

Touchstones for Creating Hospitable Space

(adapted from The Center for Courage and Renewal)

1. Be 100% present, extending and presuming welcome.

Set aside the usual distractions of things undone from yesterday, things to do tomorrow. Welcome others into this place and presume you are welcome as well.

2. Listen deeply.

Listen intently to what is said. Listen to feelings beneath the words. As Quaker Douglas Steere writes, “to listen another’s soul into life, into a condition of disclosure and discovery, may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another.”

3. It is never “share or die.”

You will be invited to share. The invitation is exactly that. You will determine the extent to which you want to participate.

4. No fixing.

We are not here to set someone else straight or to help right another’s wrong. We are here to witness to God’s movement in the sacred stories we share.

5. Suspend judgment.

Set aside your judgments. By creating a space between judgments and reactions, we can listen to another person, and to ourselves, more fully.

6. Identify assumptions.

By identifying our assumptions, which are usually transparent, we can set them aside and open the sharing and learning to greater possibilities.

7. Speak your truth.

You are invited to say what is in your heart, trusting that your voice will be heard and your contribution respected. A helpful practice is to use “I” statements.

8. Practice confidentiality care.

We create a safe space by respecting the nature and content of stories shared. If anyone asks that a story shared be kept in confidence, the group will honor that request.

9. Turn to wonder.

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

Asking Open and Honest Questions

(adapted from Parker Palmer, "Guidelines for Asking Open, Honest Questions" and "Touchstones for Creating Hospitable Space.")

When we are practicing Holy Listening, we may find it important to ask some questions that open the speaker's ear to hear their own inner truth, to listen to their own life. Learning to be a listener who asks honest, open questions is challenging. We are not there to show what good problem-solvers we are, but simply to support another person in listening to his or her own life.

This means absolutely no advice and no amateur psychoanalysis. It means no "Why don't you ... ?" it means no "That happened to me one time, and here's what I did..." It means no "There's a book/therapist/exercise/diet that would help you a lot." Nothing is allowed except real questions, honest and open questions, questions that will help the person listen to their own life without becoming burdened by the personal agenda of the listener.

What is an honest, open question? It is important to reflect on this, since we are so skilled at asking questions that are advice or analysis in disguise: "Have you ever thought that it might be your mother's fault?" The best single mark of an honest, open question is that **the questioner could not possibly anticipate the answer to it**: Did you ever feel like this before? What did that feel like?

There are other guidelines for good questioning:

- Ask questions aimed at helping the speaker rather than at satisfying your curiosity.
- Ask questions that are brief and to the point rather than loading them with background considerations and rationale — which make the question into a speech.
- Ask questions that go to the person as well as the problem — for example, questions about feelings as well as about facts.
 - Trust your intuition in asking questions, even if your instinct seems off the wall: "What color is your present job, and what color is the one you have been offered?"
- Avoid questions with yes-no or right-wrong answers. At the same time, remember that the best questions are often simple and straightforward.