peace and Power processes.

SPARKING

In face-to-face groups, when an issue or a topic generates a great deal of excitement in the group, the discussion often moves naturally into a style that reflects the high energy of excitement. Many individuals begin to speak, sometimes at once, often spouting words and ideas into the air like a fountain. In an online group, you suddenly see a surge of message posts on the same topic. This type of discussion is referred to as sparking. When it begins to happen naturally, it should be allowed to continue as long as the discussion is giving the group new ideas and energy to move forward. When some individuals begin to lose interest, however, or the ideas are beginning to be repetitive, it is time for the convener or another group member to assume leadership, asking the group to cease sparking and return to the more focused style of rotating chair or online discussion. You can bring an idea or topic to the group that needs sparking. Ask the group to enter this style of discussion for a specific time, or plan to include sparking around the idea in the future.

Sparking is a valuable process for creating ideas and energy, but it does not work well to help everyone participate equally or to be heard. When you use it, do so with deliberate intent, and make sure everyone in the group is aware that this is what is going on. When it is time to cease, you can use circling to transition back to rotating chair and less intense discussion.

CIRCLING

Circling in a face-to-face group is what happens when the group suspends discussion and rotation of the chair, inviting everyone in the group to take a turn in speaking to an issue. People listen to one another in turn. Nobody responds to or discusses any comment or idea until everyone has spoken. If you have questions or want clarification, make a note to yourself so you
can seek clarification after everyone has spoken. Although it is often the convener, any group member who perceives that the group needs to focus and clarify may request the group to circle. Whoever calls for a circle then shares an idea of what the focus of the circle needs to be.

The process of circling is easily accomplished online. When someone in the group asks everyone in the group to speak to an issue or an idea, it is very important not to simply lurk and remain electronically silent. Your virtual presence in an online group is as important as your presence in a face-to-face group, perhaps even more so. The level of trust that an online group develops depends on everyone showing up online. You are known by the contributions you make to the online processes, and it is your responsibility to convey to others in the group what you are thinking and feeling, and to interact with the group process in ways that express your intentions with the group.

During circling, everyone speaks or writes very briefly, with comments limited to the focus for which circling has been requested. This provides a connection with all of the points of view at that particular time. It also provides time for individuals to clarify their ideas in their own minds before speaking. Even if you have nothing specific to contribute at this time, it is important for you to contribute during circling. You might simply say: “I am not clear about this issue and need more time.”

When the discussion seems to be nearing time to consider building a decision, but this is not yet clear, someone can request a circle to simply find out if people feel ready to move toward closure on the issue. At the end of sparking circling can be a time for everyone to share which of the ideas expressed “sparked” the most.

Circling is especially helpful when tensions are running high, with two or three individuals at the center of the struggle. You can use circling to interrupt exclusive dialogue that often begins during times of tension. Circling gives every individual in the group the responsibility and the opportunity to speak, to share insights of the moment, or to express feelings that may not already be apparent. Circling provides the opportunity for people at the center of a struggle to pay close attention to what others have to offer, and time to do some inner work with respect to the struggle.

TIME SIGNAL

Despite the best of intentions, individuals sometimes do get carried away. In face-to-face groups, if a group is having difficulty with extended mini-speeches that interfere with everyone having the opportunity to speak, they can agree to use a time signal to help speakers remember to bring their comments to a close so that others can speak. A time signal can be a simple “T” formed with the hands. In online groups, messages that are as long as book chapters consume everyone else’s reading time. The group can agree on a virtual time signal to remind everyone to keep their posts within reason.
A conscious decision to use a time signal avoids the slip into unconscious patterns of interacting in face-to-face groups. Out-shouting, long tirades, or other verbal forms of domination are common power-over habits that many well-intentioned people have cultivated.

When a group is using rotating chair, a common unconscious habit used to try to interrupt long-winded speakers is hand-waving to ask for the chair while the speaker is still speaking. Not only is hand-waving disrespectful of the speaker, it is disruptive to the process and to the group, and places the responsibility for monitoring another speaker on those who are eager to speak.

When a group recognizes that long-winded speeches or excessively long posts are interfering with their process, then a consciously chosen signal is a respectful way to begin to shift patterns of response to others in the group. The time signal does interrupt the speaker, but it has several features that are different from the power-over verbal interruptions or distracting hand-waving. It is a signal that is preferably agreed on by the group because the group shares a desire to equalize access to discussion. The signal itself is quiet: It does not unnecessarily escalate emotions in the group with loud sound or frantic movement. Importantly, it is a signal that simply reminds the speaker of an agreed-on responsibility to respect others in the group and give way for others to speak.

The person who gives the time signal is not trying to overtake the speaker by asking to speak. The time signal is not a request for the chair; it is simply a reminder to the speaker that it is time to stop talking and give others the opportunity to speak. If no one shows a desire to speak, it is still beneficial for the group to remain silent for a few moments so that everyone can recover from the concentration given to the previous speaker and think about the direction they wish the discussion to take.

If you are the one who is given a time signal, you have several benefits: You have an opportunity to reassess the direction your lengthy comments were taking and refocus on the group as a whole. If you have become somewhat strident, you can take time to calm down.

**CALMING THE AIR**

Another hand motion that you can use in face-to-face groups is a calming motion, sometimes using both hands, palm down, moving in a slow, circular motion, as if you were petting a cat. This motion is very helpful for groups that tend to work with a high level of anxiety and stress, or that tend to erupt into unproductive sparking types of discussion. Frequent eruptions with everyone talking at once signal that anxiety and stress are running amok. A group can benefit from recognizing this pattern in their interactions and deliberately choosing to take steps to change what happens.

The calming-the-air motion reminds the group of their commitment to end interactions that feed unproductive anxieties, choosing instead those interactions that help everyone remain focused and calm. When someone calms the air, the group ceases what is happening, takes a
deep breath together, and remains still while they gather their thoughts and feelings to address what is going on.

In online groups, a calming signal can be agreed upon by the group. The message can be one or two simple words: “Everyone breathe!” When this message is posted, no further explanation is needed. The group understands that this is a call to remain silent for a few hours, and to resume posts in a spirit of returning to a focus on the group as a whole.

RANDOM RAVINGS

Sometimes people think of loose ends that were not completely finished during a discussion, or the group leaves a piece of business hanging for lack of clarity on the matter. At some point during a face-to-face gathering, usually toward the end, loose ends tend to become more obvious. It is helpful to set aside a few moments for everyone to reflect on any items that may need to be mentioned briefly before the end of the meeting. This time on the agenda is referred to as “random raving.” Online, you can enter the words “random raving” in the subject line of your message.

While you take notes during the gathering, remember that you can address random raving later. You can simply circle any note you want to address later and not interrupt the flow of discussion. When the time for random raving arrives, a quick review of your notes will help you recall these fleeting thoughts. Group members can scan their notes to see if any loose ends might be dangling that now need to be addressed. If a loose end deserves more discussion, the group can agree to place the item on the agenda for the next discussion.

CLUSTERS

Large groups can draw on the processes for Peace and Power, but need to do so using clusters. A large face-to-face gathering can begin with small clusters of participants checking in with one another, followed by each cluster reporting significant information with the large group. For example, if everyone in a cluster is in fine spirits and ready to participate fully in the gathering, then this cluster will simply report this to the group as a whole. If another cluster has a member who is recovering from being sick all week, and who will need to leave early to go to an appointment with the nurse practitioner, this can be shared with the large group. Another cluster might have someone who wants to place a 10-minute presentation on the agenda. Throughout the gathering, the group moves from the whole to clusters and back again.

A large online group can have several clusters, each with its own private e-mail discussion group. Most of the group members’ online attention is within the cluster until the structure of the

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5 Anne Montes of Buffalo, New York, suggested the idea of random raving, and it instantly became a regular part of our gatherings. This is a wonderful example of how the possibilities for Peace and Power processes grow and expand.
larger group calls for their active participation.

When clusters are used, there is a convener of the whole, and there may also be conveners of the clusters, depending on the needs of the smaller groups. Clusters may need to make a written record of some of their discussions, either to recall the specifics of their work for reporting later to the larger group or to contribute to a written record of the work of the whole group. When value-based decisions are required, clusters can be a very effective means of making sure that every perspective is considered carefully, with each cluster taking a particular aspect of the decision as a focus for their discussion.
CHAPTER 8

Peace and Power Decision-Building

Peace and Power Value-Based Decision-Building:

- Ensures the best decisions possible at the time the decision is made.
- Ensures that what you do is consistent with what you value.
- Includes flexible options to address different kinds of decisions.
- Uses disagreement to build understanding.
- Reduces misunderstandings.
- Nurtures collective memory of the group’s actions.
- Brings together different perspectives on a situation, rather than polarizing points of view in opposition to each other.
- Nurtures understanding, insights and wisdom for everyone who participates.

Peace and Power decision-building combines individual preferences (as in voting), hearing all points of view (as in consensus), and brainstorming all possibilities (as in creative problem solving). In addition, Peace and Power decision-building incorporates processes of values clarification, conflict mediation, and critical thinking.

Peace and Power decision-building is always grounded in your group’s purpose, and is built consciously to be consistent with the group’s values—your principles of solidarity. At the same time, decision-building processes contribute to clarifying and revising your group’s purposes and your principles of solidarity.

A common concern when you first consider Peace and Power decision-building is that the process will be time consuming and inefficient. It sometimes does take more time to reach a decision using Peace and Power decision-building. However, groups that shift to this approach almost never have to retrace their decision, nor do they have to spend time later making sure that everyone is on the same page. It is not possible to determine the time and effort saved when everyone understands and supports the decision while you are making the decision. But to take shortcuts in building a decision is a sure setup for wasted time and frustration later. The overall benefits of cohesiveness, acting in accord rather than at cross-purposes, and mutual understanding more than compensate for the time invested in reaching a decision using Peace and Power.
How Is Peace and Power Decision-Building Different from Other Ways to Make Decisions?

The most familiar way of making decisions in groups is voting, with the process more or less conforming to the system of Robert’s Rules of Order. Sometimes groups bypass voting and just ask everyone to reach some form of consensus. Here are some ways that Peace and Power is different, and in some ways actually similar to both voting and consensus.

VOTING

Voting is a valuable democratic tool in large communities or governments. A government that is formed by democratic processes ensures a level of order that is necessary for survival while at the same time providing access for some level of participation to all citizens. But when a group comes together because they share a personal purpose and need to work closely together, voting as a way of making decisions can reinforce a divisive power-over dynamic.

When you use Peace and Power, your group values and carefully considers all opinions, even if only one person brings a particular opinion to the group. Minority opinions are not just overruled as in voting. As each minority perspective is considered, it is integrated as an explicit part of the decision, or as a factor that informs the direction the group takes. The group may often want or need to know how many of its members hold a particular perspective, and so the group may take a straw vote. However, this is for information only, and typically is not the only factor taken into account in building a decision.

CONSENSUS

Consensus decision-making is in some ways like Peace and Power decision-building. However, common understandings of consensus do not consciously ground a decision in the values of the group, which is a key element of the kind of decision-building that is central to Peace and Power processes.

Consensus does attempt to take all perspectives into account, but if this is the only consideration, the group can flounder without a clear understanding of which direction to take among many choices. Peace and Power decision-building overcomes this problem because it focuses your discussion on the values around which your decision is built. When you all agree, for example, that your group values caring for children, then when you make a decision you will eliminate possibilities that make child care difficult.

Consensus also tends to require some compromise, in that each person gives something up in order to reach a group decision. Compromise decision-making is often called consensus decision-making simply because the group is not voting, but instead merely trying to agree. Compromise often leads to a weak and unsatisfactory outcome for the group.
In contrast, when you use Peace and Power decision-building you do not ignore the concerns of those who have reservations about the decision. Instead, you build into the decision a provision that addresses those concerns. The group carefully considers individuals’ wishes, preferences, or desires, and integrates these in light of the group’s shared purposes. Each individual shifts attention to that which the group as a whole sincerely values as a community. When individuals concede their personal preference, it is done with full understanding of and support for the group’s shared purpose and vision. In addition, a Peace and Power decision always acknowledges things that individuals had to “give up,” and builds in a provision to honor those things as the group moves forward. For example, when a group needs to decide on a location for an event, clearly not everyone’s personal preference can be honored for this event. The group settles on the best option for this event, and makes a plan to incorporate other possible locations in the future.

Peace and Power decision-building is not totalitarian group-think. What protects against group-think is the commitment to hear and value all points of view, and to refrain from bringing closure until all possibilities have been addressed fully. The group’s principles of solidarity provide the common focus for examining diverse views, but are a guide, not dogma. A new viewpoint on an issue can challenge the group to re-examine their principles of solidarity, resulting in healthy growth and change.

HOW THE PROCESS WORKS

Peace and Power decision-building includes the following processes that typically unfold in a sequence, but that also can be used in fluid and circular patterns. Here are the components of the process:

- Define the question.
- Identify the Principles of Solidarity that are most central to the question.
- List the benefits you are seeking in reaching this decision.
- Brainstorm as many options as possible.
- Gather the information you need related to the options and compare the options.
- Select the best option, or decide not to decide, or look for other options.

Define The Question

Pose the central question or questions toward which the decision is oriented. For example, “Should we look for another location for our Center?” “What kind of programs should we offer in the coming year?” “Where should we meet?”

Although this seems to be a simple step, it is often overlooked, and groups set about trying to make decisions with many different perspectives concerning what the decision really is about.
Identify Your Key Principles Of Solidarity

Explore which of your principles of solidarity are central to this question. If a group has a principle of solidarity that sets forth a commitment to work within a specific budget, then when they approach the issue of finding a new location, their process of decision-building needs to be guided by this principle. Or, the group may come to realize that they need to stretch the limits of what might be possible beyond the constraints of the budget as they now see it in order to achieve certain goals that they also value highly. If your group has not yet formed principles of solidarity, take time to identify together the values that you all agree are the most important in guiding this decision.

List The Benefits You Seek

Describe the benefits that your group envisions for any decision that arises from this process. These benefits reflect underlying values that your group uses as yardsticks against which to measure the soundness of various options. For example, a group that is contemplating a new location might identify the following benefits they want of any new location: it must be accessible to people who are underserved; it must remain within their budget; and it must provide the kind of space that is required to implement a new program that the group wishes to begin.

In typical decision-making, people who favor a certain decision use benefits that can come from the decision they prefer as a way to convince the group to go along with what they want. When you use Peace and Power, you identify the benefits you want from any decision in advance of considering possible options. Then when you know what the options are, you compare how each one measures in bringing the benefits your group seeks.

Brainstorm The Options

Brainstorm as many different options as possible. At this point, be clear that every possibility is open for discussion. No decision is contemplated or implied in this process. Remain open to all possibilities, even if they seem ludicrous at the time.

Gather Information You Need And Compare The Options

Gather the information you need related to as many of the options as you can. Obtain factual data, consult others in the community, or bring in guests to provide specialized information. Find out what has happened to other groups in similar circumstances.

If at any time the group wants to know how many people prefer one option over others, pause to take a straw vote that gives everyone information about where people stand on the issue at this point in time. Votes are not taken to decide an issue, but rather to inform the deliberation. After the group votes, take the time to have people speak to why they favor one option over
others.

As you reach a point where you have considered many possibilities and you have before you all the information you can gather, begin to weigh the most viable options seriously against the benefits you set forth early in the process. Narrow the possibilities to those options that are most congruent with these benefits.

**Make Your Decision**

If everyone in the group is comfortable with one of the options over all the others, then you have reached a decision! If the decision is a big one, it is probably not that easy. If this is the case, take a deep breath and decide how urgent this decision is. If it is truly not urgent, or if you can make an interim decision, the group leaves the matter open and places it on the agenda for the next gathering.

If the decision is urgent, then your group must focus on the necessity of reaching a decision that everyone can live with for now, and plan for more discussion of the issues involved. Even in this circumstance, the more that the group is able to identify the values upon which the decision is built and select the option that best expresses your values, the more satisfactory the decision will be in the long run.

**CHALLENGES OF PEACE AND POWER DECISION-BUILDING**

The most common initial challenge that groups encounter with this process is the feeling that it takes a long time. Voting on a matter seems to be much more efficient, and it certainly does not take as long to make a decision. As you grow more accustomed to the process you will find that the time involved is worth the investment, and the sense that it is time-consuming begins to fade. Over time you will also build a foundation upon which all of your group’s decisions are based, so that the initial processes of sorting out benefits and values moves along smoothly with very little discussion.

There are challenges that can prove to be real stumbling blocks to the process. If you consider these issues early, you can be prepared to address them as they arise.

**Being Present**

Being physically present face-to-face, or being virtually present online, is ideal when a major decision is involved. However, in a Peace and Power process, it is even more important to develop a sense of everyone’s significance. If all members of the group know that they are significant and that their opinions matter to the group, then the fact of being physically present at every moment becomes less of an issue.

However, it is still ideal if everyone can be present when major decisions are made. One way to enhance “presence” is to combine online interaction with face-to-face discussion. If this is possible, you can ensure that everyone in the group is equally informed and capable of
contributing to the decision.

If you are not able to have everyone involved in reaching a decision, those who are present can reach tentative closure because the group’s principles of solidarity guide the process. Once a tentative decision is made, those who reached that point take steps to inform everyone of the tentative decision and of the values and benefits that underlie that decision. The matter remains tentative until everyone checks in to affirm the decision or offer alternatives. However you approach doing this, you want to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to participate as much as possible in the discussion and in the decision-building process.

Positive Dissent

The right of an individual or small minority to dissent when most other people seem to be in agreement can be a strength that guards against the dangers of totalitarian groupthink. Negative dissent, however, can create a real stumbling block to a process that is intended to strengthen your group. In order to ensure that dissent proceeds as a positive strength in the decision-building process, consider the following specific questions:6

- **Have those who are dissenting fully disclosed their objections, and the underlying concerns, values, and reasons for their objections?** Everyone may need to help in placing words around an individual’s concerns. Sometimes getting clear about exactly what is motivating dissent is not an easy thing to do, especially when you are in the difficult situation of being alone in your opinion. If you are in the majority, you may not agree with those who are dissenting. Take care not to assume that the dissenters have fully disclosed their concerns. Turn your attention to helping to find a way to express and understand their underlying concerns.

- **Have all members of the group fully heard, and do we all appreciate the concerns of those dissenting?** One way to affirm the group’s solidarity in appreciation of the minority view is to ask each person to state the dissent in her or his own way, and reflect to the group what she or he might do if this were her or his own perspective. In other words, have everyone place themselves in the shoes of those who hold the dissenting view. When you strongly disagree with the dissenting point of view, remember that in expressing something you disagree with you are seeking to understand it, not necessarily to agree with it. By remaining sincerely committed to understanding another point of view, you contribute to building a decision that brings people together, rather than puts them at odds with one another.

- **What underlying principle of solidarity or value does this situation bring to light?** The value or principle may not be one that the group has addressed before, and getting clear

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about a new underlying value can have a major influence on what next step the group
takes. If you identify an underlying value that is already part of your group’s principles,
and this situation is challenging that value, this is a signal that the group may be at a
turning point in its growth.

- **What are all the possible decisions that we could make on this issue, taking into
  account this dissenting perspective?** Which of these possible decisions could best reflect
  our group’s purpose and our principles of solidarity? Once you have all the alternatives
clearly identified and once you explicitly match the alternatives with what your group is
really all about, you may be able to reach closure.

If your group considers these questions and they lead to productive discussion, you are
experiencing positive and growth-encouraging dissent. If instead you become more confused and
alienated from one another, then you are likely to be embroiled in a divisive power struggle.
Despite the positive potential of dissent, dissenting individuals hold enormous potential to act in
a divisive power-over manner. If you find yourself in a situation that cannot be resolved, you and
the group have special responsibilities to carefully consider exactly what is happening.

Reaching a point in the decision-building process where positions are polarized is a signal
that the group as a whole needs to step away from the “what” of the discussion and examine
underlying values and commitments. To do this, move to processes for conflict transformation
(Chapter 10). When most people in the group want to settle the matter and get on with things, it
can feel very tedious to shift into a process of conflict transformation. However, when you
consider the typical alternatives—hurt feelings, misunderstandings beyond repair, broken
relationships, the resentment and anger that grow from unresolved disagreement—taking the
time to attend to what is happening in the group is an attractive alternative indeed!
CHAPTER 9

Closing

Closing is a brief time at the end of a meeting or a defined online timeline when each member shares thoughts and feelings about what has happened and what they would like to happen next. Closing brings each individual’s intent and commitment together with the group’s principles of solidarity.

The main purpose of closing is to strengthen the group and each individual. Closing provides an opportunity for everyone to end the time together knowing what is going on for each person in the group, and it helps the group to plan for the future.

Like check-in, closing is only a brief part of the time invested in a group’s process, but it is the most important part of Peace and Power. Until your group gets used to closing and experiences the benefits of closing, it may be hard to take the time and energy needed to do it.

Traditional groups often get caught up in what they are doing and do not set aside time to reflect on what they are doing, how, and why. Closing accomplishes this and more, making it possible to form better understandings among everyone in the group. Closing is not always easy to do and initially can feel risky. During closing, feelings that were simply undercurrents during discussion may be expressed openly, something that is not customary in typical groups. Ironically, feelings of caring and appreciation are also usually not expressed openly in groups. Angry or hurt feelings are especially avoided because they are simply not supposed to be acknowledged openly.

During closing, group members acknowledge their feelings in constructive ways so that everyone in the group can develop a fuller understanding of one another and of the group. When this happens, everyone has the benefit of knowing what is really going on, internally for individuals and within the group. Every time your group practices the skills involved in closing, you are building an important foundation for the skills of conflict transformation (Chapter 10).

Closing a gathering or an online discussion using this process ensures that the group remains open to envisioning and exploring alternatives and uses the experiences of the group to form the future. Use closing to end gatherings, to end a lengthy or intense discussion on a single topic, or to signal a transition in an online discussion from one time frame to another. To have the benefit of closing, everyone who has participated in the gathering or the online discussion needs to speak or post a closing message online.

Once you begin to experience the benefits of closing, your group will become very dedicated to setting aside the time you need for closing. One way to estimate the time you need in a face-to-face group is to plan for each person to have a few seconds to speak during closing.
Or, for a 1-hour meeting, plan about 10 minutes for closing. For a gathering of a day or longer, set aside a half hour or so for closing.

In a face-to-face group, one way to start closing is to take a few minutes for each person to silently reflect on what has happened during the discussion and to review notes about the gathering. In an online group, you can agree in advance that everyone will post a closing message every few days, or weekly. When it is time for closing, each person shares their appreciation, critical reflection, and affirmation.

**Appreciation**

Appreciation acknowledges something that someone did or said, or a positive group interaction. It is a brief but meaningful statement. This is a time to nurture one another actively by sharing your ideas about specific ways in which you and the group benefited from something that happened. For example, if someone’s comment in the discussion was a turning point to help clarify an issue for you, or moved the group discussion to a different level, you might state your appreciation for the comment, and share with the group how or why this comment was so important to you and the group.

Appreciation includes the following elements:

- The names of individuals who are responsible for what it is you appreciate.
- A brief description of their specific acts or behavior.
- Sharing what this means to you as an individual within the group.
- Your ideas about what this means in terms of the group’s purposes or principles of solidarity

**Critical Reflection**

A constructive critical reflection that encourages and supports growth includes these components.

- “I feel . . .” (your own feeling about what has happened)
- “When (or about) . . .” (a specific action, behavior, or circumstance that is the focus of your thinking)
- “I want . . .” (specific changes you want to happen)
- “Because . . .” (how your concern connects with the group’s principles of solidarity)

Critical reflection is careful, precise, thoughtful insight directed toward transformation. It is

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7 This guideline for a four-part criticism is drawn from *Issues in Radical Therapy* in 1976 in a small handbook by Gracie Lyons, *Constructive Criticism: A Handbook*. In 1988, it was republished in a revised edition by Wingbow Press. The revision remains one of the best resources for developing this important skill. The Peace and Power approach to critical reflection draws on Gracie’s practical guidelines. In addition, many of her suggestions are integrated into our approaches for conflict transformation.
a tool for becoming aware of actions and behaviors that maintain an unjust society. It flourishes as a positive group process when everyone understands that your collective intention is to support one another in a constructive way, and when you consistently treat one another respectfully.

When you use critical reflection with commitment to Peace and Power values, you practice a powerful skill to move toward agreement on what will be done and why. Even when you have disagreements and doubts and the going gets rough, critical reflection makes it possible for your group to remain cohesive and to continue to work together.

Being critical in Peace and Power does not mean passing judgment or casting a negative light on someone or something that happens in the group. It does not mean that you are proclaiming a “correct” view. Instead, critical reflection means that you are being thoughtful, careful, and committed to making sure that the group is doing its very best.

Critical reflection is the most important skill involved in Peace and Power, and is at the heart of the process of conflict transformation (Chapter 10). If everyone regularly practices the art of critical reflection during closing, then you will build a strong foundation for dealing with conflict and for bringing disagreements into the open early when they are the most easily addressed. Because critical reflection involves insights that come from deep within, you will find times when you need to prepare ahead of time. Later in the chapter is a section devoted to the “homework” needed to develop the fine art of critical reflection.

Affirmation

The conclusion of the three-step process of closing is a statement of affirmation that gives the group a sense of the ways in which you are working to grow as an individual and as a member of the group.

An affirmation is:

- A positive, simple, “I” statement.
- Stated in the present tense.
- Grounded in your present reality, but also provides a bridge to the future you seek.

Affirmations are simple statements that speak to your deeper self. They concentrate your energy on the healing, growth-supporting aspects of your work with the group. They are powerful tools for creating change and growth in a direction that you desire.8

An affirmation reflects something that is not yet fully a part of your life, but you state it as if it has already happened. For example, at a time when you feel uncertain about a decision, your

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affirmation might be: “I trust my own inner sense and the wisdom of our group.” When a conflict has disturbed you, an affirmation to help transform the conflict might be: “I reside in the care that we have for each other.”

Affirmations offered during closing grow out of your experiences in the group, and often relate to your specific appreciations and critical reflections. Affirmations can also grow out of internal work that you do apart from the group and your experiences in the group. This work involves shifting your attention away from frustrations and problems to possibilities for growth and change. As you reflect on these possibilities, you will begin to form affirmations that provide a message to your inner consciousness that you are receptive to the energy of change moving in a creative, healing direction.

Because your inner consciousness is responsive to repetition, repeat affirmations to yourself, using the same wording again and again, with shifts in the wording as you find what is most comfortable for you. Repeat the affirmations while you are doing rhythmic activities, such as exercising, cleaning, or walking. When you reenter the group, you will bring with you the deep inner resources that you have developed within yourself to participate more effectively in the group.

Initially you may find it difficult to affirm yourself. Until you are comfortable creating your own, use an affirmation that someone else suggests. As your sense of self-affirmation grows, you will create your own. As you become accustomed to using affirmations as a source of directing your energy to create change, you will become skilled at expressing an affirmation during closing that moves you and the group from the circumstances of the present into a future you choose and create.

The Art of Closing: Getting Your Head and Heart Together

Getting ready to participate in closing requires thoughtful reflection so that you are clear about the content of what you want to say before you speak. Once you are clear about the content of your three-part closing statement, you can state it briefly and simply.

People in traditional groups rarely if ever have a chance to share their inner responses with the group when everything is going along smoothly. Therefore, doing so does not come easily or naturally, and practice is important! Even more important is a supportive, aware group that is fully committed to each member learning this and other skills involved in practicing Peace and Power. Personal notes that you have taken throughout a discussion can be very helpful at the time of closing. Productive gatherings are rarely uneventful, and in the intensity of the discussion you are likely to have thoughts and feelings about what happened and how it happened. Perhaps your perspective has shifted now that the discussion has ended. You may have become aware of an insight and are reaching a new understanding as the discussion comes to a close. Your notes provide words and ideas that you write as these things happen so that you will not forget, and
you can review your inner process when it is time to close.

**Responding to Closing**

Once everyone has completed closing, everyone takes ownership for making any responses open and clear, rather than hidden. The most difficult thing to learn about both appreciation and critical reflection is how to accept them! Hearing statements of appreciation or critical reflection is not easy, especially in front of a group, no matter how skillfully they are delivered.

Most often what people share during closing requires no immediate response. If something very emotional or heavy comes up during closing, the most important response from the group is to acknowledge what has been shared, clarify to make sure everyone understands the message, and assure everyone that the concerns will be addressed in good time.

In face-to-face interactions, you often sense right away if something you say or do during closing creates a confusion or misunderstanding. But online, your closing message can be easily misunderstood with no easy way to know how the message was received.

Peace and Power closing messages call for careful reflection, for mindful attention to what you say or write, and for full disclosure of your thoughts and feelings. In an online group, you have the advantage of taking the time you need to compose your closing carefully, reflect on what you want to say and how you want to say it, and connect your thoughts and feelings with the group’s purposes and principles of solidarity. In a face-to-face group, everyone has the advantage of sensing together that something has struck a nerve.

As you receive the appreciation and critical reflections of others, you have the following responsibilities:

- *Remain attentive; listen or read carefully. Do not interrupt or respond impulsively.*

  If what you hear is welcome and appreciated, a simple thank you is sufficient, saving your more enthusiastic response until after the group meeting. Keep the focus on the person who has expressed appreciation and resist any temptation to detract from the growth-encouraging intention of a positive closing.

  If what you receive is difficult to take in, or if you have a different viewpoint to share, let the group know how you feel and be sure the issue is placed on an agenda for a future discussion. Refer to Chapter 10 to ground your thoughts and feelings in the constructive values that the group shares.

- *Keep any response to a minimum so that you do not drag out a meeting or online discussion past the time it is supposed to end. Remember that almost everything can wait.*

**CRITICAL REFLECTION AS HOMEWORK**

Artful critical reflection arises from your deepest inner awareness, is energized by your
emotions, and is finely crafted by your clearest thinking. It is shared with others in a manner and at a time when you can call upon full awareness (including thoughts and feelings) to address the issue.

Sometimes you cannot think clearly and speak or write artfully at the time of closing. Often, people can only do so after some time has passed. This gives you the opportunity to do your own internal work at home, especially when it comes to critical reflection. If you sense during a meeting that there is a critical reflection you need to develop on your own, during closing describe the nature of your concern, and ask the group to wait for a fuller discussion later, either during check-in or as an agenda item.

The homework required to do this includes getting in touch with the full range of feelings that you experience around the issue and thinking about all of the facts and circumstances that are a part of the situation. It requires thinking through similar circumstances that you have experienced to search for a perspective that comes from that broader experience and envisioning future possibilities that might emerge from this experience.

Constructive critical reflection is placed in the context of the purposes of the group. One way to do this is to take time to review the group’s principles of solidarity. Think about the present situation in light of each principle and how addressing the issue you are studying can strengthen the group.

Weigh carefully many possibilities. Imagine what might be different in a similar circumstance in the future and possibilities for what might now emerge from the situation as it is. Think about how you and the group might move forward in a direction that you choose carefully rather than a direction that just happens.

As you reflect on the situation, write down ideas and thoughts. You can go over these notes to sort out which of your ideas are beneficial and constructive and rethink ideas that may not be constructive. Once you see your ideas on paper, you can explore different ways of saying things and make sure everything you need to say is there. When you share your ideas with the group, the notes you prepare at home can help you to remain focused and include your full range of feelings and thoughts stated in constructive and beneficial ways.
CHAPTER 10

Conflict Transformation

Peace and Power Conflict Transformation:

- Acknowledges conflict or potential for conflict early, before things get out of hand.
- Builds on the group’s principles of solidarity.
- Enacts the powers of diversity and solidarity.
- Rotates leadership and responsibility so that those at the center of the conflict can step aside.
- Addresses issues critically and constructively.
- Places the conflict in a greater context so that long-term and broad-reaching implications of the conflict are clear.
- Expands practices of critical reflection.
- Expands practices of value-based decision-building to move beyond the conflict itself.
- Brings to light what everyone can learn and how the group can grow because of the experience of transforming conflict.

Conflict transformation is a process that uses differences in ways that build greater solidarity, and that lead to growth for each person and the group. Instead of letting differences create divisions, hurt feelings, and misunderstandings, groups that invest in the process of conflict transformation will develop stronger ties, greater understanding, and respect (instead of resentment) for their differences.

There are a number of alternative approaches to dealing with conflict that are effective (conflict resolution, negotiation, arbitration, etc.). A Peace and Power approach to conflict transformation draws on many of these. Several of these approaches focus on reducing hostilities and on an outcome of compromise between opposing groups or individuals. The best approaches seek win–win solutions.

Peace and Power is designed to move beyond these approaches in order to transform conflict itself. In conflict transformation, the group addresses the immediate issue in constructive ways but pays close attention to what everyone can learn from the situation. Everyone grows in understanding the group’s values and uses the conflict process to develop new skills that contribute to the group’s cohesiveness and ability to integrate diversity.

Conflict transformation involves ways of knowing and doing that are central to Peace and Power processes. Conflict transformation draws especially on the powers of diversity, solidarity, and responsibility. The Power of Diversity means encouraging creativity, valuing alternative views, and encouraging flexibility. The Power of Solidarity means integrating variety within the
group. The Power of Responsibility means owning your own actions and encouraging criticism and self-criticism in the context of love and protection for each individual and the group. (See Chapters 3 and 4.)

Sound too idealistic? For some groups, this may indeed be more of an ideal than a reality. But if your group is serious about creating new ways of working together, you will find huge rewards as you develop the skills of conflict transformation.

**RELEARNING CONFLICT**

Conflict is not easy, and certainly very few people welcome conflict in their lives. Conflict is often scary, difficult, painful, and dangerous. But conflict is an inevitable part of human interaction, and if you want to deal with conflict in healthy and constructive ways that create safety, growth, and stronger relationships, then conflict transformation is for you.

Even at the best of times, dealing with conflict is not easy and not always possible. When a group cannot integrate differences, the group inevitably becomes engaged in divisive conflict. Typically groups deal with conflict by ignoring it, backing away from it, getting caught up in it, or agreeing to disagree. When a group is committed to using conflict transformation, conflict becomes an opportunity for growth and transformation.

To move beyond the typical patterns of dealing with conflict, it is important to realize the subtle ways in which habits of power-over powers creep into your group interactions and to develop ways to use PEACE powers. Making this shift will involve learning to embrace conflict as an opportunity for growth and an important part of group experience.

Typical dictionary definitions of the word *conflict* refer to incompatibility, opposing action, antagonism, and hostility. Underlying those definitions is the suggestion of the potential for violence. In fact, conflict is not always the same thing as hostility, antagonism, or incompatibility. Differences of opinion, disagreements, arguments—all forms of conflict that do not have to involve hostility or violence—happen in all groups. In a hierarchical group, a simple disagreement can quickly escalate into something that carries feelings of antagonism, polarization of viewpoints into “right and wrong,” and open hostility.

A first step in moving toward a reality where conflict is valued and valuable is to recognize the limits of adversarial definitions of conflict and to create a new way of thinking about conflict. In American English, there are no words to express the peaceful, even welcomed coexistence of differing points of view, different perspectives, or different ideas. Honest discussion can happen without hostility, antagonism, or competition for being “right.” Even when people have strong feelings such as hostility or anger, transforming conflict into something beneficial for the group and for individuals is possible. Being able to do this depends on knowing that you have a choice in dealing with conflict and that you can learn ways to transform conflict.
HOW DOES CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION HAPPEN?

The Peace and Power process for transforming conflict begins with someone in the group summarizing the conflict using each of the four elements of critical reflection. (See Chapter 9.) The process of critical reflection is then expanded as a framework for everyone to address the conflict in a constructive manner. Each person addresses each of the four elements of critical reflection, lending their individual perspectives to the process of building a complete understanding of the group as a whole.

- “I feel. . . .” Everyone in the group addresses feelings about the conflict situation, being careful to remain focused on feelings without blame and without prejudging what is going on or who is doing what. It may be helpful to circle, with people briefly acknowledging their tension, anger, hurt, or indifference. Include positive feelings that can sustain the group in a constructive process, such as love, respect, hope, and trust.

- “When (or about). . . .” The group then turns the discussion to making clear what has happened to bring the conflict to center stage, acknowledging actions, words, or inactions. It is important to acknowledge individuals who are involved, without blame, but with honest and open factual accounting of agency in the situation. At this time, any misunderstandings about what has happened can be resolved, and a common ground of understanding built.

- “I want. . . .” All members share what they hope to see happen next. It may be helpful to circle so that everyone speaks, revealing as many avenues as possible.

- “Because. . . .” The group makes explicit the principles of solidarity that are emerging as central to the conflict and express values that are particular to the conflict itself. Everyone participates in considering how the group’s principles and values are reflected in the conflict, or how the conflict can expand or change the group’s principles of solidarity.

FOUNDATIONS FOR TRANSFORMING CONFLICT INTO SOLIDARITY AND DIVERSITY

Conflict transformation begins before there is conflict in a group. It is very difficult—often impossible—to transform conflict by waiting until conflict happens and then beginning to work on ways to deal with it differently. Groups can develop three important traditions during times of relative calm that build a strong foundation for transforming conflict.

Nurturing A Strong Sense Of Rotating Leadership Within The Group

If your group has practiced rotating leadership, then you can turn to those who are relatively calm, and who have energy and willingness to address a conflict constructively when it happens. (See Chapters 6 and 7.) Effective leadership from someone who is not directly engaged in a
struggle, but who is part of the group, can refocus the group’s attention.

The person who steps up to provide leadership around a conflict can provide clear guidance in staying focused on the underlying issues rather than simply getting lost in the muddle of the conflict itself. Refocusing is a critical element to bring about transformation; it places the conflict in a larger context so that people can respond to the larger implications and long-term effects of the conflict.

If every individual within your group has experience at being a leader, each person already feels strong and supported in a leadership role and can comfortably move into this role when the group experiences conflict. Those who are at the center of the conflict can wisely step aside, hear other perspectives, and focus on their own constructive responses and actions.

**Practicing Critical Reflection**

Critical reflection (see Chapter 9) provides a way to learn the Power of Responsibility and to move out of communication styles of blaming, hostility, and damaging verbal assaults. Instead, everyone in the group develops skills of communication that focus on the group’s responsibility for what happens in the group. If you practice using critical reflection when no real or serious conflict is involved, you build the necessary skills of addressing something that is difficult in a safe context. Thus, the group as a whole develops confidence in critical reflection as a safe and welcomed process.

If you practice critical reflection regularly, you will develop a deeper shared understanding of your group’s principles of solidarity. With regular practice, everyone feels familiar with the process so that when conflict happens and someone expands critical reflection in addressing the conflict, it brings a sense of safety and commitment to the process, rather than the usual sense of fear and dread.

**Practicing Ways To Value Diversity**

If your group has established habits that draw you closer to valuing individual differences, then when you do experience conflict you will have a strong basis from which to transform the conflict. Intense feelings typically narrow or restrict your ability to remain open. Habits of valuing diversity lay a founda- tion to being open to many options even when feelings are running high.

The processes of check-in (see Chapter 6) and closing (see Chapter 9) are two ways for groups to habitually recognize, honor, and celebrate diversities that exist within your group. When conflict occurs, you already know and appreciate diverse perspectives, interests, and talents that individuals bring to the situation. In transforming conflict, the group’s members learn more about themselves but also build on the foundation of diversity that they already appreciate.
DEVELOPING THE SKILLS OF CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

The critical reflection elements give you and your group a way to begin to talk about a specific issue. However, because this process involves learning to say and do some things that are not typically part of what we know and do, you might find it helpful to consider some of these new ways of doing things.

Whenever conflict enters the awareness of someone in the group, the group needs to address the conflict. It is always tempting to dismiss early awareness of possible conflict as “personality differences,” assuming that two or three individuals will just have to work it out. Although it is indeed desirable for individuals to resolve personal differences, conflict or hostile interactions within the group require a group response if it is to be transformative for the group.

Conflict is no one person’s responsibility; no one or two individuals can resolve group conflict even if they resolve a conflict between themselves. Conflict is everyone’s responsibility. Every individual learns, gains new insights, and experiences new possibilities. As different people speak to the issue, many more possibilities emerge. The rich exchange that happens in this process brings forth many possibilities that exist among group members and provides insight from which awareness of common ground emerges.

In the following sections, you will find a more detailed explanation of how to constructively prepare for a discussion that involves conflict transformation.

Being Specific About The Agent

One of the most familiar yet subtle power-over powers is mystification: actions that obscure specific responsibility for what happens (Chapter 3). Sometimes owning responsibility can be uncomfortable because you regret what you are doing or have done. Often it is difficult to own responsibility because of shyness or false modesty. Sometimes you may feel a concern (possibly misguided) about protecting someone else. Sometimes people are hesitant to name someone specifically because of fear they will offend or embarrass the person. Sometimes discomfort comes from a general sense of something that you have not thought through.

To make the shift to being specific about who or what circumstance is responsible for or contributing to a problem, consider why it is so important. Naming an instance and an agent (especially when the agent is yourself) is critical for growth to occur. If you do not know what or how to change, you cannot take positive steps to do so. When you “beat around the bush” concerning who is responsible for what, you mystify your concern and create misunderstandings. When you do this, others can sense that something is amiss, and typically wonder if they are the one who you think is responsible or to blame. They begin to feel suspicious, uncomfortable, and distressed. If you name who you think is responsible, at the same time that you share the other components of your reflection (what you want to happen next and why you think this is
important for the group), then you begin to build trust and trustworthiness because everything is in the open and everyone knows that no secrets or hidden agendas will be kept.2

**Being Specific About Your Feelings and Your Observations**

A feeling statement is a precise way of sharing what is happening within your- self. It carries no hidden messages about what anyone else has done or is doing. An observation statement is a clear description of what you or someone else has done or said. An observation does not include what you think another person meant or what you suppose they intended.

Because owning and expressing feelings is risky, it is tempting to just hint about something that you are feeling, or shift the attention to someone else by blaming them for how you are feeling. For example, if you say “I feel rejected,” even though you use the word feel, the word rejected implies that someone has done something to cause your feeling of hurt. If you say “I feel disappointed,” you are blaming someone else for doing something that caused your feeling of frustration or sadness. Feeling words are not easy in many English-speaking cultures because of this subtle “turn” that shifts responsibility from the person who is speaking to the person who is supposed to be listening.

It is also typically much more comfortable, or more convenient, to say what you think about the situation, rather than what you feel. And, because of this focus on thoughts instead of feelings, people tend to interpret what happened and lose focus on what actually might have happened. For example, it is much more common to hear or say “Sam is so irresponsible” instead of “This is the third time that Sam has not opened the doors of the studio on time.”

When you use the process of conflict transformation, you learn to say what happened in a way that is free of your own interpretation, and that clearly conveys how you feel about what happened. Here is an example: “I feel so frustrated because Sam has not opened the doors of the studio on time.”

When you put your feelings and your description of what happened into a crit- ical reflection, you also convey your openness to hearing other perspectives and your intention to move forward in a constructive way. Consider the following examples, which show the differences between statements that blame someone else and statements that focus only on your own feelings and observations.

**Stating What You Want**

When addressing something that needs to be done or that needs to change, provide a clear, specific statement of what you want. Focus on what you do want, not what you don’t want. Stating what you want is not a demand, nor does it mean that the group will respond by giving you what you want! It does, however, move the group toward a solution or toward a constructive response to your thoughts and feelings. If others in the group do not accept your idea, the group
can sort that out and still attend to your concern as fitting for you.

Typical habits of hierarchical culture lead to two tendencies: stating what you do not want or merely implying what you want with some indirect or nonspecific comment. Compare the effectiveness of each of the following statements:

- Constructive statement of what you want: “I want two kids to help with this project.”
- Saying what you don’t want: “I don’t think we should have too many kids on this project.”
- Implying what you want indirectly: “Kids in this group just need to get involved.”

RESPONDING TO CRITICAL REFLECTION

As hard as it is to learn to be specific about who is involved or responsible in a difficult situation, it is even harder to learn constructive ways of responding when you are named as one of those who is responsible. It is much easier to become defensive or to wallow in hurt feelings. Everyone in a group that uses Peace and Power processes has to make a commitment to learning constructive ways of responding to critical reflection if everyone is to benefit from the process. Once you learn to do this, you will find that you grow by leaps and bounds, that your relationships with others will deepen and strengthen, and that your skill in dealing with difficult situations in other contexts will improve.

When you personally receive a critical reflection from someone in the group, you have at least four responsibilities:

- Listen actively, or read carefully online, to make sure you understand clearly what the other person is saying. This usually means that your first response is to paraphrase what you perceive the message to be.
- Wait for the perspectives of others in the group. Usually different people have different perceptions of a situation, and knowing these will help you decide how well the critical reflection fits.
- Weigh how fair or accurate the critical reflection is. Sometimes you will know immediately that it is fair. More often, you will need a few minutes or several days to reflect on and integrate it.
- Respond in a constructive manner. For a fair critical reflection, the most constructive response is a behavioral response: You take it to heart and change your behavior! If you decide that it is not fair, share your thoughts with the group in a constructive way.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Once you grow accustomed to putting your critical reflections into words, you will have acquired a skill that will serve you invaluably in all areas of your life. You can use this skill with
your family, people at work, and in your interactions with people in groups that do not use Peace and Power routinely. Just about every time you use this skill you will find dramatic differences in the ways that people respond.

Your words do not need to follow the “formula” in a strict cookbook manner, and in fact this is rarely the case. But if you examine a real-life situation, you will see all the elements in what the person says who is sharing a critical reflection.

**RECLAIMING THE VIRTUES OF GOSSIP**

Talk outside the group about people and events in the group, commonly known as gossip, can be a destructive source of group conflict or it can be an important source of group energy and creativity. Gossip is a skill linked with women’s talk. Gossip, like many other words in the English language that are often linked to women, once had a positive meaning that has now been distorted to a negative meaning.

Originally, the word gossip was a noun for the woman who assisted the midwife at the time of birth. The gossip was the labor coach, and after the birth she went into the community to spread the news about the birth. She was considered a very wise woman who could communicate the wisdom of the stars. Groups can reclaim the art of gossip to develop new ways of talking about one another and events in the group. It is unrealistic to expect that people in a group will not talk about what goes on in the group when the group is not meeting together. Therefore, it is far more helpful to expect this to happen, and to have a mutual understanding about it, rather than to simply expect people not to talk outside the group!

The talk shared among group members in the less structured setting outside the group or in email exchanges can be an important source of energy that, like the labor coach, helps to give birth to the ideas and visions of the group. Constructive and energizing gossip builds on the values of Peace and Power. The ethics of gossip that follow ensure talk that is constructive and contributes to growth.

- **Gossip is to be purposeful**. When you tell a story about someone or something, tell why you are sharing the story. For example, if you are telling your friend about a budding sexual involvement between two members of the group, share the reason you want to talk about it. This could be because you are seeking ways to interrupt the divisiveness that could result in the group. When you and your friend both enter into gossip with this type

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9 In *Man-Made Language*, 2nd edition (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, 1985), Dale Spender includes a poem beginning “what men dub tattle gossip women’s talk is really revolutionary activity . . .” She goes on to note “. . . we will have to invest the language with our own authentic meanings, and repudiate many of those which are currently accented as accurate . . .” (p. 5).

of reason, you will move away from talk that derides, blames, or otherwise damages the people involved. Instead, your talk will focus on how the group can respond to the situation in ways that are respectful and that protect the integrity of the group. If you cannot name a reason to gossip that comes from a shared purpose, you should turn your talk to another topic.

- **Own your Self.** Focus on your own feelings and ideas, rather than what you think someone else felt or thought. Although you may be concerned about how other people in the group may feel or react to an emerging sexual involvement between two people in the group, focus your gossip on how you feel about it, and what your thoughts are about how it may influence the group.

- **Name your source.** When passing along information, be clear about how you came by the information. Share with who told you about what happened, or how you know about what happened. If you cannot name your source, then do not pass along the information. Do not say, for example, “I heard that Shawna lied to her friends.” Instead, say: “Jane told me that Shawna lied.” Or, “I was in the group when Shawna told us what we later realized was not true.”

- **Be cautious about how you convey information about the group and people in the group.** Presenting information in a way that could be used to hurt another person only leads to destructive outcomes. Only give information that opens possibilities for greater compassion and understanding. For example, information that could be hurtful would be to leave a class saying in the hallway: “I was astonished at what Priscilla said in class today! She really is intolerant!” A message that could convey the same astonishment, but not misrepresent or label Priscilla, would be: “I was astonished when I heard Priscilla’s views on the militarization of women’s lives. I need to think through how to continue this discussion the next time we meet. Do you have any ideas about this?”

- **Affirm the opportunity and possibility for growth and change.** When talking about Priscilla’s comments on militarization, examine various points that you think need to be explored to move the discussion toward constructive understanding. Gossip that focuses on what else needs to happen moves toward greater understanding of the issues.

- **Use humor as a way to address emotions, and to shed light on a situation.** Be very cautious about hurtful, diminishing teasing. Never knowingly tease or ridicule another person, and be cautious about humor that is self-denigrating. For example, suppose you are telling a story about being put down when you spoke up as a student in a committee meeting. A comment made in a laughing tone (“I guess I am just an unimportant student who has no business expressing my opinion”) is not funny, nor is it dry humor. It is self-denigrating, and it passively implies ridicule of others about whose opinions you are only speculating. Instead, you could tell your story about how people responded to your speaking up as a student, and proclaim “Students arise!” to move toward an affirming, joyful statement that offsets your distress with the negative response you received.
• **Use information to share and inform, not to manipulate.** For example, if you honestly think that your friend is doing something wrong, then provide all the information you can that might help enlighten the situation without prodding or coercing your friend to decide in the direction you want. Refrain especially from making bold proclamations (which are really speculations) about the future as a way to frighten the person to decide your way. Leave the decision to your friend, even if it may turn out to be one with which you do not agree. Do not say, “You are really going to regret this a year from now.” Say instead: “Let’s write down all the things that might come of this one year down the road.”

• **Use gossip to assist and to build community, not to compete.** When you hear another person’s story, refrain from responding with a “one-up” story of your own. Instead, focus on sharing ideas and feelings about what her story means to you, and how together you can learn from the story. For example, if a friend tells you about a terrible thing that happened at work when they gave pay raises, do not launch into your own “ain’t-it-awful” story about when your boss denied you a pay raise. Instead, say that you have had an experience that is similar, but keep the focus of the discussion on what your friend has experienced and is learning about the politics of her work life.

**ANGER AS A SOURCE OF STRENGTH**

Anger is a feeling that many people, especially women, have learned to deny. Understandably, women have learned to fear the anger of others because it is so closely linked to life-threatening violence against women. Women’s expression of anger can lead to life-threatening violence, further enforcing fear of their anger. Like the word conflict, anger is a word used in many societies to suggest many negative feelings and dynamics in human relationships.

Although anger is a fundamental feeling, other feelings and dynamics acquire the label as well. Anger is not the same thing as hatred, dislike, disgust, or envy. Emotions like hatred, disgust, or envy are not sources of strength in the way that anger can be, but these emotions need to be acknowledged and examined for their significance in pointing a way toward change and growth.

In groups committed to shifting ways of working with one another, dealing constructively with anger is a major step toward creating the safety needed to deal with conflict. Steps you can practice to learn new ways to deal with anger as a source of strength include the following:

• **Recognize that your anger is a valuable tool or clue that something different needs to happen.** Learn to take the time to move away from the situation until you are clear about what needs to happen differently. Use your anger as a signal that you need to step away from the situation until you think through exactly what needs to change.

• **Rehearse safe ways to acknowledge your anger with people who can support your growth and understand the areas on which you are working.** You can use critical
reflection approaches in either role-plays you set up or in relatively safe real-life situations. Rehearse when you are not feeling angry, but work with situations that have made you feel angry in the past, or could in the future. Rehearsing ways to acknowledge your anger will help you overcome your fear of anger so that it no longer immobilizes you but becomes a source of strength.

- **Realize that unprepared confrontation (face-to-face or online) is usually not a constructive approach to dealing with anger**. Instead, confrontation usually polarizes and distances you from other people involved in the situation. Once you take the time to get clear about the signal that your anger represents, then you can think through approaches that address the situation directly and calmly, moving toward constructive changes in the situation. Practice using critical reflection in groups, giving special attention to how you share what you want to happen next. Notice how the group responds to your insights and invite them to give you constructive suggestions. In the following example, you will see how a writing group addressed an issue using the processes of conflict transformation. In this example, tensions have grown out of perceived power imbalances in the group.

**CONFLICT IN ONLINE GROUPS**

Conflict in online groups can be much more challenging than face-to-face conflict; it is very easy to miss signals that conflict is brewing or to ignore conflicts altogether. Ignoring conflict might feel more comfortable at the time, but in the long run, as in face-to-face groups, it festers as a negative influence on the group.

However, when online groups share a mutually developed commitment to address issues early and regularly practice the foundational skills for conflict transformation (rotating leadership, critical reflection, ways to value diversity), the online form of communication becomes an ideal way to address conflict. The temptation to respond offhandedly can occur online, but more often you have time to reconsider and reflect on what you want to say before you hit the Send button. You have the opportunity online to review your message, even placing it in a draft folder for a day or more so that you can gain perspective on the situation. You are able to make sure that you provide constructive criticism, and that you do not imply blame or impose your own interpretations on other people’s reality.

Everyone in the group needs to respond to an online message that addresses a conflict. Unlike a face-to-face group, where some members may not be present or where some people do not speak for various reasons, in an online group, there is seldom a reason for people not to contribute to the discussion. It is wise for an online group to refrain from open discussion of the issues involved until every member of the group has sent her or his first response to the group—an online circling.

By waiting to know everyone’s response, the nature of the discussion can be more focused
and can take into account a complete picture of how everyone in the group feels about the conflict. If you begin open discussion before this process is complete, you can create an “e-mail hell” that results in compli- cating the conflict rather than transforming it.

    The group may decide to call for closure of a discussion around a conflict at a specific point in time. The group may need to shift into a decision-building process to come to a mutual understanding in order to begin on a new footing. Everyone acknowledges what they have learned from the conflict and how the group has grown in the process of transforming the conflict.

    The following example is from an online class that has a weekly discussion topic and class assignments. This example shows how an issue that is very difficult to address face-to-face (racism) was addressed effectively in an online interaction.

**INTERRUPTING HABITS THAT SUSTAIN DIVISIVENESS**

Divisiveness is an all-too-familiar experience within groups. Divisiveness obscures commonalities, side-tracking groups from developing solidarity in their diversity. Most of the things that sustain divisiveness in groups are habits that people have learned as the “right,” “assertive,” “savvy,” or “political” way to deal with group interactions. In fact, these habits are rooted in power-over values, where the individual is assumed to be at odds with the group and with other individuals in the group. Integrating differences is not seen as a possibility, much less a value. This list shows examples of what happens when you are nurturing diversity, contrasted with what happens when you are engaged in divisiveness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diversity</th>
<th>Divisiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>When I am convinced that my point of view is the only reasonable one</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I still take the time to find out what other people think</td>
<td>I keep repeating it to make sure that everyone hears it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>When things become tense in a discussion, and sides are being drawn</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encourage discussion so that each point of view is presented fully.</td>
<td>I usually know what side I am on and grow impatient with drawn-out discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In a meeting or online</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I make sure I express my point of view and limit my comments so that others may also speak to the issue.</td>
<td>I make sure I express my point of view at length so that others don’t miss out on all the implications of my insights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>When I am aware that something I have said or done has bothered others</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I stop to consider what has happened and try to put myself in</td>
<td>I figure it is their problem and it is up to them to work it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>their shoes.</td>
<td>out.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**When others are expressing their views**

| I actively listen and hear them out before framing my response. | I usually already know what they are trying to say and jump in |
| Online, I read carefully and make sure I understand their     | to say what I have to say to move the discussion along.        |
| points of view.                                               |                                                                 |

**When there is disagreement in the group**

| I invite everyone to express their viewpoints so that we can   | I think the best way to deal with it is simply to agree to     |
| all hear and consider these in reaching a decision.           | disagree and not get caught up in trivia.                      |

**When I am unable to attend a scheduled meeting or unable to be**

| I make sure someone knows my concerns about relevant issues    | I figure I can catch up later and let people know what I      |
| and is willing to take them to the group.                      | think.                                                        |

To keep sight of the extent to which your group is overcoming habits of divisiveness and moving toward valuing diversity, consider the following:

**Your group values diversity and solidarity if . . .**

- You can name at least one thing your group does during every meeting that reflects the valuing of each individual.
- You can identify at least two recent occasions when your group’s decisions considered the minority view.
- You can identify at least three principles of solidarity held in common by each member of your group.
- You can name at least four recent occasions when the leadership in your group shifted spontaneously in response to the issue under discussion.
- You can identify (in your group’s most recent meeting) at least five instances when members freely expressed appreciation for one another.
- You can describe at least two points of disagreement that your group is currently considering, and, for each of the two points, you can describe at least three distinctly different perspectives that the group is considering.
CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION AND VALUE-BASED DECISION-BUILDING

Conflict transformation is not the same kind of challenge that a group faces when they are forming a decision, but it leads to the kinds of decisions that represent deep commitments, insights, shifts in ways of being together, and shifts in attitude. The components of value-based decision-building that are expanded in transforming conflict include the following:

- **Describe the benefits that the group seeks.** Many possible benefits will emerge during critical reflection, but it is helpful to be sure that the group as a whole shares a vision of the benefits that can emerge from the conflict experience. This is a key to transforming conflict, rather than simply resolving or managing conflict.

- **Clarify which principles of solidarity the group seeks to bring to full expression.** The conflict situation in all likelihood provides an opportunity for members of the group to grow in their understanding of what their principles of solidarity really mean when they are translated into action.

- **Identify as many approaches to moving beyond the conflict as are possible within the context of the group.** Transformation of conflict does not lead to one answer or solution. Rather, it leads to a number of actions, turns, or shifts in approach that are both individual and collective in nature.

WHEN TRANSFORMATION OF CONFLICT IS NOT POSSIBLE

Even when transforming conflict does not seem possible, it is well worth the effort to work toward the ideal for some time before giving up. Often, when it seems impossible, real movement toward the ideal is possible. However, when you and the group finally recognize that you cannot transform a conflict in an ideal sense, turn your energy to exploring what is possible to create better working relationships.

In groups where membership is voluntary, it may be that it is time to consider ending the group altogether. (See Chapter 11.) Some voluntary groups and groups that are obliged to continue to work together might seek outside assistance in creating better working relationships. Even when less than ideal circumstances are the best that you can do, you can carry with you insights that come from the experience and build from the experience in the future.
CHAPTER 11
Period Pieces

It helps to remember why we are doing this work. I think there is sometimes the naïve assumption that if we talk about it enough, we will get it perfect, and I don’t believe in perfection. I don’t believe the world will ever be perfect, or that any of us will ever be perfect, or that our strategies will ever be perfect. In the effort to make social change, we learn and grow and develop, and that is what it is all about. —Charlotte Bunch11

Things happen in every group periodically that remind everyone of the challenges of doing things together in groups, particularly if your group is trying to make change. Some of these happenings are pleasant and welcome. Others are less pleasant and unwelcome. Peace and Power processes call for an awareness and anticipation of periodic group issues and challenges. This chapter describes some things that your group can anticipate to ease the way.

PERIODIC REVIEW OF PRINCIPLES OF SOLIDARITY

Periodically reviewing principles of solidarity is like cleaning house: It is easy to delay or neglect getting it done! Nevertheless, like cleaning house, it is something that will create a better group “space,” and it feels good once you do it. Some groups select a season of the year as a time for assessing what they are doing and to talk about changes that the group needs to make. In other groups, the time for taking a new look at the old principles comes when the focus shifts, such as when a task is completed or when group membership changes.

Three questions are helpful in taking a critical look at your principles of solidarity.

- Are we actually doing what these principles suggest?
- If not, what ARE we doing?
- What principle is implied in what we are doing?

OPEN OR CLOSED GROUPS?

Peace and Power groups usually seek to be open to all who wish to join. However, this is a decision that needs to be considered carefully. Some groups may not be able to be completely open because of the work they need to get done. The dilemma becomes, then, how to remain open to new thoughts, to integrating diversity within the group, and yet remain effective in your

work.

One way to address group membership is to think of openness as relative and changing rather than as an opposing choice of open or closed. Task-oriented groups often need to maintain stability in membership to meet the pressing demands of tasks that form their central purpose for gathering. As the demands of the tasks change, a natural flow of movement occurs as some people leave the group (sometimes temporarily), and others join. Groups that are essentially permanent, such as a group that operates a community shelter, can identify times when membership is open and develop traditions to educate and orient new members.

**PEOPLE JOINING AN ONGOING GROUP**

Integrating new members is a welcome but difficult transition. In open groups, the demands of constantly integrating new members is a challenge that requires far more time and energy than the group typically expects. Because Peace and Power groups do not function like typical groups, people who are new to the group are essentially in a foreign land, in the midst of a new culture that may be totally unfamiliar. The words spoken may be their language, but meanings of words take on a new character that existing members learn to take for granted. People unfamiliar with the language of Peace and Power often find themselves in a muddle trying to figure out what is really going on. Once a group is committed to welcoming new members, existing members need to be constantly aware of these dynamics and establish ways to ease the transition. The group needs to set aside time to explain and clarify what is going on and to make resources such as the history, purposes, and principles of solidarity available to new members.

Groups that require relative stability in membership may set aside times during the year for orientation of new members. The group plans these events carefully. They can be face-to-face, online, or both. Members of the existing group take responsibility for various parts of the orientation. A typical new member agenda includes a history of the group, a review of the principles of solidarity, an orientation to what the group does, and a detailed description of the contributions expected of all members.

**MEMBER LEAVING A GROUP**

In groups with unrestricted openness in membership, leaving the group may be a simple matter of not continuing to contribute financially or dropping out of the gatherings or the online discussion. In groups that exist for a purpose that involves personal development, such as a reading group or a support group, the group’s purpose may lead to a live-and-let-live response to someone’s leaving.

However, when a member leaves a group, this can create a void in the group, and people want to acknowledge the leave-taking openly in some way. In a group where an individual’s leaving has consequences for other members of the group, it is especially important to state in
the principles of solidarity what the group wants to happen when someone leaves.

Creating traditions around this event, similar to the traditions of welcoming new members, is helpful in making this a smooth transition for the group and for the member who is leaving. Because this event represents both an ending and a new beginning, one way to approach it is similar to closing, with an entire gathering devoted to a closing concerning the leaving of the individual.

Each group member takes the time to express appreciation, critical reflection, and affirmation. From this, the person leaving as well as all members of the group can carry new insights into their separate futures.

**ASKING A MEMBER TO LEAVE A GROUP**

As difficult as it may be, sometimes the energies of the group and of an individual are not harmonious with one another. Whatever the issue is, the group must address it in some constructive way. The assumption that we can live together happily ever after is simply not consistent with reality. Ending one phase and beginning a new phase is not necessarily a failure. Still, it is very traumatic for everyone involved to acknowledge difficulty that leads to asking a member to leave.

When a group finds that an individual is not able to function effectively as a group member, the issues must first be addressed openly, bringing to the discussion the fullest of intentions to act in a way that is consistent with the group’s principles. The group explores all possible avenues for resolving the issues. The discussion continues until every member is certain that the avenue chosen is one that is good for the group and loving and compassionate for the individual.

**ENDING A GROUP**

Ending a group does not mean that the group has been a failure. Often it is the celebration of the completion of the purpose for which the group formed. If the purpose was not a specific task that the group can wrap up in a neat package, then knowing when the purpose has been accomplished may not be easily recognizable.

For example, a group formed to provide support for one another may find that after a while, people have sources of support elsewhere that had not existed when the group was first formed. When this happens, the group may have evolved into something that is no longer meaningful. When coming to the group’s gatherings or showing up online begins to be a chore rather than a pleasure, it is time to consider ending the group.

Rather than let a group simply fizzle out, plan a specific event around which the group acknowledges their ending. The event provides a means for everyone to close this phase of their experience, taking something from it into the future. Planning for a gathering for a final closing of the group online can be a rich and growth-enhancing experience.
CHAPTER 12

Classrooms, Committees, and Institutional Constraints

Peace and Power happens at its best when everyone in a group chooses to work together in this way. This is not always possible in a traditional setting, but certain Peace and Power ways of working together can be adapted in almost any situation to create change.

When you bring Peace and Power into a group that exists within an institution that typically functions in hierarchical ways, you bring a powerful influence toward transformation. You can use the methods of Peace and Power as a whole, adapt them, or use them in part for moving to new power relations in traditional groups.

The key element in making decisions about what to do and how is clarity about what value or values the group chooses to embrace. From there, the group will find many ways to enact its values. The group members can then periodically examine how well they are doing in creating the value and process changes they are seeking together.

Taking steps to adapt Peace and Power processes in hierarchical organizations and institutions can be risky, frightening, and discouraging. Sometimes your efforts will fail, and sometimes groups seem unable to move beyond mere token acts of working in ways that they envision. Often the hoped-for benefits and changes that happen seem completely invisible, only to become visible long after the group has ended.

If you want to take Peace and Power into a traditional setting, one important step you can take to give you greater confidence is to create a group outside the institution where you can practice Peace and Power values more fully. This is usually a voluntary group committed to working together in order to create personal and social change. Experiencing a group where you can realize Peace and Power ideals more fully, even though it may be a small group, provides a place of centering, of concentrating your energies in a healing direction, of support for the values that you are seeking to enact, and for exploring all that might be possible. Then, when the disappointments of the old world come crashing in, the visions of the new possibilities are there, somewhere.

HOW DO WE BEGIN?

One way for groups in institutions to begin the shift is to choose one, two, or three of the PEACE powers as a starting point. Many groups work within traditions that alienate and divide individuals from one another, and people who grow weary of the divisiveness and alienation are
often eager to find a different way. Choosing at least one PEACE power implies a unifying value, provides a focus for the shifts in interaction, and maintains a grounding for times when the confusion of change becomes overwhelming.

The Internet and the Web, developed from philosophies of democratization, is a powerful tool for groups to use in equalizing power\(^\text{12}\). Email, distribution lists, email discussion lists, and bulletin boards offer equal access to information and give everyone an equal opportunity to “speak” without interruption or time constraints. As is true for face-to-face groups, everyone in the group must participate online—everyone has to show up.

People enter traditional groups such as classrooms, work teams, and committees expecting that the group will function as usual. When you present a different way of working together, explain the reasons for making the shift. If the reasons clearly relate to what the group has already been seeking, then the transition is relatively easy. The group can consider Peace and Power approaches as ways to help achieve what they already want to do.

If the group has a long tradition of working in hierarchical and power-over ways, making the transition will be more of a challenge. You might start by acknowledging a persistent problem that many people in the group see as a problem. Perhaps there is a lot of interruption and cross-talk in your group discussions, and many people seldom have the opportunity to speak or be heard. You can explain your concern about this, explain why you think it would be helpful to shift to another format for discussing, and propose using a form of rotating chair to make sure that people are not interrupted when they are speaking.

If you want to introduce Peace and Power to your traditional group, it is helpful to prepare written or verbal information about the intended shift that is specific to the work of the group. Focus on both the value shift and the process shift that you are proposing. In a group that has a defined leader (for example, a teacher or a committee chair), the leader can prepare a description of ways in which the group will begin to function, and why these changes are being made. If you are a leader initiating a change without the group considering this as an option, propose that the group try this new approach for a defined period of time, after which the group can discuss the experience and decide how to proceed.

Members of groups who are not the defined leader can also bring a proposal to the group. A student in a classroom can prepare a brief explanation of something they want the group to consider, and why. A member of a com- mittee or work team can prepare a similar description of a change for the group to consider. For example, a group member can propose that the group start using check-in and closing as a way to make sure that everyone has a chance to contribute to the agenda, and to help provide continuity from one meeting to another.

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PEACE AND POWER IN THE CLASSROOM

Traditional classrooms are especially steeped in traditions and constrained by institutional rules. However, because the typical classroom exists for the purpose of learning, it is an excellent place in which to adapt Peace and Power approaches. Peace and Power complements many approaches to teaching and learning that emphasize greater student involvement and empowerment.

Peace and Power approaches can be a breath of fresh air in a classroom, but they can also confuse people when it is not clear why the shift is happening. The traditional teacher–student power imbalance is familiar to everyone who has attended school. The teacher has the power to grade, to offer opinions and judgments, and to speak. The institution defines the student as a receiver of grades, a receiver of the teacher’s opinions and judgments, and the listener. Overcoming these expectations for roles and behaviors is not easy, and some institutional expectations cannot be ignored (such as the recording of grades to represent the achievement of a certain curricular or institutional standard).

Three Peace and Power values that classroom participants usually welcome are:

- empowerment for all,
- demystification of content and processes (especially processes for grades), and
- creating unity and community.

Although you might assume that these values are central to what education is all about, they are ironically consistently undermined by typical classroom traditions. When a teacher brings alternatives to the classroom that clearly enact the values of empowerment, community, and demystification, dramatic change occurs in how teaching and learning occur.

Although the values of empowerment, community, and demystification seem easy to embrace, the actual process of making the shift is a big challenge for everyone. Some students welcome the change; others respond with varying degrees of reserve, and still others object at the outset. If people who object have no alternatives, it may not be possible to make the shift. When individuals who object have a choice (for example, they can enroll in another section of a college course), they are free to leave the group and pursue an alternative. Individuals who are initially hesitant but willing to stay with the group frequently relate moving stories about the inner transformations that occur for them during the group’s gatherings.

WHAT DO WE DO ONCE WE SELECT A PEACE AND POWER VALUE?

The ways in which the ideas of Peace and Power influence the work of groups in hierarchical institutions will differ greatly from group to group. The value the group members decide to adopt as their principle guides their choice of method. For example, if a classroom
group decides to work with the Power of Sharing, there are many ways this can be done. They can share leadership through the rotating role of the convener and share participation by using the rotating chair during discussions. The group may choose a traditional lecture format for some classes as an avenue for enacting the value of sharing by the teacher to overcome knowledge imbalances. Or the group can choose to have the teacher lecture for part of the class time, with rotating-chair style of discussion for another part of the time. In addition, the group members can also share drafts of their written work with one another as a way to exchange ideas freely. The possibilities are unlimited.

The PEACE powers in Chapter 3 and the commitments in Chapter 4 are the basis for the suggestions in the following sections. Here the suggestions take into account typical challenges that you will encounter when you bring Peace and Power into an existing hierarchical institution. Some suggestions focus on individual behaviors, but all reflect fundamental shifts of value and attitude embraced by the whole group. For each value I have noted key Peace and Power processes that can help your group make the value real in action.

**POWER OF PROCESS**

Required structures such as objectives, time frames, or evaluation procedures are used as tools that provide a structure from which to work, but they are not the focal point. The process is the important dimension; the structure is only a tool and nothing more. How you interact with one another becomes the central focus. Your group takes the time to discuss your process along with the content in a classroom, or the business of the work group. Priorities related to decision-making shift, so that the urgency of making decisions lessens and the group learns to value the wisdom that comes with the process. Key process: closing.

**POWER OF LETTING GO**

All participants let go of old habits and ways to make room for personal and collective growth. Teachers and work-group chairs let go of power-over attitudes and ways of being; class participants and work-group members let go of tell-me-what-to-do attitudes and ways of being. Those who tend to dominate discussion let go of their tendency to speak. Those who tend to remain silent let go of their tendency to sit back and watch. All participants move into ways of being that are personally empowering and that nurture the empowerment of others. All participants share their ideas, but shift to a focus of fully hearing and understanding others’ points of view. Key process: rotating chair.

**POWER OF THE WHOLE**

Mutual help networks within the group are encouraged. Old competitive habits are replaced with actions that reflect cooperation. Each individual makes sure that everyone in the group has any and all information that is required to be successful. Every individual is responsible for using their talents and skills to address the interests of the group as a whole. Each participant, whether
teacher or student, leader or member, is accountable to the whole group for negotiating specific agendas, keeping the group informed about absences, leaving early, arriving late, or initiating activities. Key processes: Check-in and closing.

**POWER OF COLLECTIVITY**

Each participant is taken into account in the group’s planning-in-process. The group works to address the needs of those who are moving into individual journeys where others may not be going. The group in some way addresses the needs of those who are having specific struggles. Individuals do not compete with one another. Instead, the group acknowledges and addresses everyone’s needs as equally valuable. The group takes into account every point of view within the group in making decisions. Key processes: Rotating chair and circling.

**POWER OF SOLIDARITY**

The group recognizes solidarity as coming from the expression of differing points of view so that all can understand and integrate them into a richer and fuller appreciation of every individual and of the group. Out of this appreciation, each individual participates in clarifying the principle(s) that the group chooses to embrace. By actively seeking to understand the differing perspectives each person brings, the group can more fully understand what sustains them as a group. Key processes: rotating chair and Peace and Power decision-building.

**POWER OF SHARING**

All participants bring talents, skills, and abilities related to the work of the group and actively engage in sharing their talents. Leaders and teachers enter groups with previously developed capabilities that are shared according to the needs of the group and in consideration of the structure-as-tool. Members and participants enter the group with personal talents, backgrounds, and experiences that everyone values and shares. All participants enter the group open to what others can share and to learning from every other member. Key process: Check-in and closing.

**POWER OF INTEGRATION**

The group acknowledges all dimensions of the situation in planning their work. Each individual’s unique and self-defined needs are acknowledged and integrated into the process. Everyone—not just the leader—participates in shaping how the group’s work is done. The first portion of each gathering is set aside as a time for everyone to express their priorities, needs, and wishes for the gathering so that the group can integrate these as a part of the process for that gathering. Key process: check-in.

**POWER OF NURTURING**

The group respects each participant fully and unconditionally and regards every person as
necessary and integral to the experience of the group. The group plans tasks, activities, and approaches to nurture the gradual growth of new skills and abilities, ensuring that every participant can be successful in reaching the goals of the group and in meeting individual needs. Critical reflection, practiced with the intention of nurturing one another’s growth, becomes a powerful tool to assist one another in being successful. Key process: closing.

**POWER OF DISTRIBUTION**

Resources required for the work of the group (information, books, funds, space, transportation, equipment) are equally available and accessible to all members of the group. People share resources that individual members might purchase, such as books, equipment, or transportation (for example, through libraries, laboratories, resource rooms, or sharing among members), so that any individual who chooses not to use personal resources in this way—or who cannot—has equal access to the material. The group addresses issues arising from material inequalities among members openly to expose and overcome power imbalances perpetuated by economic privilege and disadvantage. Key process: rotating chair.

**POWER OF INTUITION**

The process that occurs and what you address in the group depend as much on the experience of the moment as on any other factor. What emerges as important for the group to address in the moment is what happens. The group lets go of what “ought” to happen to make possible what will happen. When institutional timelines or performance expectations have to be a priority but the group also has other priorities of its own, the group members weigh which priority comes first and discuss how they can still address both priorities. Key process: check-in.

**POWER OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

The group values ethical dimensions of the process as fundamental to the goals and purposes assigned to the group by the institution. The group considers every decision in terms of its ethical dimensions. Part of each gathering is devoted to a closing (appreciation, critical reflection, and affirmation) as a way to move to group awareness of the values represented in what is done and to consider if these are the values the group intends. Key process: closing.

**POWER OF DIVERSITY**

The group plans and enacts deliberate processes to integrate points of view of individuals and groups whose perspectives they do not usually address. The group deliberately includes experiences (through writings, personal encounters, poetry, song, drama, etc.) of minority groups, of different classes, of different countries, and of women. Key process: Rotating chair.

**POWER OF RESPONSIBILITY**

All participants assume full responsibility as the agents for their roles in the process.
Rotating conveners is one way to nurture leadership. Rotating chair ensures that everyone has a way to assume responsibility for what happens in group meetings. Each individual assumes responsibility to demystify the processes involved in all activities so that each member of the group has equal access to participating and understanding what is going on. In classrooms, grades become each individual’s responsibility. Everyone shifts focus to what they are learning and accomplishing. The teacher or work-group leader has a special responsibility to help demystify the workings of the institution and to make explicit the political process within the institution. Key process: closing.

**POWER OF CREATIVITY**

The group actively seeks new and novel approaches. The group challenges and creatively reconceptualizes old problems. The group imagines and considers new solutions, including even the wildest possibilities. The group assesses that which can be retained and valued in current practices, and why. Song, dance, music, and other forms of art are integrated into the group’s process as a way to inspire, to relieve stress, and to acknowledge the wholeness of experience. Key processes: closing and conflict transformation.

**POWER OF TRUST**

The group is diligent in using check-in and closing because of the value of these processes in knowing one another. Everyone speaks during these times to share personal insights and perceptions about what is happening personally and in the group. Over time, each person’s integrity shines through their intentions, words, and actions, building personal knowing and trust. Key processes: check-in and closing.