

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 foundation 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 critical 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 invaluablely 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 talk⁹. 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 mid- wife 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 group¹⁰. 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

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).

¹⁰ Peggy L. Chinn, “Gossip: A Transformative Art for Nursing Education” in the *Journal of Nursing Education* 29:7 (September 1990), pp. 318–321.

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 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.⁷ 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.

<i>Diversity</i>	<i>Divisiveness</i>
<i>When I am convinced that my point of view is the only reasonable one</i>	
I still take the time to find out what other people think	I keep repeating it to make sure that everyone hears it.
<i>When things become tense in a discussion, and sides are being drawn</i>	
I encourage discussion so that each point of view is presented fully.	I usually know what side I am on and grow impatient with drawn-out discussions.
<i>In a meeting or online</i>	
I make sure I express my point of view and limit my comments so that others may also speak to the issue.	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.
<i>When I am aware that something I have said or done has bothered others</i>	

I stop to consider what has happened and try to put myself in their shoes.	I figure it is their problem and it is up to them to work it out.
<i>When others are expressing their views</i>	
I actively listen and hear them out before framing my response. Online, I read carefully and make sure I understand their points of view.	I usually already know what they are trying to say and jump in to say what I have to say to move the discussion along.
<i>When there is disagreement in the group</i>	
I invite everyone to express their viewpoints so that we can all hear and consider these in reaching a decision.	I think the best way to deal with it is simply to agree to disagree and not get caught up in trivia.
<i>When I am unable to attend a scheduled meeting or unable to be online for a period of time</i>	
I make sure someone knows my concerns about relevant issues and is willing to take them to the group.	I figure I can catch up later and let people know what I 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.