

SHAMELESSLY ALIVE WOMEN'S GROUP

Living Guidelines to Support Our Collective Liberation



Inspired by teachings from the Nonviolent Leadership for Social Justice Retreat, with particular support from Edmundo Norte (other folks credited where their words are used)

Connect with our vision of creating a world where everyone's needs matter

Honor our diversity of experiences and perceptions, including among members of disenfranchised and dominant groups

Raise awareness about differences as a way to support deeper, more authentic connection in the group, and helping create the inclusive, welcoming world we want to live in

Create space to acknowledge how dynamics of oppression impact our group.

If an oppression-related topic comes up in someone's share, acknowledge it, and create space to name what may have been stimulated in the group, prioritizing people of color if they volunteer first, but not asking them to speak first.

Don't let fear of making mistakes keep us from talking about race.

From Roxy Manning: "America is still so conflicted about racism, so uncertain about how to acknowledge it and talk about it, that even in NVC circles, we don't know how to talk about it and are afraid to acknowledge it. It's a subject of such pain - and in some cases, huge risk - engendering such fear for both white people and people of color, that both sides tend to avoid it....

...accept that you'll make mistakes and that you *will* stimulate pain for someone. This doesn't mean avoid the subject. Talk about it. Address it. Name your fears. If you stimulate someone, then use your NVC skills and deal with it. *Empathize!* If you can't, self-empathize, and help the other person get empathy...

If you stimulate someone and you don't get why, go ask a white friend or someone more knowledgeable (and not triggered) to help you understand. *Engage!* Don't shy away and ignore the elephant in the room. If you're white, you can pretend it's not there and that it will walk out when the person of color leaves. But if you're a person of color, that elephant has its trunk wrapped around your heart, waiting to follow you to the next gathering. Recognize that this is not an issue just for the people of color.

We all lose something precious – authentic community – when we don't discuss diversity issues, especially when it results in people leaving and not coming back.”

Let love be the glue that binds us.

May our explorations be guided not by intellectual argument, not right/wrong thinking, of which there is already so much in the world, but by our love, our humility, our longing for a beautiful, wholesome world of justice, inclusion, and connection. If one person brings something up without love, let the next person bring that to their attention *with* love, and so on, and so on. (Inspired by Miki Kashtan)

Practice empathy, rather than argument, as a tool for liberation from the culture of right/wrong thinking, disconnect, power over, and self-reliance

Create a shared intention to be allies to oppressed groups (whether around race, class, sexual orientation, disability, etc.), and identify our own needs that drive us to want to end oppression and that restore our own humanity

Hold issues of oppression as a collective issue, not an individual issue.

Those of us in dominant social positions are encouraged to speak up, and to own our own triggers around hearing comments that may harm a member of our group. In other words, we are encouraged to support our collective liberation and *care for our own needs as allies*, rather than offer support from a place of pity of sympathy.

From NVC trainer Roxy Manning: “If you are a white person and you're aware of the issue, step in. You can help the community understand and demonstrate that this is not a person of color issue, but a challenge for everyone in the community. You can remove the burden described earlier where, if something triggers me, as a person of color, I need to put aside my trigger and speak up. If *you* have the knowledge and awareness to facilitate, then step in. Help educate those who have yet to step in to address discrimination and system disparities.”

Recognize the distinction between impact versus intention

We may all very well-meaningly insult or offend a member of an oppressed group at times in our lives. The invitation here is to acknowledge and bring curiosity and empathy as to the impact of our words and actions first, before going to expression of our intention, in order to contribute to healing and balance of power

Prioritize awareness of impact before intention

This is a “microcompensation” (a term coined by NVC trainer Miki Kashtan), to compensate for “microaggressions” – forms of unintentional discrimination or “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership.” (Professor Derald Wing Sue). Offering empathy and/or understanding as to the impact of these unintended hurts is a healing measure we can offer to provide balance, healing, and

sanity for the person whose experience and perspective often goes ignored by dominant culture.

As members of dominant groups, practice listening and empathizing, and doing our own inner work so that we can show up openly and vulnerably for difficult conversations.

As members of disenfranchised groups, to the extent we have capacity to do so, practice naming challenges and speaking up, and doing our inner work so that we can show up compassionately for ourselves and others.

Slow it all down

Take time to pause, self-reflect, self-empathize(!), and dialogue from a place of presence and compassion, for ourselves and one another.

Resource the heck out of ourselves with empathy(!)

Offer ourselves empathy for our self-judgment and self-berating when we make a mistake and unintentionally trigger pain in another. Offer ourselves compassion for the vast history and culture of domination that have conditioned us to cut off from one another and treat one another in less-than-loving-and-respectful ways. Understand that empathy is what creates the space in us to consciously choose how we want to show up in the face of social conditioning, to mourn the ways in which we may have not met our own needs to offer care, and to stretch toward understanding another's worldview and experience.

Mourn our mistakes with compassion, not guilt

Mourn our oh-so-human mistakes as a way to further our learning in life and in the group, rather than take ourselves away from others in self-criticism and guilt.

Offer a reconciliation process for our mistakes

Begin with empathy for the “target” member, then share the impact upon you of hearing their pain, and then, if the target members wishes to hear it, share the intention behind your “oops.”

Let's be in it for the long haul.

Accept that disconnect will happen, and have the courage and commitment to engage in self-reflection and acknowledgment of our unintended impacts, so that we increase the possibility of reconnection.

Inevitably, our efforts to come together and find harmony and resolution will be imperfect; sometimes we will hurt, sometimes we will lose connection. A huge part of living Nonviolent Communication – in our circle, in our relationships, and in our world – is nurturing our relationships for the long haul. How do we learn to ride the waves, to heal and repair the inevitable breaks in connection? These are long-term skills and capacities that we can develop to serve our collective healing, and are the antidote to the urgent fix-it mode of our dominant culture.

Try on These Four Agreements

From “Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools,” by Glenn Singleton and Curtis Linton

- 1) Stay engaged
- 2) Speak your truth in LOVE
- 3) BE WILLING to experience discomfort
- 4) Expect and accept non-closure

Adapted from From East Bay Meditation Center’s “Multicultural Agreements”

- **Try It On** -- Be willing to “try on” new ideas, or ways of doing things, that might not be what you prefer or are familiar with.
- **Practice Self-Focus** - Attend to and speak about your own experiences and responses. Refrain from speaking for a whole group, or from asking another to speak for a whole group.
- **Practice Both/And** - Try substituting “and” for “but”! This practice acknowledges and honors our multiple realities.
- **Step Up / Step Back** - Create space for full participation by all present. If you tend to speak often, try “stepping back,” and if you tend to be quiet, try “stepping up.”
- **Practice mindful listening** - Try avoiding planning what you’ll say as you listen to others. Be willing to be surprised, to learn something new, and to listen with your whole being.