



story groups

Unlocking You

Online Story Group Curriculum

Leader Guide

From the Authors of This Course

Hello!

We are so excited to be partnering with you to bring story groups into your particular community and populations. We have seen first-hand the power of guiding people into engaging their life through the lens of story. In our decades of working with individuals and groups, the framework of story has been one of the most powerful tools we have used in helping individuals gain personal insights and make meaningful shifts in their lives and relationships.

Our hope is that you use this curriculum to launch story groups in your particular areas of influence and begin to guide participants into their own life stories. To that end, we have created this leader guide. Our desire is that you make the groups you run your own. This manual is intended to support you toward those efforts.

I, Cyndi, also want you to know that as part of your purchase of this course, you have the opportunity to meet with me monthly for a year – for support, Q&A and guidance as you facilitate your own story groups. Being a leader in this work is not easy and we all need places where we can receive encouragement and support as we do this meaningful work.

We hope this is just the beginning for you and that ongoing groups can eventually form and story communities can begin to develop and take shape. We are honored that you chose to partner with us as we work to bring the power of story to an ever growing number of people and communities.

With much respect for the work you do,

Cyndi & Steve Mesmer





Welcome!

We are honored that you have this book in your hands. It means you are a serious learner of life and desire the practical tools needed to facilitate a story group, based on the methodology of The Allender Center and other narrative story methods. It also means you feel ready and desire a practical guide for how to run your own story group in order to unlock change on behalf of others.

This guide serves as a blueprint, a how-to guide designed to assist you with practical tools, teaching videos, tips along the way, and a separate guide for your participants. There is nothing gained from reinventing the proverbial wheel. Our hope is this guide provides you with what you need to get started. It can serve as a stand-alone or, is best put to use, alongside training provided by the Art of Living Counseling Center offerings (artoflivingcounseling.com).

No two groups are the same based on the leader's style and care. Know you bring your uniqueness to this guide. You uniquely hold the key to exactly how your unique story group will be facilitated. No one can do this for you. If you only emulate other leaders, your unique way of facilitating would be missing from the world.

Please hold this guide loosely and imagine yourself as an artist. The Art of Living Counseling Center bases its name on the premise that life is best understood as an art form rather than a series of accomplishments. Nothing could be truer when it comes to facilitating a story group. As a leader of your group, you hold stories unique to you, providing you with the particular style, cadence, and direction that your group will take.

Know, unique one, that who you are, including your evolving story, will be part of the unique artistry in how you engage others' stories. Therefore, the more you engage your own story with kindness and curiosity, and get to know yourself and what you bring, the more you will be able to rest in what you offer.

Thank you for willingness to serve others on this journey. Let's begin!

NOTE: This serves as a guide, independent of group leaders and/or groups facilitators. The Art of Living Counseling Center or use of this guide cannot be held responsible for any harm incurred by facilitation or participation.

Statement of Confidentiality

(Please read aloud, have participants sign and keep the page in their participant guide)

We desire for this group to be a safe place for all individuals to show up authentic, vulnerable and share struggles, celebrations and stories of harm. We are aware that humans are messy individuals and that at times we don't always show up in safe ways but we commit to move in a direction of being safe for one another. We all agree that ALL INFORMATION shared in our group time together including details of personal stories, additional personal information shared by participants, facilitators or guest's stories, personal examples in teaching used, and any video's shared be kept strictly confidential and not be shared with anyone outside of this group.

Please honor and respect their vulnerability by keeping any and all information shared confidential.

Additionally, in groups such as this, people can and will get triggered. I ask that group participants commit to address any group related issues or dynamics within the group. Please refrain from talking about group members with ill intent, or group issues outside of the group and instead readdress any concerns or triggers the next time group is in session. Additionally, should you feel a need to process how to bring an issue to group with me in an individual session, you will commit to bring that issue to the group when appropriate. Your signature represents a recommitment to this confidentiality statement. Thank you!

Signature

Date

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How To Best Utilize This Guide

This guide accompanies the Art of Living Counseling Center course which includes the following:

Downloadable videos available purchased with this guide.

Downloadable Participant Guide to be used by your group members. This includes the Meeting Agreement form, Confidentiality Agreement, as well as teaching handouts, discussion questions, and additional reflection questions.

This guide includes teaching notes to accompany the teaching videos, as well as weekly tips to use regarding common issues that leaders encounter.

Please note that each week your group should include the following:

- Weekly check-in to bring connection and cohesiveness to your group
- Teaching video to watch together as a group on each teaching week (optional but recommended)
- Discussion questions found here and in the Participant Guide
- Optional reflection questions for participants to consider on their own

NOTE: Weeks four, six, eight and ten are designed to be for when stories are read by participants. Therefore, there are no teaching notes or videos to collectively watch on these weeks.

It is recommended that you read this guide thoroughly and then refer to it, as needed, when clarification or reminders are needed, along with the video tips. Situations with your group are likely to arise and it is best to check the Table of Contents to see if it is addressed in this guide.

It is recommended that you work through this guide with a co-facilitator or professional who can help you navigate complexities of group work.

Starting a story group is not for the faint of heart. Many decisions need consideration prior to beginning:

- What is the reason I desire to form this group?
- Who do I desire to serve? Who do I currently know? How do I screen for appropriateness?
- When will we meet? How often?
- Where will we meet?
- Will I use all the videos for the teaching time? Are there subjects I would like to teach myself?
- Will I have a cofacilitator? If so, what role will they assume?
- What will I charge the group members to maximize commitment and honor my expertise?
- Who will I turn to when I need consultation?
- What will I do if/when I need refer someone to a counselor? Am I prepared to do this?



Pace and Format of Group Meetings

As a group facilitator, choices need to be made upfront regarding how your group functions. The format and pace of your group is based on a number of variables including the following:

- Group size (we suggest 8 participants besides yourself and a co-facilitator)
- Group format (in-person group or virtual group on a platform like Zoom)
- Your personal capacity, availability and preferences
- Group participants' own personal journeys and commitment level

We recommend:

- Scheduling 12 weekly meetings or one 4-day intensive (long weekend or two weekends). This may be paced as you'd like to promote group safety and continuity.
- Picking a regular day/time, as well as a consistent place to avoid confusion prior to each group meeting. We strongly recommend avoiding meeting in a public place or even a space that could be easily interrupted.
- Each weekly meeting lasting 90 minutes or 2 hours, or a weekend lasting 8 hours with breaks and lunch between.
- Assembling a calendar, listing the dates to clearly communicate to the group. A sample is provided below as well as in the Appendix.
- Reading and copying the Confidentiality Agreement found in session one and in the Appendix of this guide. A glossary and list of resources is also provided for you as a leader.
- Modifying the sample schedule below to meet your specific and unique needs but be aware of how the lessons are condensed.



Sample Schedule (12-Week)

Week One: _____ [Date]
Introduction to Story

Week Two: _____ [Date]
How to Write and Attend to Another's Story

Week Three: _____ [Date]
How We Are Alienated From Ourselves and Collective Community Through
Betrayal, Powerlessness and Marring

Week Four: _____ [Date]
STORY week – Two participants read stories

Week Five: _____ [Date]
Attachment: Its Impact and Healing

Week Six: _____ [Date]
STORY week – Two participants read stories

Week Seven: _____ [Date]
What Happens When We Are Misnamed

Week Eight: _____ [Date]
STORY week – Two participants read stories

Week Nine: _____ [Date]
How We Are Invited and Participate in Reenactments of Our Core Wounds

Week Ten: _____ [Date]
STORY week – Two participants read stories

Week Eleven: _____ [Date]
What Does It Mean To Grieve Our Stories?

Week Twelve: _____ [Date]
Healing is a Lifelong Process



NOTE: If you have less than eight participants, you may choose to adapt your schedule so there is just one story on a given night, along with an open Q&A time about the topics covered in previous weeks. If your group members are more experienced and have been meeting together for a long time, you may opt for less teaching and two stories per participant. Also consider using some of the At-Home questions for discussion.

Option: 4-Day Intensive

Consider coordinating a Thursday – Sunday or two weekends on Friday/Saturday, 9:00-5:00 (with lunch and two 15-minute breaks)

Note that your group meetings may or may not allow time to cover every question in the Participant Guide. Assess what is reasonable for everyone to amply share based on your number of participants. A good rule of thumb is to engage fewer questions with more depth that includes everyone's opportunity to participate.

BIPOC, LGBTQIA and Marginalized Individuals

BIPOC stands for "Black, Indigenous, People of Color" and is an acknowledgement that this particular marginalized people group experiences injustices that are systemic in an American white, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied culture. This is significant when referring, for example, to the course's reference to one's "family of origin."

"LGBTQ" stands for "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (or Questioning), Intersex, and Asexual. It is important for you as the leader to ask how someone prefers to identify. This is unique for each person and is courteous to ask rather than assume.

Be certain that you are careful to ask people their understanding of terms as you move through your group. For example, as Abby Wong-Heffter says, the term "family of origin" may be a confusing term since, in her Chinese-American blended family of origin, "family" not only includes her biological mother, father, and siblings, but also aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, or even neighbors who are an integral part of the family culture. Similarly, someone who grew up with same-sex attractions will have an additional layer of complexity to their unique story of development. Recognizing and naming these complexities that are rooted in one's upbringing is a significant part of story work.

These are just a couple examples where more awareness may be needed. If you are unfamiliar with those in your group who are in a different demographic, ask questions of clarification and consider consulting with mentors or The Art of Living Counseling Center for recommended resources.

Somatic Care

Before deciding the pace of the group and the material, do an honest evaluation of this season of your life. Consider how much time you will need preparing group meetings, as well as your capacity to hold the stories of your participants. Ask yourself how you will care for yourself immediately following each group session. Is there a practice or ritual that you will practice? Consider engaging in a physical outlet (yoga, meditation, prayer, walking, etc.) so that your body has a release from the stories of harm you will hold during your group.

Also, keep in mind that whether you are facilitating an in-person group or a virtual group, your group members may need additional support from a local therapist to help them navigate patterns or blind spots that go beyond the scope of your group. Additionally, know who is in your corner in terms of a mentor or therapist whom you can turn to as a means to receive your own care during this group process.

Types of Groups

It is important to know which type of group you are forming based on the setting and role you play as a facilitator. There are generally three types of group settings –

- Clinical (facilitated by a licensed therapist)
- Church (facilitated within a structure presumably under a church hierarchy)
- Community, Neighborhood, or Friend group (facilitated by a peer)

Each of these settings have a unique set of advantages and challenges of which to be aware. On the following page is a set of questions to consider.



	Clinical Setting	Church Setting	Community/ Friend
Do I have a legal responsibility?	Yes	No (This is not therapy)	No (This is not therapy)
Do I have an ethical responsibility?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Do I need malpractice insurance?	Yes	No	No
Should I use a confidentiality agreement?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Should I charge a fee?	Yes Requiring them to pay up front increases commitment	Yes Asking a small amount up front increases commitment	No It is recommended to have them sign a commitment form
Will the group feel like therapy?	Yes	Yes	Yes
Will there be a shift in the relationship?	Yes	Possibly	Possibly
Is it important for group members to be in individual therapy while in group?	Yes Have a list of referrals available	Yes Have a list of referrals available	Yes Have a list of referrals available
Is it important for you (the facilitator) to have someone to consult?	Yes	Yes	Yes



Virtual Groups



Story groups are effective as either an in-person or virtual group format. Here are a few of the tips found to be most helpful when choosing to do a group virtually:

1. Virtual groups should rely on video conferencing that ensures security. This is easy to search on the internet and currently includes platforms like Zoom and V-See. Others, such as Skype, are not compliant with general security protection.
2. Each person should have their own screen, if at all possible. If you have couples, ask them to use separate computers so that each person's face is on screen alone. This provides autonomy for a fuller level of transparency and engagement in the virtual space.
3. As you begin, ask participants how familiar they are with the virtual platform. If using Zoom, for instance, ask them to physically give a thumbs up, thumbs down, (or somewhere in the middle) in regard to how familiar they are with words like "Gallery View or Unmute." This will provide an indication of basic navigation tools you may need to review. Be sure you are comfortable with the technology yourself.
4. Decide the settings you desire prior to the first meeting. This means thinking through if you want people sitting in a virtual "waiting room," having access to chat, and other functions available.
5. Be on time and set an expectation that the group will start on time.
6. Upon entering the virtual space, greet each person by name each week. Prepare to be on time so you are able to do this.
7. Ask participants to always have their camera on, except, perhaps, if they need to move to a different room in their home. Additionally, ask participants to click mute when a group member is reading their story.
8. Create a ritual as you formally begin. This should look different after each person is in the "room" and welcomed by name. Perhaps light a candle or begin with three simple breaths, indicating you are now together in a sacred space.
9. Set the tone and let participants know they can expect technology glitches. Internet connections will sometimes fail so have a plan that allows for grace and everyone understands what to expect when this occurs. It likely means reentering the virtual room by the link provided.
10. Call participants by name and do so often. Being called by name in an online platform is grounding and provides a sense of inclusivity and unity amongst all group members.
11. Be aware of your body. Regulating your own emotions allows others to mirror the resting

posture they will see in your face muscles, particularly your eyes and jaw.

12. Speak at a slower pace than usual. Similarly, listen at a slower pace knowing participants may not hear as quickly as you speak due to technology.
13. Intentionally make time to tend to the body in the course of your group. At a natural break, stand together, stretch, or find ways to bring energy to your virtual space.
14. A virtual platform is different in that you can't "go around" in a particular order. Everyone's "gallery view" looks different on their screen. This means it is up to you to call on people or rely on people to volunteer. Getting into a habit allows a normal part of your virtual group protocol.
15. A virtual platform is taxing so allow for longer pauses, linger in silence, and playfulness along the way.

Evaluating Participants' Appropriateness for Groups

Regardless of the type of group you form, it is important to those who you choose or allow to participate in your group. Setting up your group for a good experience begins here. Consider a 45-minute conversation or session to assess the following factors for appropriateness.

Potential Participants Must Have:

- The ability to regulate their own emotions and keep themselves safe.
- Self-awareness of their issues and how they relate to others.
- Willingness to be redirected (more curious and agreeable than defensive or overly compliant).
- Ability to commit to the full set of sessions. Consistent attendance creates safety for the group.
- Awareness that their own issues are likely to be triggered, particularly if they have only seen the facilitator in a one-on-one setting.
- Self-awareness to hold both their own issues and others' issues in the group, knowing themes in their stories will intersect.
- No possible conflicts of interest with other group members where emotional safety is at risk.

Structuring an Initial Group & The Facilitator Role

It is important as you begin a group for the first time to understand the importance of your role as a facilitator. The Socrates quote, “To know thyself is the beginning of wisdom” plays well here as you consider many of the aspects of your group. Consider some of the following as you begin:

1. New groups (whether the individuals know each other or not) need structure and containment for safety to be established.
2. This curriculum provides teaching videos to use with your group. However, you may teach it yourself as well. Either way, be sure to monitor your time.
3. As previously suggested, it is encouraged to plan groups for 90 minutes or two hours. This creates the rhythm for each member to check-in, teaching, and enough time for questions and discussion.
4. Individuals who have not done previous story work will likely not understand the impact of bringing their own story or what it is like to attend to another’s story.
5. It is suggested to model a story of your own on week two, particularly if you have a cofacilitator who can model engaging the story and encourage participants to engage also. Your story should be genuine yet engaged previously in another setting.
6. Your ability to contain the group, yet allow them to freely take risks, is key for safety.
7. On participant story weeks (weeks four, six, eight and ten), it is recommended to have a shorter check-in order to allow enough time for engagement and a short break in between story readers.
8. It is suggested to engage stories for about 35-45 minutes. Longer will be taxing for most. Less time likely doesn’t allow for the natural resistance that initially occurs in the reader. Less time also may not allow enough time to adequately name what needs naming in the story.
9. As a leader, you will likely get more skilled at seeing and naming within stories. Allow yourself to naturally develop your own style of story engagement, as well as group facilitation.
10. Allowing silence (as participants truly think) allows the discussion questions on teaching weeks to create space, safety, and cohesiveness amongst the group.

Common Struggles in Group Work

About Group Member Presentations

- Be curious about the purposefulness of how group members present.
- Be curious about what participants might be protecting themselves from and what it might cost them to let it go.
- Be wondering about connections between how a group member shows up and the way this is connected to their story.
- Be curious about what comes up for you related to a group members presentation.
- Members need to know you want goodness for them and that you are for them.
- When naming a participant's presentation directly and then redirecting them, be mindful of the presence of shame. Naming and redirecting feels highly exposing. Attend to their shame with kindness.

Group Member Roles

Dr. Irvin Yalom explains that no "problematic group member" exists without the group itself. The idea is that each of us have patterns that, given the group dynamics, emerge as problematic. It is important for you, as the facilitator, to be aware of this since it is common that any, or all, of the following roles may be exhibited in your 12-week experience. Patterns that unconsciously surface replicate an individual's family experience.

As a facilitator, you have the unique opportunity to provide a new experience for group members who lacked attunement, containment or repair in their families of origin. For instance, consider the following roles that may emerge and a possible way of responding. These are effective for both in-person and virtual groups. Also, notice that each facilitator response begins with the words, "I'm aware..." This is a disarming way to address the issue in a gentle yet effective way.

Note: These response only apply after several weeks of a pattern.

1. *Monopolist*: This is the person who tends to dominate conversation, even beyond their turn. Often, the tendency is due to a lack of comfortability with silence or a need to be appear smart or wise. Regardless of the reason, the other group members will look for you to address this.

Facilitator response:

"I'm aware of a dynamic here. The majority of the group is allowing Lauren [the monopolist] to carry the burden of the dialogue. I'm curious what that is about for each of you." Be open and willing to listen. As you allow silence, the focus of attention turns to group members and away from Lauren whose awareness has just been awakened. Typically, group members will remain quiet but hopefully someone will boldly admit it's hard to interject. Affirm their courage and ask if other group members share this. As a

group, agree that sharing time proportionally brings more safety to the discussion.

2. *Silent Observer*: This individual may appear to be more of a spectator than a group participant.

Facilitator response: (Again, only address when a pattern is observed)

"I'm aware that you have been quiet and I'm curious about what you are thinking. Would you be willing to share your response to question three?"

3. *Advice Giver*: This group member has a recommended book, podcast, quote or verse in response to someone's story. Typically, providing something alleviates some discomfort they experience while sitting with others in their pain.

Facilitator response:

"I'm aware you have some wonderful resources to share which is great. However, my invitation for everyone in the group is to simply be with them while we are together. You can provide additional resources after our meeting is over. Does that make sense to everyone?"

4. *Prayer Warrior*: Much like the advice giver, the "prayer warrior" may suggest praying after a particularly difficult response from a group participant. While there is nothing wrong with the desire to pray for someone, it typically makes the one praying feel better, regardless if it proves beneficial for others. This needs to be addressed since each of you and your group members have a different kind of experience with praying.

Facilitator response:

"I'm aware that praying may calm you down. However, that might not be the experience of everyone. So, I'd invite you to simply be with _____ (person's name) right now, trusting God is battling within our group all the time."

5. *Performer*: This is the individual who uses vivid or sensationalistic language in order to draw attention, yet isn't really vulnerable in the process of engaging in the discussion. They might say something like, "I'm prone to not trust very much. But, a couple years ago, when my rapist was finally charged, things changed. My husband has been very patient with me so I've learning to trust more..." Clearly, there may be awkward silence in this situation.

Facilitator response:

"I'm aware you just shared something very vulnerable but without context. Is the rape something you would like to discuss?"

6. *Highjacker*: This is the person who is not very helpful because they turn the conversation back to themselves. They hijack the conversation and make it about themselves.

Facilitator response:

"I'm aware you have a similar experience but let's stay with Lauren and her story right now."

7. *Sympathy-Giver*: This group member offers "candy" by the kind of sympathy they give.

It may sound like they want goodness for the person but their care sounds patronizing or empty. Brene Brown makes a clear distinction between empathy and sympathy: “Empathy fuels connection; sympathy drives disconnection.” Empathy never begins with “At least...” but instead conveys, “You are not alone.”

Facilitator response:

“I’m aware we may have pulled you away from what you were saying. Can we go back to _____ (name a specific emotion or particularity).”

8. *Refuser of Care:* Most of us struggle with care when it is sincerely offered. We have, after all, learned to survive with little, so genuine care is uncomfortable and often rejected. When you sense a person is refusing care, you can’t insist they receive it. But you may be able to still respond with the following, creating kindness and safety amongst your group members.

Facilitator response:

“I’m aware that care is not frequently offered when we are young so it may be difficult to receive in our group. I would invite you to remember the eyes of those in this group right now. We are for you and we desire goodness on your behalf.”



**story
groups**
Unlocking You



SESSION ONE:

Introduction to Story

Facilitator Tips

Watch the Facilitator Tip Video for Session One

How exciting! Your first meeting is likely one of nerves, for you and your participants. Be assured that you've got this – and your participants are FAR MORE nervous than you. Set the stage and put them at ease with very specific (and simple) instructions for the session. Whether meeting together virtually or in-person, consider a shared screen or flipchart page with the following:

Welcome! We are so glad you are here!

What you can expect tonight:

- Welcome – Leaders share schedule/considerations
- Introductions– 20 min (Explain that all will check-in to begin each week)
- Watch Video #1: Introduction to Story – 15 min
- Watch second Video #1: How Engaging Stories Works – 20 min
- Allow for questions about the video – 5 min
- Confidentiality statement (read, explain, sign) – 10 min
- Discussion questions – 25 min
- Closing

Welcome

Be prepared to genuinely greet everyone and provide a schedule of the 12-week session (sample provided in Appendix). Be sure participants have been provided the downloadable Participant Guide in order to follow along on a weekly basis. Also be sure YOU have a participant guide so you know exactly what your participants have in front of them.

Introductions

Begin with yourself as a sample of how you would like them to introduce themselves. As Cyndi explains in the facilitator tips video, say your name and a little bit about who you are, as well as your family of origin. Explain, for instance, some of the dynamics of your family and what it was like growing up in your house. This provides a framework for others and the level of transparency in which you will engage each week.

Videos and Check-Ins

This week's video segments are divided into two sections. The first video is an introductory session into the origin of this course and why beginning to see your life as a story, in a group setting, can have such a powerful life-transforming impact in our healing. We would suggest playing this video to begin as it sets the stage for the group time. Perhaps, as indicated above, include a brief explanation between videos, of how a "check-in" typically goes



Facilitator Tips

since this will be something to begin with each week. “I’m feeling a bit anxious tonight but generally I’m excited. I wanted to provide this group because I have been served by this type of group in the past, etc.

The second video “How Engaging Stories Works” provides more details about the ingredients of a story. If you choose to teach yourself, there are teaching points provided in the next section.

Confidentiality Statement

Have participants locate the confidentiality statement in the back appendix section of their participant guide. Wait for everyone to have it in front of them, even if on screen. Read the statement aloud and explain the importance of confidentiality. Explain that even telling a spouse details of stories, without a name, is a violation of confidentiality. Additionally, if they are talking to a friend on the other side of the country, the same confidentiality is expected. Story work people often connect and it is possible that connections are made. Also explain that if there are issues amongst group members that come up in group, they should be addressed in group.

Consider the following as you review the teaching video for this first week:

- Know your participants will be anxious meeting the first week, so your energy and containment will help them feel welcome and at ease. Greet them when they first arrive and introduce yourself. Let them know you are so glad they are there. Names are important, so use them as often as you can. It is also helpful to have name tags, especially for the first few weeks until everyone gets comfortable. If using a virtual platform, encourage each participant to post their name under their video square.
- Let participants know that a new group can feel anxiety-producing and that you too are always anxious when starting a new group or meeting new people. Also, mention that it is common for new participants to secretly ask, “What did I sign up for?” They may even be tempted to leave. Reassure them this is common and typically, by the final week, the group is sad to end the session.
- Be upfront about the courage they have when vulnerable. Researcher, Brené Brown, often calls this a ‘vulnerability hangover’ which can carry over into the day following group. It often feels shameful – largely because we are unaccustomed to sharing such hidden parts of ourselves or showing emotions. Invite participants to offer kindness to themselves in those moments.
- Create containment each week by letting group members know what you will be doing that week. People like to know what to expect, and it calms them. Give them a schedule beforehand, either the schedule provided or create your own that fits with what you want to create for your group.



Facilitator Tips

- Begin with introductions, even if many in the group know each other. Model vulnerability. This will set up for them to share more vulnerably which will help your groups sense of cohesiveness. Let yourself be impacted by your group members. If you have a co-facilitator, have one of you introduce yourself first and the other last.
- Lastly, know your group makeup and understand that and be sensitive to the fact that people have all different cultures, experiences and backgrounds. Be aware of who you are and what you bring to the room. Acknowledge obvious differences that make up your group. For instance, "I am aware that there are only two males in a group of females," or, if you have only one black, brown or other minority member, acknowledge it. "I am aware that you are in a group of white faces and I just want to name that since there are implications emotionally and in your body. I am grateful for your presence and want to be mindful of any dynamics that may come up that might impact you in a negative way. I would imagine you have navigated this before and I want this to be a safe place for you."



SESSION ONE:

Introduction to Story

Teaching Notes and Discussion Questions

 32:19

Video for Session One teaching is provided in two sections. See Facilitator Tips in previous section for how to best utilize this.

Throughout this curriculum and group experience, you are invited into a powerful process of seeing your life through the lens of story. This framework will help you discover and unlock stories in your life that are robbing you of the life you are meant to live.

When we go through overwhelming moments in life, we often lack the resources and settings that can help us process these experiences. We don't have words to express the powerful feelings that arise. We might be too ashamed to even bring up an incident or we lack safe people to talk to about our experiences, whether those are personal experiences of harm, collective experiences or both.

Whatever the reasons, the result is the same: Harmful experiences remain unprocessed and hidden away inside of us. Hidden, but not silent. The unprocessed experiences of our childhood continue to speak and shape how we see ourselves and how we relate to others. And since these experiences are overwhelming and painful, we create defenses around ourselves to protect us from having to deal with the pain. Our bodies are wired to do so. Our bodies work hard at looking for possible threats and we will use whatever means to protect ourselves.

Why Groups?

Story groups are powerful because they place us in an environment where we invite others to identify our defense structures and help us engage our pain in meaningful and healing ways. When we courageously choose to lower our defenses and allow access into the hidden places in our hearts, change becomes possible. Telling our stories to one another in these supportive environments brings us into contact with our unprocessed pain. It is at this point we can begin to address and honor how these experiences have shaped and impacted us.

Why Story?

1. Stories are universally and deeply familiar to us. Intuitively, we attune to stories.
2. Our brain is wired for story. Researchers see our brains neurologically light up when both listening to and telling stories.



The Framework for Understanding the Past, Present and Future

In Dan Allender's book, *To Be Told*, four core parts of story are introduced. These will be discussed in more detail later but this serves as an introduction:

Note to Facilitators: The underlined sections of this guide serve as an answer key for blanks that are found in the Participant Guide. Be sure to be aware of this as your participants seek clarity about the fill-in-the-blanks in their book.

1. Innocence

We are born with a wide-eyed innocence about us, full of wonder and potential. We easily have faith (trust), hope and love.

2. Innocence shattered

It does not take long before our faith is broken and we are betrayed, causing us to be skeptical and isolated. Similarly, our hope can be broken, leaving us a powerless stranger who feels we do not belong. Love also inevitably leaves us marred, often splitting us. We long to be made whole and innocent again.

3. Innocence sought

Our loss of innocence cannot be tolerated very long before we seek to reclaim those broken parts. However, we are unsuccessful in our attempts, leaving us to become an orphan, stranger and a widow or widower. Our coping mechanisms seek to cover up the parts of us that have been destroyed.

4. Innocence reclaimed

Story work is unique in that lost and broken stories "re-member" us – putting us back together. This requires patience, grief, and authentic community as we invite others into hidden parts and stories. It is a lifetime process toward becoming a priest, prophet, and queen/king.



Ingredients of a Story

According to Donald Miller and others, a story is a character, within a particular setting, who wants something and overcomes conflict to get it. There are key components to analyze when looking at our personal narrative as a story:

1. Character

A fully developing character makes a far more interesting story. However, when we look at our own life, we often see an undeveloped character because we have an inaccurate view of our own main character. This is often true of supporting characters in our stories, as well. Because of these blind spots, we need others' eyes to identify and name contradictions, missing pieces, and undeveloped character descriptions.

2. Setting:

Every story has a backdrop or a place and time. It's important to know if a story takes place in the 80's or the 2000's since different cultural climates and belief systems were in place. Additionally, it is important to understand the location of the story since culture impacts this as well.

Types of Setting:

- Time
- Geography
- Cultural
- Micro Culture

3. Desire:

The main character's desire is the engine of the story. Therefore, uncovering what the main character wants is critical to understanding a person's experience. Desire is tricky. It both gets us moving and gets us in trouble. If our desire is fulfilled, it is fantastic but if it is unfulfilled, it is heartbreaking. Some characters try to kill their desires while others pursue them with abandon. Sometimes desires can appear foolish. Other times, desires are dangerous to reveal because they come at a high cost. Discovering the storyteller's desire will reveal much about your character's story.

4. Conflict

Every good story involves conflict and every main character experiences hardship or trauma of some kind. As Steve explained in the teaching video, there are two types of conflict: Necessary or cocoon-like conflict, and overwhelming or mason jar conflict.

5. Resolve:

All stories seek resolution. Some resolutions are false or temporary. True resolve comes when we enter the pain of our thwarted desires and hold the grief of our stories of harm. We need the eyes of others in order to provide new perspectives. Resolve comes over time and from a willingness to see our stories more accurately.



Note to Facilitators: These questions are in the participant guide and meant for group discussion after the teaching section. In future weeks, use the "At-Home Questions for discussion, as time allows.

Questions to Consider:

1. What do you think of the idea of considering your life a story where you are the main character? Is this something you've ever imagined before?
2. Can you name one or two experiences in which you remember experiencing a moment of innocence when you were younger? What did it feel like?
3. Can you identify one or two experiences of shattering you experienced as a child?
4. Can you name one or two ways you attempted to protect yourself from possible future experiences of betrayal, powerlessness or marring? (what defense structure might you have used?)

Session 1: Introduction to Story

At-Home Reflection Questions:

1. How would you describe you as the main character as a child?
2. What was the culture of your family of origin? What were the rules and norms in your family of origin that shaped you?
3. Name 1-2 things your character desired as a child?
4. Describe a time where your character faced overwhelming conflict. What did your character do in that situation?
5. Name a thwarted desire that your childhood character needs to grieve in order to find resolution.



SESSION TWO:

How to Write and Attend to Another's Story

Facilitator Tips

Watch the Facilitator Tip Video for Session Two

Be sure to model your check-in as you did last week. Continuity provides safety, predictability and stability for your group members. If you personally started check-in last week, with your co-facilitator checking in last, maintain that rhythm.

This week is foundational to your group. Rely on watching the video and fielding questions from your group participants that may arise after watching each section.

1. How to write a personal narrative
2. How to attend to another's story

Specific instructions for how to both write a story and attend to a story reader are in the participant guide and should be reviewed prior to the group meeting. Encourage group members to add questions or notes while attentively watching the video, particularly when examples are provided.

If you are facilitating the group with a co-facilitator, model how to both read and engage a story by bringing your own. Be sure it is a story you have already engaged and your co-facilitator has read in advance. Know this is a big risk for them and your correction may discourage further engagement. Feel free to coach the rest of the group as you go. Comments like, "That was a great insight, Joe. What did you notice on Sally's face that made you think of that?" help bring unity and confidence within group members. If time allows swap so your co-facilitator reads a story as you engage and facilitate the group's involvement.

Anticipate questions, as well as who in your group might be anxious, who might be over-confident, and who might remain quiet. Observations of your group members is essential since it often reveals data that may indicate their style of relating when in the group.

Be aware of the pace of your group meetings and monitor check-in time in particular. While it is great that people are getting to know each other, members should not be anticipating staying later than the scheduled time. Contain the meeting time well so group participants feel safe and honored.



SESSION TWO:

How to Write and Attend to Another's Story

Teaching Notes and Discussion Questions

23:12

While using the video, be sure you are clear of your expectations for your group members – namely that each participant will write a story and submit it to you one week prior to the date they are reading. The schedule in this curriculum indicates story reading on weeks four, six, eight, and ten but you may have adapted it for the number of participants in your group. Create a “sign-up” so your group members can select the date they would like to read a story. Then send them a copy of the revised final schedule. Emphasize the importance of attendance on weeks when they are the listener.

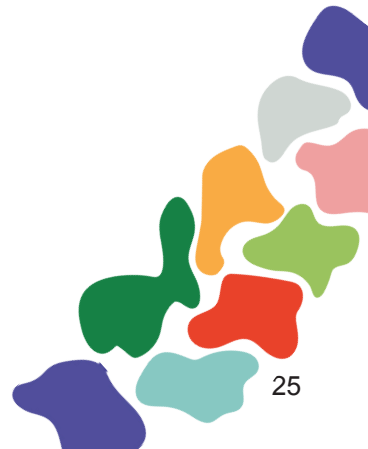
Story Assignment

1. Content:

Choose an event from your childhood that had a significant impact on you. And then write a story (600-800 words), describing the event. This event can be something that stands out in your memory as a personal tragedy or a confusing or painful memory that surfaces as you ponder this assignment.

And remember, even seemingly insignificant events, especially those that linger with you over the years, can be indicators of patterns of behavior, relationships or situations that need further exploration. The event you choose to write about may come from any of the following situations or something not listed below that stands out to you as having had a major impact on you or caused a disruption to your childhood norms. This may include:

- A move
- Divorce or remarriage
- Parental job loss
- A death that was significant to you
- Neglect or being left
- An awkward situation
- Any abuse of any kind (emotional, physical, sexual, spiritual)
- Death of a family member
- Unwanted comment or touch
- A sibling moving away
- A bullying experience
- Humiliation by a coach or a teacher



Our lives are filled with tragedy. It is in the midst of our tragedies, both past and present, that we will see how the waters of suffering have cut our terrain and formed the contours of our character. More than anything else, tragedies shape our identity and our character.

—Dr. Dan Allender, *To Be Told*

2. How to Write:

This writing assignment is designed to help you enter your story. There is a common saying writers use to guide their efforts: “Show, don’t tell.” For example, don’t tell your reader, “The flower is beautiful.” Rather, describe the details, such as, “The flower’s petals were like velvet and made me wonder if this is what love feels like.” This is the level of detail in which you should write.

When you begin writing your story, remember to include the setting details (the where and when your story occurred), some basic background information, and descriptive language about the characters in your story.

It is also important to know your characters’ emotional experience of the event.

- How did your younger self feel before, during, and after the incident?
- What kind of emotions or lack of emotions did your characters display?

As you write and engage this story, note any emotion that surfaces for you: anger, sadness, anxiety, rage, disgust, shame. Use these emotions to help you connect and understand this younger version of yourself. Incorporate these emotions into the story. Finally, make sure you use your 5 senses when writing this piece. What do you smell, hear, touch, taste and see?

3. Reflect:

When you have completed the story, please reflect on and write a few paragraphs about how this story impacted you. How did life change for you after? How did you engage and relate to others in relationships after this story? Look for patterns and themes that may have developed because of the impact of this story. Additionally, reflect on what you learned from experiencing the events of your story. How did your younger self cope with and adapt to life after the story took place? Also include your reflections on how this story is playing out today in your relationships.

4. Deadline and Input:

Your facilitator will provide guidance about submitting your story to them prior to reading it. We suggest sending a copy to them no later than 7 days before your assigned reading date.



How to Attend to Another's Story

Check in with yourself and assess lens and heart when listening to the reader's story.

- Is your perspective one of great regard for the individual reading their story? Do you see this as a privilege?
- Can you appreciate the courage it takes to read their story?
- How do you come as you listen? Assess your energy level, your access to your compassion/empathy towards others and your ability to attend well to another. Be proactive in compartmentalizing your own life stressors so you can engage this work well.
- Always approach the reader with deep respect, non-judgment and vivid curiosity.

What is happening in the reader when a story of tragedy is being read?

- Readers are most likely feeling anxious and uncertain as they bring their story. This is true for all people reading a story but especially true for first time readers. Be mindful of this fact.
- The more connected the reader is to their story the more they will be IN their story. This means their body, emotions and mind will be re-living the actual experience. We therefore need to be aware that we are also engaging and talking to a younger version of the reader. For example, if the reader is a 40-year old female, reading a story that takes place when she was 8 years old, then the 8 year old version of the reader will also be present in the room.
- The reader does not see everything in their story because they are seeing their story from one perspective: Inside the story. The reader will have missing pieces to their story simply due to his perspective.
- Keep in mind that we are dealing with stories of harm. The nature of trauma is that it blocks our ability to see ourselves, other characters and themes within their story, accurately. The reader needs others to kindly and lovingly help them see what they may be unable to see. So, even though something might seem obvious to you about the story being read, keep in mind, it may not be to the reader. Your perspective, as the observer, is potentially helpful to the reader, but never superior to the reader.

Our role in listening to a story is that of an Invited Guest. We, as listeners, have been invited into a vulnerable holy space in the reader's life. "Take off your shoes" and honor the space you have been invited into. Keep in mind you can only enter the story with the reader to the extent they will allow you. Some spaces may be closed for now. Respect that.

Facilitators – Ask participants to email you their written story at least one week prior to the week they read their story. This way you can provide questions and comments for them to consider. This is NOT for the purpose of revising or rewriting necessarily but provides them with your encouragement and thoughts.

At-Home Assignment:

1. Read through the “Story Assignment” and begin to identify potential stories of harm you might choose to write about for your group engagement. Make some initial notes about your character’s age, what your character wanted, the setting of your story, and the pressures and conflicts your character was facing.

If you have trouble remembering your childhood try breaking your childhood down into smaller sections. Some sample prompts are:

- Where was I in third grade (or any grade)?
- What was my school called?
- What was my teacher’s name?
- Did I walk or get a ride to school?
- What were weekday mornings like when I was in grade school?
- What did dinner time look like?
- What did specific holidays look like?
- Who was home when I came home from school?





SESSION THREE:

Facilitator Tips

How We Are Alienated From Ourselves and the Collective Community Through Betrayal, Powerlessness, and Marring

Watch the Facilitator Tip Video for Session Three

As you consider those in your group and the stories they will be reading, one important thing for you to be aware of is how trauma impacts the nervous system. Watch the Tip Video carefully for this session and be aware of the signs of someone who may be outside the window of tolerance, either hyper-aroused or hypo-aroused.

In either case, the story engagement is immediately delayed or postponed. If the person is outside the window of tolerance, your only focus is to make sure the individual is regulated. Please know that this may occur with the story reader or someone listening to the story who may get dysregulated.

- If someone does become dysregulated, the best thing you can do is to stay calm.
- Ask them to lock eyes with you and take deep breaths together.
- Ask them if they are able to feel their feet on the ground and their hands on the chair.
- As they slowly get regulated, have them take a sip of water or a mint.
- Provide time and space without other group members' interrupting until the individual is able to be present with you and the rest of the group. This may take the rest of the time you have as a group.
- Explain to the group that this happens occasionally and the priority is making sure the person is safe.
- If individual seems to move in a dorsal vagal response (freeze or appease), then invite them to some kind of movement like standing up, moving their arms or legs. You can even have yourself and the group join you in that. This may help their body 'wake up.'

Related to the teaching material, a common question is, "Can I only be ONE of these – orphan, stranger, or widow?" The truth is, due to harm we have all experienced, we have all of these parts, to one degree or another, that need re-mem-bering or redeeming.



SESSION THREE:

How We Are Alienated From Ourselves and the Collective Community Through Betrayal, Powerlessness, and Marring

Teaching Notes and Discussion Questions

 33:02

1. Innocence:

Pure; not yet spoiled; Free from blemish, flaw and without stain.

We are all meant to be people that are full of faith, hope and love.

We function better as human beings when faith, hope and love are most vibrant in us.

- Faith/Trust: Having the ability to trust others, to trust in the goodness of others, to remember the goodness from the past that allows for trust in the present and the future. We can rest and be carefree because of trust.
- Hope: The ability to imagine and dream for the future. To get excited and anticipate goodness to come.
- Love: To both give and receive love and pleasure and shelter non-duality (either/or thinking).

2. Innocence Shattered

We all have experienced (and will experience) betrayal, powerlessness, and marring, which shatters our innocence.

- Can you identify experiences where there was a shattering of your ability to trust?
- Can you identify experiences where there was a shattering of your ability to hope?
- Can you identify experiences where there was a shattering of your ability to both give and receive love?

3. Innocence Sought

We attempt to re-establish some sense of innocence by trying to recreate a world absent of shattering. We reason, "I must avoid the experience of betrayal, powerlessness and marring."

So we attempt to recreate the protection that we were meant to experience. We attempt to recreate innocence. But we can't go back to not experiencing the harm. This recreating process plays out in our styles of relating and in the archetypes of orphan, stranger and widow.



4. Innocence Reclaimed

We step back into our stories of harm in order to reclaim that which was lost, specifically as it relates to the orphan, stranger and widow.

The Orphan:

When there is a shattering of innocence through betrayal, we often feel abandoned and our orphan comes up for our main character. What gets shattered most prominently for the orphan is the ability to trust.

Betrayal is experienced, leading to a feeling of:

- Doubt or suspicion (loss of trust)
- Insecurity (not being protected)
- Vulnerability (not provided for and thus on our own)
- Shame (not wanting to have needs – toughen up)

Ways the orphan shows up:

- Hypervigilant and suspicious
- Attempts to be needless and self-sufficient
- Difficulty receiving from others
- Refuses rest, comfort and care
- Exhausted
- Trusts no one but him or herself
- Can be bitter

Reclaiming innocence for the orphan looks like:

- Understanding and blessing the orphan part that showed up to protect yourself
- Naming betrayal in particularity
- Learning to admit and receive care
- Enter grief in the moments you did not receive care
- Become able to hold the tension of naming what you needed (sometimes getting it and sometimes not)
- Receive good care
- Commit to a life of lament and gratitude

A Priest/Mentor will slowly emerge as an orphan heals. The priest is a reclaimed archetype for the orphan. We have a priest in all of us.

The priest is able to:

- Trust and welcome others
- Let go of things needing to be done our way
- Remember past change and movement
- Say yes or no
- Rest



- Ask for help and manage if the answer is “no”
- Mark both beauty and messiness
- Care for those around them
- Offer goodness from places of abundance rather than scarcity
- Create space for others
- Remember where they were when they feel hopeless
- Become a safe harbor

The Stranger:

When there is an experience of a shattering of innocence through powerlessness, that is when our stranger comes up for our character. What gets shattered most prominently for the stranger is hope.

Powerlessness is experienced, leading to a feeling of:

- Disillusionment (“I didn’t see that coming”)
- Lack of power or agency
- Profound disappointment
- Feeling like a fool

Ways the stranger shows up:

- Will not hope again, reasoning it is foolish
- Feels indifferent: “If I can’t control the future, I won’t care.”
- Withdraws and won’t let others close
- May control all they can and stay away from what they can’t control
- Will stay watchful and on “high-alert” to never be caught off-guard again
- May be cynical, feeling safer with cynicism as their friend

Reclaiming innocence for the stranger looks like:

- Understanding and blessing the stranger that showed up to protect
- Naming and grieving the harm that set up for needing the stranger to be birthed within
- Acknowledging that hope is both dangerous and beautiful
- Attending to your own heart
- Letting down walls of protection
- Attending to your own desire
- Dreaming of the future and imagining what could be
- Letting others into your dreams and desires
- Allowing others to celebrate with you
- Creating a community and finding your tribe

A Prophet will slowly emerge as a stranger heals:

- Has the ability to see others well
- Exposes the reality of the present moment

- Has the freedom to use his/her/their voice to speak against systems of oppression
- Uses what he/she/they sees and uses influence of power in service of others
- Invites others to dream and imagine goodness for the future
- Hopes on behalf of others
- Awakens hope and desire in others

The Widow/Widower:

The widow experienced a shattering of innocence through marring that splits ambivalence. Love has the unique ability to hold and engage with the paradoxes of life in a way that calls existence into greater belonging and harmony: Light and dark, sinner and saint, blessing and cursing. Love is the greatest virtue because at its heart is the ability to embrace a non-dual framework. Love makes space for all. Love is expansively inclusive and holds healthy boundaries. Love, when it is functioning optimally, doesn't split the world into either/or. The widow however, experiences a powerful duality: a great love and a great loss. These two powerful experiences create a tug of war, causing ambivalence. In order to survive the tension, the widow becomes polarized into categories of good/bad or either/or.

Love's unique ability to hold the paradoxes of life are disavowed and torn in two like the widow's broken heart. The ability to love becomes a lesser version of itself in this wounded state where there is weeping, then rage; reminiscing, then cursing, with an inability to hold life's complexity. There is a feeling of disillusionment and a deep fear to love again.

When there is an experience of a shattering of innocence, we feel ambivalence and our widow/widower becomes present to our character. What gets shattered most prominently for the widow/widower is love.

Splitting of ambivalence leads to experiences of:

- Ashes where there was once beauty
- Death where there was once life
- Hollowness where there was once intricacy
- Restraint where there was once freedom

Ways the Widow/Widower shows up:

- Has an inability or refusal to connect to desire
- Is fearful of vulnerability
- Polarizes into "either/or" (dualistic) thinking: Just give in to others and freeze desire OR Just take from others and enflame desire.
- Stagnated due to a resistance to allow life to be regenerated, often closing off authentic desire
- Often fears mourning losses because mourning brings access to desire

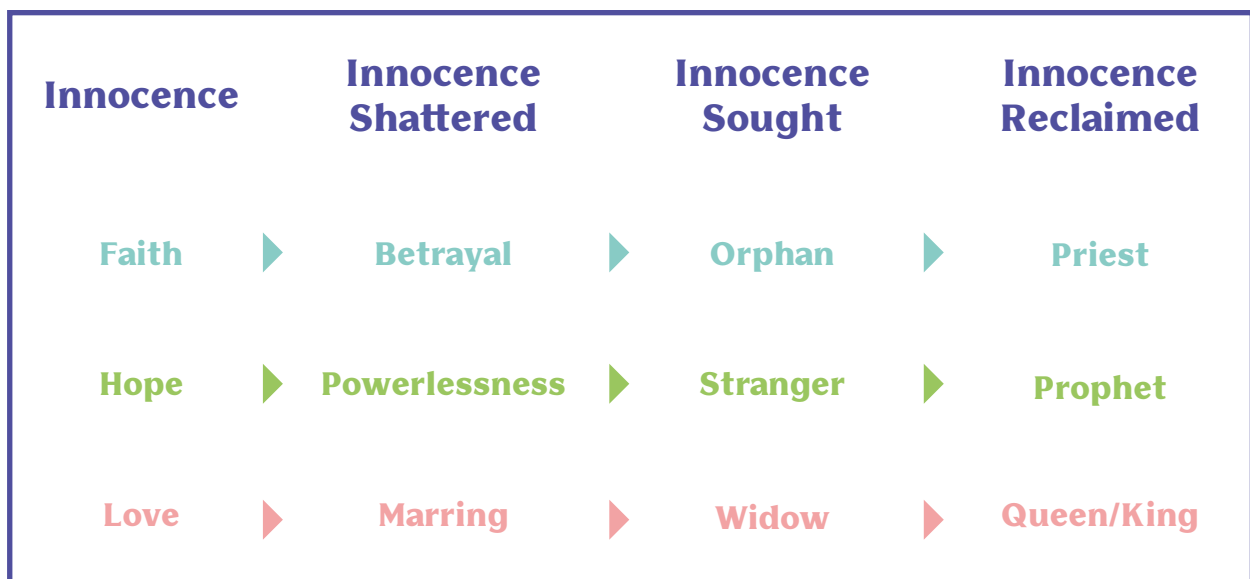
- Seeks the short and controlled bursts of pleasure from an addictive framework versus engagement with the fullness of life

Reclaiming innocence for the Widow/Widower looks like:

- Understanding and blessing the widow that showed up to protect
- Naming the painful experiences that split the ambivalence
- Naming the escape that the polarized tension created
- Reconnecting with desires, acknowledging AND grieving the ache of unmet desires
- Balancing the dynamic of giving and receiving pleasure
- Learning to celebrate the complexities and paradoxes of love
- Opening boundaries/walls to allow for vulnerability and a new understanding of safety
- Embracing love that is bold, expansive, accepting, complex and ever-surprising

A Queen/King will slowly emerge as a Widow/Widower heals:

- Has the ability to hold duality, complexity and paradox
- Can invite others to more fullness of life and embrace their full self
- Has the ability to say yes or no
- Can lead their kingdom and hold mystery, complexity and paradox
- Shows up with a growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset
- Makes space and creates room for the other; is inclusive
- Believes there is mutual flourishing for all
- The Queen/King fully grasps that love is for all, not just for him/her/them but meant for all people



No discussion questions are specified for this lesson. Allow for a time of questions, as time permits. Repetition and your personal responses are essential for participants seeking to understand these concepts.

At-Home Reflection Questions:

1. In what ways can you identify with the orphan and what situations or incidents may have set up for the orphan to show up for you?
2. What may it look like to move towards reclaiming innocence for your orphan part?
3. In what ways can you identify with the stranger and what situations or incidents may have set up for the stranger to show up for you?
4. What may it look like to move towards reclaiming innocence for your stranger part?
5. In what ways can you identify with the widow/widower and what situations or incidents may have set up for the widow/widower to show up for you?
6. What may it look like to move towards reclaiming innocence for your widow/widower part?

SESSION FOUR:

Setting Up For Stories

Watch the Facilitator Tip Video for Session Four

Group participants have no teaching notes in this section of their participant guide. However, questions for their personal reflection are encouraged to prepare for the week. Consider them for yourself as well.

These questions will not be discussed but should be considered as you begin this week:

1. How do you come as you listen to the story reader?

2. Assess your energy level, as well as your ability to attend with compassion toward another.

3. Be proactive in compartmentalizing your own life stressors so you can engage this work well.

SESSION FIVE:

Facilitator Tips

Attachment: Its Impact and Healing

Watch the Facilitator Tip Video for Session Five

Fewer topics may be as triggering as learning about attachment styles. This is largely due to the pre-verbal nature of attachment. Be extra-prepared this week and be sure to watch the video prior so you know what to expect. Note that attachment styles are not like other personality assessments but are based on decades of research about how we relate based on our primary caregivers' general posture towards us before the age of about two-years old.

The Still-Face Video

One additional feature of this teaching video is the "Still Face" designed by Dr. Edward Tronick, sponsored by the ABC Project and the Children's Institute. Its purpose is to demonstrate how foundational attachment and regulating is prior to any cognitive understanding of attachment styles.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Pcr1Rmr1rM&authuser=0>

This is a self-explained experiment often viewed with distress because it shows a baby in visible anguish due to a parent's shift into a non-responsive affect. Pause the video and attend to group members if there is visible stress or you notice someone suddenly goes off-camera in a virtual space.

Additionally, note the following prior to session 5:

- Begin with a grounding exercise and let group participants know about the still-face video. It often is the youngest part of us that gets triggered unexpectedly. In preparation, review the tip in lesson three on staying in the window of tolerance, as needed.
- Spend extra time sharpening your own understanding of the four attachment styles so you can answer questions your group members may have.
- Be sure to focus participants on their own attachment style. If a group member is also a parent, it is easy to feel ashamed about one's own parenting or lack of attunement to their baby or toddler. While important, begin the session by directing their attention to their own experience and their style of relating today.



SESSION FIVE:

Attachment: Its Impact and Healing

👁️ 38:02

Teaching Notes and Discussion Questions

Your style of attachment is developed and formed during the first two years of life. The remaining years of childhood are obviously important as well, however early experiences of attaching to a caregiver are foundational for human development. Early attachment failures are carried into your sense of being and is where your style of relating primarily comes from.

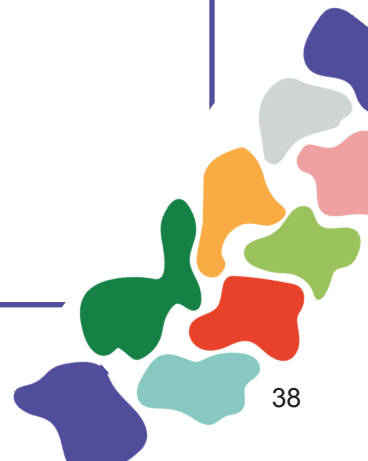
Early attachment often depends on how three needs are handled by primary caregivers.

1. Attunement: Seeing what is not said; attentive to the inner world of the child.
2. Containment: Helping make sense of and not being overwhelmed by a child's emotions.
3. Repair: Acknowledgment of parental failure without defense and soothing hurts.

There are four defining features of the attachment bond:

1. Desire to be physically close to the parent.
2. Feels distress when separation occurs.
3. Experiences a safe haven and emotional soothing when reconnected with the parent or primary caregiver.
4. The parent provides a secure base for the child to explore his/her world.

What were your thoughts and feelings as you watched the "still face" video?



Attachment Styles

1. Secure Attachment

Children who are securely attached generally become visibly upset when their caregivers leave, are happy when their primary caregivers return and are easily comforted. Primary caregivers of securely attached children tend to play more with their children. Additionally, these primary caregivers react more quickly to their children's needs and are generally more responsive to their children than the primary caregivers of insecurely attached children.

Response of the child with a secure attachment:

- Able to separate from the parent
- Seeks comfort from the parent when frightened
- Greets return of parents with positive emotions
- Prefers parents to caregivers
- Is able to separate from parents and explore more, knowing the parent will be available upon return

The Secure Attachment Style in Adults: (check which ones you might relate to)

- They tend to have trusting, long-term, mutual relationships
- They have high self-esteem
- They have more resilience in recovering from stress, especially in relationships
- They seek out social support
- They have the ability to share feelings with other people
- They demonstrate the capacity to initiate and receive repair attempts
- They have positive feelings about their adult romantic relationships
- They have a functional radar for danger, not overly marked by hyper- or hypo-arousal



2. Avoidant/Dismissive Attachment

Children with an avoidant/dismissive attachment have primary caregivers that tend to be emotionally unavailable or unresponsive to them a good deal of the time. They disregard or ignore their child's needs, and can be especially rejecting when their child is hurt or sick. These primary caregivers tend to leave the child alone much. They also discourage crying and encourage premature independence in their children. There is not much play, eye contact, and little sweetness in their interaction with the child. They are often NOT AVAILABLE.

Possible Reasons Why the Primary Attachment Figure has Difficult Attaching to the Child:

- Lack of knowledge about how to offer support
- Lack of empathy skills
- Failure to develop a sense of closeness and no urgency to do so
- Parental history of negative attachment with rejecting caregivers and role models

Response of the Child with an Avoidant/Dismissive Attachment Style:

- They often show up contained
- They may be described as "little adults"
- They are disconnected from their bodily needs
- They minimize the importance of emotions
- They tend to seek proximity to attachment figures, but won't directly interact with them
- They tend not to be distressed by the separation of a parent and upon return the child avoids seeking contact
- They rarely show an outward desire for closeness, warmth, affection or love

The Avoidant/Dismissive Attachment Style in Adults: (check which ones you might relate to)

- They steer clear of emotional closeness in relationships.
- They may not get involved in romantic relationships
- They seek relationships and enjoy spending time with their partner but may become uncomfortable when relationships get too close.
- They may perceive partners as "wanting too much" or "being too clingy" when the partner expresses desire to be more emotionally close.
- When a threat of separation or loss is felt, they tend to either focus on other things or withdraw and cope alone.



- They tend to deny vulnerability and use repression to manage emotions.
- When seeking help, they tend to use indirect strategies such as hinting, complaining or sulking.
- They report very few memories of their early relationship with parents
- They report very few memories of their early relationship with parents but may describe their childhood as happy and their parents as loving; however they are unable to give specific examples to support these positive evaluations.
- They are overly focused on themselves and own creature comforts, and may largely disregard the feelings and interests of other people.
- They have difficulty disclosing their thoughts and especially their feelings to their partner.
- Their response to conflict or a stressful situation is to become distant and aloof.
- They tend to have an overly positive view of themselves and a negative, cynical attitude toward other people.
- They tend to react angrily to perceived slights or threats to their self-esteem.

The Avoidant/Dismissive Attachment Style May Have Critical Inner Voices Such as:

- "I don't need anyone."
- "Don't get too involved. I will just be disappointed."
- "People won't commit to a relationship."
- "People will try to trap me."
- "Why does he/she demand so much from me?"
- "I've got to put up with a lot to stay involved with a partner."
- "There are other, more important things in life than romance."
- "I've got to protect myself. I'm going to get hurt in this relationship."
- "I'm too good for him/her/them."



3. Anxious/Ambivalent Attachment

The main factor in a child developing an anxious/ambivalent attachment is inconsistent attunement in the relationship with their primary caregivers. The primary caregivers are inconsistent and erratic in regard to attention and attentiveness. When primary caregivers vacillate between attunement and neglect or anger, their child becomes confused and insecure, not knowing what kind of reaction to expect. The primary caregivers tend to be manipulative and the parenting tends to be focused on meeting the primary caregivers needs above the child's needs. They are often INCONSISTENT.

Possible Reasons Why the Primary Attachment Figure has Difficult Attaching to the Child:

- The parent has a history with an anxious/ambivalent attachment caregiver.
- They act in ways that are insensitive and intrusive as they confuse emotional hunger with genuine love for the child.
- The primary attachment figure confuses feelings of longing and desire toward their child for actual love and concern for the child's well-being.
- The primary attachment figure tends to be overprotective.
- They tend to use the child as a way to meet their own emotional needs.
- The primary attachment figure lives vicariously through their child and is overly focused on the child's appearance or performance.
- The primary attachment figure tends to over-step personal boundaries of the child by touching them excessively or invading their privacy.

Response of the Child with an Anxious/Ambivalent Attachment:

- They may cling to attachment figures.
- They act desperate for their attachment figure's attention.
- When reunited, they feel confused, dazed and agitated, staring off into space and avoiding direct contact with the attachment figure.
- As a child, they are unable to be satisfied or comforted.
- The child hungers for closeness and love along with a disabling fear of losing it.
- The child tends to be distrusting and suspicious of the parent.
- The child limits exploratory play.

The Anxious/Ambivalent Attachment Style in Adults: (check which ones you might relate to)

- They are self-critical and insecure.
- They seek approval and reassurance from others but tend to distrust the reassurance.

- There is a deep-seated feeling that they are going to be rejected. Therefore, they experience excessive worry and difficulty trusting.
- They are rejection-sensitive, looking for signs of a partner losing interest.
- They generally have positive views of others, especially parents and their partner but a negative view of themselves.
- They rely heavily on partners to validate self-worth.
- They might be demanding and possessive, and can tend to be perpetually vigilant and somewhat emotionally dramatic.
- They are resentful and angry when their partner doesn't provide attention and reassurance.
- There is a belief that unless they dramatically express anxiety and anger, it's unlikely another will respond to them.

The Anxious/Ambivalent Attachment Style May Have Critical Inner Voices Such as:

- "It's obvious that he/she/they are losing interest in me."
- "Why isn't he/she/they more affectionate?"
- "He/she/they always has an excuse for not wanting to make love."
- "I'm so needy and dependent. No wonder she (he) doesn't like me."
- "My partner doesn't love me as much as I love him/her."

4. Disorganized/Chaotic Attachment

Disorganized attachment arises from fear without solutions. Primary caregivers in this attachment style often frightens their children in different, often unconscious, ways. When primary caregivers or caregivers are abusive, the child often experiences the physical and emotional abuse as being life-threatening. The child is stuck in an awful dilemma: his or her survival instincts tell them to flee to safety, but the only safety they know is the very people who are frightening them. The primary caregivers are the source of the child's distress. They often have NO PROTECTOR.

Possible Reasons Why the Primary Attachment Figure has Difficult Attaching to the Child:

- There is unresolved trauma and loss in the caregivers' life. Significant trauma that is not resolved in the parent is passed on to the child. Consequently, there is no way of making sense of their trauma and they are more likely to engage in triggering and disorienting behavior with their child.
- There is an inability to tolerate the range of emotions in moments of stress.
- The parent has active addictions or personality disorders.



Response of the Child with a Disorganized/Chaotic attachment:

- The first impulse is to seek comfort from the primary attachment figure but when they get near, they feel fear.
- They express odd or ambivalent behavior toward the attachment figure, such as first running up to them, then immediately pulling away, perhaps even running away from the parent, curling up in a ball or hitting the parent.
- They disassociate from themselves.
- They may feel detached from what's happening around him/her/them.
- They experience feeling blocked from their own consciousness.

The Disorganized/Chaotic Attachment Style in Adults: (check which ones you might relate to)

- They struggle to make sense of their experiences.
- They struggle forming a coherent narrative.
- Their stories are fragments and they have difficulty expressing themselves clearly.
- They don't have healthy ways to self-soothe.
- They tend to respond in relationships as very hot and cold.
- They may have trouble socially or struggle in using others to co-regulate their emotions.
- It is difficult for them to open up to others or to seek out help.
- They often have difficulty trusting people, as they were unable to trust those they relied on for safety growing up; therefore, they see the world as an unsafe place.
- They struggle with poor social or emotional regulation skills.
- They may find it difficult to form and sustain solid relationships.
- They often have difficulty managing stress and may even demonstrate hostile or aggressive behaviors.
- They may lack empathy skills and show a sense of remorse when they hurt another.
- They can come across as selfish and controlling in relationships.
- They may refuse to take responsibility for their actions, disregard rules, and can be abusive to others.
- There is a high risk for substance abuse or other addictive behaviors.



The Disorganized/Chaotic Attachment Style May Have Critical Inner Voices Such as:

- "I'm unlovable."
- "Don't trust anyone."
- "I'm just too terrified to _____."
- "I can't."
- "I feel like I'm going to lose it."

What is your attachment style? Which one do you relate most with?

Can One Heal From a Past Failure in Attachment? YES!

Ways to develop a more secure attachment:

1. Make sense of your stories.
2. Form a coherent narrative.
3. Step into unresolved trauma and loss, facing and feeling the full pain of experiences and offer kindness and attunement to those younger parts.
4. Develop healthy relationships which allow for trust and resolution of attachment issues.

Attachment theories have been well-researched. This material comes from a number of sources including, but not limited to John Bowlby, Amir Levine, M.D. and Rachael S.F. Heller, M.A., Peter Levine, Diane P Heller, and Abby Wong-Heffter.



At-Home Reflection Questions

1. Write about your primary caregivers. Who were they? What were they like? How did they manage their emotions? What do you know about what was going on in their life at the time you were conceived until you were about 2-years old?
2. What type of attachment do you think you had? Why?
3. What adult-like attachment patterns do you most relate to? In which ways?
4. What people and relationships do you currently have to help develop a more secure attachment style? If you feel this is lacking, what might you pursue to work towards developing more connecting and trusting relationships to help heal?



SESSION SIX: Reflect On Your Group Thus Far

Facilitator Tips

👁️ *Watch the Facilitator Tip Video for Session Six*

Review the section covered earlier, particularly the various roles group members may play, including the:

- Monopolist
- Silent Observer
- Advice Giver
- Prayer Warrior
- Performer
- Hijacker
- Sympathy-Giver, and
- Refuser of Care

Reflect on your group members and any patterns you see within your group thus far. Consider if any pattern of behavior is interfering with the group on a consistent basis. Refer to the earlier section of Common Struggles in Group Work to consider how this may be gently addressed.



Facilitator Tips

Group participants have no teaching notes in this section of their participant guide. However, questions for their personal reflection are encouraged to prepare for the week. Consider them for yourself as well.

These questions will not be discussed but should be considered as you begin this week:

1. How has your group been so far? Reflect on how you feel today compared to how you felt the very first week you attended?

2. Assess your level of engagement during check-in times, during story engagement or during discussion times. Are you sharing authentically? What are you aware of as you consider this?



SESSION SEVEN:

Facilitator Tips

What Happens When We Are Misnamed

 *Watch the Facilitator Tip Video for Session Seven*

Words. They shape our family of origin stories in ways we not even notice. The teaching topic today may hold deeply hidden triggers. As Cyndi Mesmer indicates in the tip video for this week, be mindful of the language you use when engaging the topic of harm. Many have experienced harm in the name of words like good, scripture, purity, bad, evil, Satan, Allah, dominion, or others.

If you find yourself in your group with questions like, “What do you believe, Sally?” you know you have detoured from the point of this week’s lesson. Be particularly mindful this week of staying focused on the impact of harm, rather than seeking a source which may or may not be embraced by others.

If you find yourself, as a facilitator, stuck here this week, perplexed over how harm could possibly be found in using one specific authority, you may want to consider talking with a mentor or one of the resources incorporated with this course. We’re happy to provide current resources to assist you in your journey.



SESSION SEVEN:

What Happens When We Are Misnamed

👁️ 16:11

Teaching Notes and Discussion Questions

Humans are capable of doing what are often considered “evil things” to one another. Even though we desperately want to make sense of the bad things that happen to us we sit in the uncomfortable reality that unfortunately, we do not have all the answers. Rather, we can meaningfully look at the impact these bad experiences have had on our stories. Sometimes that impact comes from another human being’s harm or from a family system or structures of power within our local and broader cultures.

This week, we bring language to these experiences of harm and learn some ways to begin to heal looking closer at the setting of our stories.

When bad things happen to us as humans by other humans, what do we do to protect ourselves from the pain and full impact? Consciously and unconsciously in an attempt to protect ourselves, we find ways to cope that unfortunately deepen harm in the long run.

To help provide greater understanding, we have identified four ways misnaming occurs:

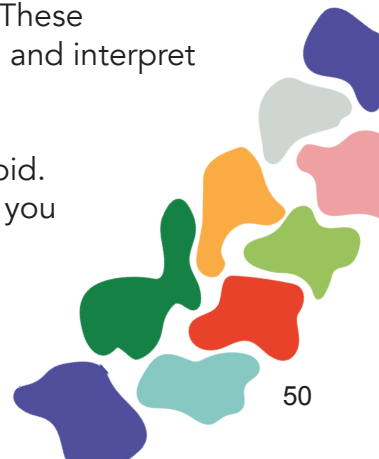
1. Destructive naming
2. Agreements
3. Vows
4. Unhealthy bonds

1. Destructive Naming

Destructive naming is any verbal or nonverbal message that is destructive to our hearts, bodies and souls. These come in the form of direct or indirect assaults and accusations that seep into our very being, wounding us significantly. Destructive naming has intent to harm and/or destroy something in us. This naming can be experienced through language, non-verbal behaviors or gestures and facial expressions.

Destructive naming is also where collective communities name specific people groups, especially when BIPOC or LGBTQIA folks are named as a whole. So, they are not just individually named but whole people groups are named in destructive ways. These agreements tend to add up and form a kind of lens that changes how we see and interpret our world.

Examples may include conveying the message: “You’re too much. You’re stupid. You disgust me. You won’t amount to anything. I hate you,” and others. Can you name some destructive naming that you have experienced either verbally or nonverbally as a child?



2. Agreements

Agreements occur when we take on the destructive naming as true. This happens when we agree with what has been named about us and thus make a judgment against ourselves. This judgment creates a kind of opening in our heart that makes us even more susceptible to lies, accusations and destructive naming about ourselves. We make agreements with shame, guilt, fear and accusations.

Examples may include the silent (or verbal) message: "I must be disgusting. It's clearly my fault and always my fault." "I am too much." "I'm stupid."

Can you name a few examples of agreements you have made?

3. Vows

A vow occurs naturally to alleviate the pain of our agreements. As a way to cope, we create "sealed agreements" or vows in order to lessen the pain and shame we feel. Vows are more than an agreement.

Vows are more powerful because it comes with resolution. A decision of action has been added to save myself from the turmoil of an agreement. It helps resolve the inner turmoil an agreement creates; therefore, we tend to like our vows and often want to hang onto them for dear life. Because of this favorable view of vows, a vow becomes entrenched in our way of being and makes us complicit. Where there was once a feeling of powerlessness and ambivalence there is now a recovery of power. This is intoxicating.

Examples may include the silent (or verbal) resolution: "I will never be like my mom/dad. I will never be that vulnerable again. I will never commit to someone. I will always be on guard. I won't get my hopes up again."

Can you name any vows you have made as a way to help resolve some of your inner pain and turmoil of an agreement?

4. Unhealthy Bonds

Bonds are a powerful alliance or connection between two people. Relationships have varying degrees of healthy and unhealthy bonds. Healthy bonds are based on love, trust, kindness, containment and goodness. Unhealthy bonds are marked by anxiousness, fear, rigidity or hyper closeness, often based on consumption, possessiveness, fear, lust, envy and chaos.

Who in your life has traces of healthy and unhealthy bonds?

What are some ways we can recognize, break and heal from destructive naming, agreements, vows and unhealthy bonds?

At-Home Reflection Questions

1. Identify an experience where you experienced directly or indirectly destructive naming.
2. Think about and pinpoint an agreement(s) or vow(s) you may have made in your life out of these destructive namings.
3. Can you identify how you might currently live as though these lies are true?
4. Can you identify healthy and unhealthy bonds that were formed, as well as the effects of that bonding today?
5. What might be 1-2 ways of moving towards breaking any unhealthy bonds?





SESSION EIGHT:

Facilitator Tips

Where The Reader is Most Bound

Watch the Facilitator Tip Video for Session Eight

Reminder is that where your readers are most bound in their stories is typically where they carry the most shame. Where they feel most complicit. (Partly or completely responsible for the harm they received.) So, if our desire is to be a part of inviting healing to the part of them that carry embedded trauma, we have to be willing to go to those places. It will not feel good nor kind, but it very may be their ticket to increase freedom in the area of their life that they have held for years and decades. And just a reminder, we are here to be with people in their shame by intensifying it, not rescuing them out of it. We are here to increase desire even when they are fearful of it. Are you willing to go to the darker parts of their story? The places where they may have experienced pleasure. The parts they went back to their abusers? The parts where they had longing and desire and it was met with harm, ridicule, or humiliation? It will be difficult because it means you will feel it in your body as well. But will you be willing to go to places where they were left alone? Where they feel in a bind. Will you grieve with them and be angry with them? If your goal is to just make them feel better, that is an easy task, just stay away from what they are most tormented by. But they will leave the same and be left holding the shame on their own.



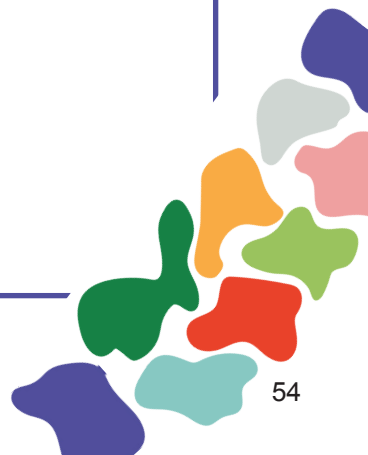
SESSION EIGHT:

Where The Reader is Most Bound

Teaching Notes and Discussion Questions

Group participants have no teaching notes in this section of their participant guide. However, questions for their personal reflection are encouraged to prepare for the week. Consider them for yourself as well.

Remind yourself of the first week of group. What caused you to join the group? Have you had a taste of freedom thus far? Be patient and trust the process knowing even small shifts are significant and take time.





SESSION NINE:

Facilitator Tips

How We Invite and Participate in Reenactment of Our Core Wounds

Watch the Facilitator Tip Video for Session Nine

One of the most beautiful things about working on stories of harm in a group is the opportunity the group dynamic itself holds. This is often called a reenactment – which has great potential for healing particularly with groups that continue beyond the 12 weeks.

Cyndi Mesmer gives a great example in the video tip about a group's response to a story about a harsh, loud and demanding mother. After finishing the story, the group engages in a way that mimics the harm the main character inflicts with comments like, "I'm so mad at your mother right now," or "If we were there for your 'little girl' we all would rise up and defend you." Ironically, this seemingly innocent (and even advocacy) posture may be so familiar to the reader that they remain silent, reliving the very story they just read.

A corrective experience is one in which a facilitator would notice the reader in this particular example. By discerning their face, body language and downcast eyes, they might gently interject in the group with something like, "I'm noticing a lot of energy in the group right now." The goal here is not to shame the group but ask them to notice the reader who is likely quiet. "As much as Sally may need an advocate, the energy might be mirroring her mother's. What are you feeling right now, Sally?" Her answer may vary but the point is to not miss her, just as the story did. Again, the nuances here will vary but your awareness of reenactments and how you steer the group is an art form. Reenactments may inflict a group member to withdraw further because their needs were again not tended to.



SESSION NINE:

How We Invite and Participate in Reenactment of Our Core Wounds

👁️ 17:16

Teaching Notes and Discussion Questions

How Our Bodies Respond to Trauma

When we experience trauma (betrayal, powerlessness and marring of ambivalence), our limbic system takes over and we are mainly operating from this survival part of our brain. The trauma triggers us into a fight, flight, or freeze response. And since the limbic system is determining that we are in danger, it is in control and we do not feel safe; therefore, our prefrontal cortex fades into the background which leaves us without access to language and problem-solving capabilities. All trauma then is preverbal, meaning we are cut off from language and trapped in speechless terror.

Trauma Demands Repetition

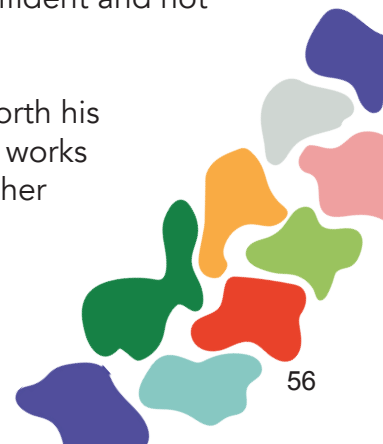
Christine Langley Obaugh states: “We repeat what we do not repair.” Trauma trapped in our bodies unconnected to language is unrepaired trauma. Trauma demands repetition. It demands remembering – literally the “re-member-ing” of our fragmented self.

Trauma literally calls us to the work of putting back together the shattered and displaced parts of ourselves. However, since we are compromised and without language in this healing work, our traumas routinely reproduce not as a memory, but as an action: A reenactment. If we can understand language and integrate these traumas, we can decrease the chances of being caught in destructive reenactments.

Examples of Reenactments (maladaptive ways):

A young boy needed his parents praise and approval but instead received criticism, verbal assault and disinterest. As a young adult, the boy has become an overachiever but “tunes out” or seemingly “doesn’t care” when receiving criticism or accolades. To him, this stance feels empowering and like he has a sense of control over experiencing the emotional reactivity and criticism of another. This response will invite the same response from his friends and colleagues since they will experience him as over-confident and not in need of feedback.

A child was ignored by her father, and she blamed herself as not being worth his time. Later in life she chose a husband who is also self-centered and then works really hard in attempts to get him to see and attend to her. If she can get her husband to respond, this is her way of trying to get rid of the feelings of self-blame and worthlessness.



A woman abandoned by her father now has intense fear of being abandoned so she becomes clingy and possessive creating others to feel overwhelmed and ultimately leave her.

A boy experienced significant rejection from his parents and has not worked through and named the neglect. Today, he becomes flooded with rage, hurt, terror and unworthiness when a friend fails to return a call or fails to include him in activities. He experiences the situation as a confirmation that he is not cared about which is a reenactment of his earlier relationship with parents.

A woman who grew up in an alcoholic home learned to focus on others and deny the existence of her own needs. As a result, she has an underdeveloped ability to ask for help and identify and articulate her needs. This underdeveloped resource set her up for choosing relationships based on attending to and caring for others. She takes responsibility for others' thoughts, feelings and behaviors which invites the same dynamics of her childhood home.

Adaptive ways: Intentionally stepping into past trauma for the purpose of creating corrective experiences.

Examples of Correcting an Experience (adaptive ways):

Narrative Work/Story Groups: Counseling or story work are examples of adaptive ways of choosing to step into discussing current reenactments and past traumatic events. Doing this work will trigger similar feelings and allow a therapist or skilled listeners to attend to us, challenge our distorted beliefs and increase our ability to tolerate the distress of these past experiences. The goal is to rework the biochemical memory patterns of the past and begin to integrate our traumatic past into a redemptive present. The particularities of the story need to be engaged for healing to occur. You may be a part of a group made up of different ethnicities, sexual orientations, cultures, and genders which will intensify reenactments.

Somatic Body Work: Learning to indwell your own body and your own story can enable you to work through experiences that have been unresolved.

The relationships, healing, and life that you are desiring comes through engagement of all of your senses. Fulfillment is not just a mental experience- and neither is healing. You may experience present moment feelings and sensations as you talk through different relationships and memories. A trained somatic therapist will help you find curiosity and engagement of sensations that may arise. This will grow your tolerance and presence from the inside out. Having healthy relationships with others begins with a healthy relationship with your body-mind. (Jenny McGrath from Indwell Counseling)

[Information compiled from: *The Body Keeps Score, Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, by Bessel Van Der Kolk; *Healing The Wounded Heart*, by Dan Allender; Jenny McGrath from Indwell Counseling, A helpful way to conceptualize and understand reenactments, by Michael S. Levy, PH.D. *The Journal of Psychotherapy Practice and Research*, 1996.]

At-Home Reflection Questions

1. Identify one or two experiences in which you think you reenacted a core wound. Describe.
2. Can you see your contribution in the reenactment? Can you identify any agreements and vows that were made that may have contributed to the reenactment?
3. Groups are perfect opportunities to reenact old wounds. Can you identify a group you are in, this one or another, where there may be a reenactment playing out? If so, what does it look like?
4. What core wound or trauma are you prompted to step into more fully as a way to grieve and receive healing care?





SESSION TEN:

Facilitator Tips

The Spectrum of Compassion and Truth

Watch the Facilitator Tip Video for Session Ten

Embedded trauma carries shame. Therefore, as a facilitator, a tough question to ask yourself is: How comfortable am I sitting in another's shame? The place where their desire, innocence and longing was met with ridicule, humiliation or abuse. This is the most difficult part of facilitating story work, knowing when compassion is not enough but leaning into the bind and amplifying shame helps people finally rest in freedom.

Author Dan Allender has said many times that you cannot bring people any further in their story than you yourself have gone. As a facilitator, how comfortable are you reflecting on these questions?

1. What do I notice in my body as I engage other people's stories? Tight in my throat? Stiff in my chest or neck? Queasy in my stomach?
2. What is my posture as another is reading a story? Do I feel anxious? Tough? Quiet and compassionate?
3. What is my natural inclination as I listen to a story? Do I track with the reader's nonverbal cues? Am I often unsettled with sadness, seeking to see some ray of hope? Do I hope to prove the harm that others' inflicted?

Sit in these questions for a time and linger with curiosity over how your own story intersects with your role as a facilitator.

Do you know your style of facilitation? Do you lean more towards naming what you see as truth in their story or do you lean more towards offering compassion? Both are needed but if you are noticing that you use one 80% of the time you engage can you be curious as to why? What might that be about for you? Desire to rescue or make them feel better. What to name their beauty too quickly as a way to avoid the pain, suffering and anger. Does that fit your own personal role in your family or play out in your own story somehow? Or if you are 80% naming truth in a more direct way, can you be curious about that? How might that be connected to your story? Need to have the answers, need to avoid being caught not knowing and thus the feelings of being an imposter? Can you start to decide what the reader needs in that moment and maybe even out what you are offering and learn to trust your body and as you connect with the reader's experience, you will get more clarity about what may be needed at that time.



Facilitator Tips

What do you notice about yourself as you attend to others' stories? Are you prone to want to rescue them out of their pain? Do you want them to see something they don't see? Pay attention to your own tendencies since they also reveal much about your own story.

This is the final week of story reading but it is also wise to begin to ask participants if they plan to rejoin another 12-week session, assuming you are continuing. Also direct them to their participant guide which contains basic instructions in preparation for your final week together.



SESSION ELEVEN: What Does It Mean to Grieve Our Stories?

Watch the Facilitator Tip Video for Session Eleven

In his book, *Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief*, David Kessler says the following:

Each person's grief is as unique as their fingerprint. But what everyone has in common is that no matter how they grieve, they share a need for their grief to be witnessed. That doesn't mean needing someone to try to lessen it or reframe it for them. The need is for someone to be fully present to the magnitude of their loss without trying to point out the silver lining.

As a story group facilitator, know that your goal is not to see a reader's tears. Many factors influence grief, including gender, attachment style and culture, among just a few.

Loss invites us to grieve but most stories of harm are layered in complexity. This requires numerous story engagements over time. Your role is to meet the person where they are and graciously invite them to see their story with more authenticity.

Cyndi mentions in the tip video that grief will likely be felt as you close the 12-week sessions. Be aware of this and discuss it with group members. Also, remind participants they are welcome to continue the group if you are offering a next session.

NEXT WEEK:

Allow at least 10 minutes today to thoroughly explain the group participants' homework for next week, specifically the page in their participant guide titled, "To Be Completed Prior to Session 12: Offering a Blessing for Group Members." Read the instructions aloud and ask if there are questions.

To Be Completed Prior to Session 12: Offering a Blessing for Group Members

1. Come prepared to explain a significant moment, insight or interaction that occurred for YOU – something that you believe will stay with you long after our group time has ended.

2. Come prepared to give a blessing to each member of the group (facilitators included). Think of each of them by name and what you have seen and experienced from each and offer that individual a blessing in the form of ONE or TWO words or phrases to describe them. There is no right way to do this. The only guideline is to direct your thoughtful feedback to the uniqueness of the individual in question. This exercise is designed to bless the individual and encourage them to continue the hard and rewarding work of growing in personal responsibility, maturity and humility.

Feel free to contact your group leader if you have questions.

GROUP MEMBER NAME (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

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_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____



SESSION ELEVEN:

What Does It Mean to Grieve Our Stories?

👁️ 22:20

Teaching Notes and Discussion Questions

Francis Weller writes about the need for all of us to undertake an “apprenticeship with sorrow” (The Wild Edge of Sorrow). In this apprenticeship we must learn from our mentor sorrow, known as the “art and raft of grief” and discover the profound ways it ripens and deepens us. Entering into an apprenticeship with grief, to say the least, is not easy. Many of us would rather decline this invitation. Unfortunately when we do, we tend to ignore, disavow and push away the feelings of grief. When we push it away, we delay our healing and prolong our shattered state.

Grieving is essential to finding and maintaining a feeling of emotional intimacy with life and relationships. Maybe, we can even come to view grief as a ‘holy visitor’ that always leaves gifts, restoring parts of us with greater empathy and an increased capacity for life.

What does it mean to grieve?

Grieving is the intentional process of allowing your body to feel the emotions related to a lost connection with a person, place, thing or idea.

Unpacking our definition

Intentional process:

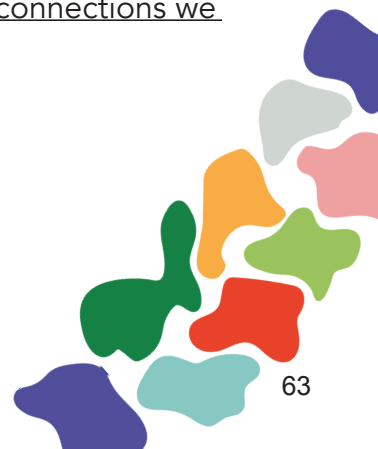
Feelings are inevitable. Grief is to choose to engage the emotions we feel and accept that where they take us is where we need to go.

Emotions:

Grief involves a spectrum of emotions. However, two that always present themselves are sorrow/sadness and anger.

Lost connection:

Grieving indicates a severed connection. We have difficulty grieving the lost connections we most need.



The process is: Feel - Together

1. Feel:

Feelings are crucial to the grieving process. In fact, you cannot heal what you do not feel.

Clean Pain:

Acceptance of the emotions triggered by loss. Allow those emotions to flow.

Dirty Pain:

Avoidance of those emotions triggered by loss which then ushers in added thoughts, beliefs, and judgments that interfere with processing the original feelings.

*"Welcoming everything that comes to us is the challenge.
This is the secret to being fully alive."
—Francis Weller*

2. Together:

Grieving must be done in community otherwise it easily slides into private suffering. Once we begin to feel what we need to feel, we need to share that with others. We all need at least one person to bear witness to our loss.

Bear Witness:

Simply, "I see your pain." We need someone or a group to name and validate the losses we suffered in our stories of harm.

Attunement:

Being with another more fully; the ability to let what's happening in another's body resonate in mine.

Attunement is a process: Attunement, Misattunement, Re-attunement.

Self Attunement: the ability to let what is happening with my younger self resonate with my adult self.

Grieving is the process the body wants to go through that allows us to metabolize the powerful emotional experiences we encounter in the shattered places in our stories. Knowing that we need to give our body permission to feel those feelings and that we need others to bear witness to and engage us in our grief; gives us the container we need to heal.

*"Trauma always carries grief...
Therefore, grief work is a primary ingredient in the resolution of trauma."
—Francis Weller*

At-Home Reflection Questions

1. How do you typically deal with or manage the grief of your losses?
2. What are the feelings you currently experience in a loss you may currently be facing or in the recent past? Can you identify times in which your pain was “clean pain” versus “dirty pain?”
3. Have you ever allowed someone to bear witness to a loss you were going through? If so, describe what this was like.
4. Notice how you are doing “self-attuning.” How is your heart towards the younger versions of you? Can you resonate with the younger version of yourself in your story? If not, what judgements get in the way?





SESSION TWELVE: Healing Is a Lifelong Process

Facilitator Tips

Watch the Facilitator Tip Video for Session Eleven

Spend time this week engaged in the same reflection and preparation as your participants, knowing your words have power. Be specific about the blessing and keep it simple, yet precise, honoring the request you've made of one or two words to describe each group member.

Suggested Flow of the Final Session

Check-In:

Check-in can be brief like weeks prior when you have facilitated stories. Consider asking each group member if they plan to continue with another 12-week session during their check-in.

Brief Teaching (Healing is a Lifelong Process):

There are nine statements (fill-in-blanks) to recap the general principles moving forward.

Blessings:

Then, shift gears and explain that each person will do two things:

1. Explain their insight about what they have learned.
2. Sit back and receive the blessings from group members (with no comments from them).

Describe that it is natural to feel uneasy receiving blessings on their behalf (perhaps downright painful!) This, unfortunately, is also a key way we have survived – where receiving is difficult for an orphan especially when it contains unconditional goodness for them.

Facilitators should also be included in this exercise so model with a genuine, “thank you” for the blessings you receive.

If you want to add a creative feature, consider putting each group members' name in a hat so that, one-by-one, each group member is objectively chosen for their turn (facilitators names included).

Close:

Once everyone has had a turn, acknowledge that leaving the room or closing a virtual room is never easy, particularly after such goodness in a 12-week session.



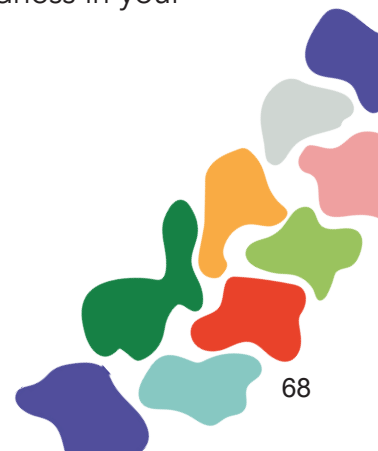
SESSION TWELVE: Healing Is A Lifelong Process

Teaching Notes and Discussion Questions

👁️ 8:10

Healing our past trauma is a lifelong process, not a destination we arrive at. Like most things in life the healing process will ebb and flow. As you continue to engage your personal and collective stories of harm, keep in mind the following as you progress in this work and commit yourself to a lifetime of growth.

1. Keep naming the particularities of harm. This is difficult to do since it often involves people we love.
2. Continue to see your life as a story where you are the hero.
3. Tell the truth about the characters in your story – not for the sake of blame but in order to love and honor yourself and them.
4. Study closely the role you played in your family.
5. Kindly give yourself permission to grieve the harm and unmet needs in your past, times you experienced betrayal, powerlessness, and marring.
6. Look closely at the ways you adapted in order to survive the environment of your family. Continue to name the agreements and vows that shaped you.
7. Observe the trauma patterns you still reenact today. Notice how you, consciously or unconsciously, set yourself up for repeated harm and relational patterns. Be intentional about changing those patterns.
8. Know this work is difficult and celebrate the shifts and healing you experience.
9. Allow yourself to savor the moments of peace, sweetness and goodness in your life with gratitude for your hard and courageous labor.



Appendix: Samples, Resources & Glossary

Statement of Confidentiality

(Please read, sign and keep in this participant guide)

We desire for this group to be a safe place for all individuals to show up authentic, vulnerable and share struggles, celebrations and stories of harm. We are aware that humans are messy individuals and that at times we don't always show up in safe ways but we commit to move in a direction of being safe for one another. We all agree that ALL INFORMATION shared in our group time together including details of personal stories, additional personal information shared by participants, facilitators or guest's stories, personal examples in teaching used, and any video's shared be kept strictly confidential and not be shared with anyone outside of this group.

Please honor and respect their vulnerability by keeping any and all information shared confidential.

Additionally, in groups such as this, people can and will get triggered. I ask that group participants commit to address any group related issues or dynamics within the group. Please refrain from talking about group members with ill intent, or group issues outside of the group and instead readdress any concerns or triggers the next time group is in session. Additionally, should you feel a need to process how to bring an issue to group with me in an individual session, you will commit to bring that issue to the group when appropriate. Your signature represents a recommitment to this confidentiality statement. Thank you!

Signature

Date

Sample Schedule (12-Week)

Week One: _____ [Date]

Introduction to Story

Week Two: _____ [Date]

How to Write and Attend to Another's Story

Week Three: _____ [Date]

How We Are Alienated From Ourselves and Collective Community Through Betrayal, Powerlessness and Marring

Week Four: _____ [Date]

STORY week – Two participants read stories

Week Five: _____ [Date]

Attachment: Its Impact and Healing

Week Six: _____ [Date]

STORY week – Two participants read stories

Week Seven: _____ [Date]

What Happens When We Are Misnamed

Week Eight: _____ [Date]

STORY week – Two participants read stories

Week Nine: _____ [Date]

How We Are Invited and Participate in Reenactments of Our Core Wounds

Week Ten: _____ [Date]

STORY week – Two participants read stories

Week Eleven: _____ [Date]

What Does It Mean To Grieve Our Stories?

Week Twelve: _____ [Date]

Healing is a Lifelong Process

Session 12: Blessing Group Members Exercise

Note: This is also included in the Participant Guide

1. Come prepared to explain a significant moment, insight or interaction that occurred for YOU – something that you believe will stay with you long after our group time has ended.

2. Come prepared to give a blessing to each member of the group (facilitators included). Think of each of them by name and what you have seen and experienced from each and offer that individual a blessing in the form of ONE or TWO words or phrases to describe them. There is no right way to do this. The only guideline is to direct your thoughtful feedback to the uniqueness of the individual in question. This exercise is designed to bless the individual and encourage them to continue the hard and rewarding work of growing in personal responsibility, maturity and humility.

Feel free to contact your group leader if you have questions.

GROUP MEMBER NAME (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

Glossary of Terms (Also included in Participant Guide)

Agreement – A lie we believe that brings some level of solace in the midst of shattered faith. For example, after being verbally abused for making a mistake, one might make this agreement, “I will never do too well in my job because I am not very smart,” or in the wake of a significant rejection or betrayal, one might make this agreement, “No one will ever want to marry me because I am too flawed to be loved.” Evil uses agreements to bind us in the wake of painful life events.

Ambivalence – Simultaneously holding contradictory feelings. In abuse, this typically includes intimacy (aliveness) and disgust or shame.

Arousal – One’s natural response of being awakened. This not only applies to sensual touch but one’s sense of being alive. When someone is misnamed or their passion is marred, it may lead to one’s war with their body and their desires.

Attachment – A well-researched theory that prior to age two each individual develops patterns of relating based on how they were attuned to by primary caregivers.

Attunement – The awareness and attention needed for someone to truly be understood, seen and delighted in.

Complicity – The belief, often accompanied with contempt and shame, that one is at fault for being aroused, particularly in the midst of harm. Naming that one feels complicit allows shame to lose some of its power, often leading to healing and some freedom.

Containment – The act (and art) of delicately keeping something within limits. In the context of a group, this typically means listening to someone while also bringing honor to a group’s restrictions, such as time, pace, or emotional bandwidth. Within a family, it is a primary caregiver’s role to “hold” the complex and often confusing emotions of a child in a way that is protective and caring.

Contempt – To despise or disrespect. Often, with issues of harm or neglect, a feeling of contempt is held for oneself (and his or her body) or others and what they represent.

Covert (abuse) – A kind of binding to another where a child is chosen and yet also set-up to fuse pleasure with shame. (see Grooming and Triangulation)

Disassociate – A natural response to detach from an experience or memory.

Glossary of Terms

Faith – The ability to rest and trust in goodness leading to delight.

Family of Origin (FOO) – The family (biological or other) in which one grew up.

Grooming – A process by which someone in power observes one's vulnerabilities to gain access to one's heart. When continued, subtle (often caring) touch is introduced which creates a sensual bond. With time, intimacy may be intensified with sexual touch and threats and privileges are used to sustain control.

Hope – The capacity to imagine and move into the future.

Hypervigilance – Exhaustive watchfulness, often due to betrayal, suspicion, and self-doubt.

Love – The capacity to give and receive pleasure and goodness, sharing mutual delight and honor.

Lust – The idea that we use people to fill a basic emptiness.

Naming – The process of truthfully stating something, particularly if it is vulnerable. In regard to harm, naming specific behavior as "abuse" for instance, usually leads to a sense of relief, grief, and freedom.

PCG – Primary Care Giver

Reenactment – To repeat a pattern of relating, particularly one that leads to harm. Because our brain has a natural impulse to resolve that which is interrupted, these patterns continue until the source of harm is exposed and rewired.

Repair – One of the basic needs of a child (and adults) to have another own mistakes made. Few people have had good models of repair where specific places of harm are named with remorse. A fine line exists. A child should experience a parent's "I'm sorry" without shame so that a child does not end up caring for a repentant parent.

Shame – An experience of exposure (being seen) that reveals something repulsive, ugly, toxic or bad about oneself. Shame is a sense that delight and honor are ruined and will remain forever. Shame is bound to a particular moment which is why entering that moment brings release from shame.

Glossary of Terms

Trigger – To initiate or activate. In the case of harm done in the past, a present-day event can set off a bodily response or alert that feels threatening even if no threat is near.

Unhealthy Binds – An attachment where one is bound to another, often based on conditions, fear or abusive patterns. Often soul ties are rooted in insecure attachments in the formative years of development.

Vow – A resolution that seems to make it easier to live without hope, usually accompanied by an agreement. For example, “Since I am not smart (agreement), I will never take on projects that demand too much (vow).” or “Since I am so flawed, I will never let a person pursue me that I really care about.” A vow is a way to manage the future without having to risk, dream, or experience more loss.





story groups

Unlocking You

For more information and offerings find us at [The Art of Living Counseling.com](https://www.theartoflivingcounseling.com).
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