

Be Present, Inc

JOURNEY TO BE PRESENT:
BUILDING CONSCIOUS AND ACTIVE PARTNERSHIPS
IN A DIVERSE WORLD

Be Present Empowerment Model[®]

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THE BE PRESENT EMPOWERMENT MODEL®

Replacing silence with information, assumptions with a diversity of insights, and powerlessness with a sense of personal responsibility are critical to individual and organizational effectiveness. What are the necessary skills and insight to risk being different with one another, our families, communities, workplaces and organizations? How do we build personal and community well being on the strength of self-knowledge rather than on the distress of oppression?

Enduring progressive change begins with and is sustained by persistent personal growth.

The *Be Present Empowerment Model*® is a personal and organizational model that begins on the individual level, exploring the impact of diversity. The model acknowledges that in order for change to be sustainable, we must understand who we are and find and value our true voices. The emergence of true voice is a process through which one learns and appreciates all of who s/he is and is validated for her/his thinking, intelligence, and ability to live life, not just survive. As we feel our own personal power, we begin to comprehend our interconnectedness with others and the focus moves from individual empowerment to community action and grassroots level change.

The *Be Present Empowerment Model*® guides people through three distinct stages of development, which result in their being able to interact with others beyond and outside of the barriers imposed by race, class, gender, age, etc., and from a position of wholeness. It is a process that teaches people how to be conscious and present in each moment so that they can deal positively with difficult issues and work beyond them to form lasting and active partnerships across barriers. It models how to build strong alliances that promote change in our lives and in our communities.

The stages of development are:

Know yourself outside the distress of oppression.

Listen to others in a conscious and present state.

Build effective relationships and sustain true alliances.

KNOW YOURSELF OUTSIDE OF THE DISTRESS OF OPPRESSION

Because of the way we have been oppressed and the way oppression is internalized, people initially talk about their lives within the context of their oppression. The facilitator encourages each person to tell her/his story and guide her/him to a place where s/he can see not only her/his hurt, but that part of herself/himself that is whole and well despite it. As each person identifies issues that are barriers to her/him fully being herself/himself, s/he gains insight into how s/he has internalized her/his oppression and how that plays out in her/his life. Through this process people find their true voices and develop a sense of self-worth.

LISTEN TO OTHERS IN A CONSCIOUS AND PRESENT STATE

Listening to others outside of one's hurt, despair, and fear is a skill learned by experience, and analysis and modeling by the trainers. Often people are unable to respond effectively to the issue at hand because they are distracted or confused by their own feelings. As people identify and begin working through their own barriers, they can listen to and really hear what another person is saying and give fair consideration to what is being said.

BUILD EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIPS AND SUSTAIN TRUE ALLIANCES

Once people have developed some level of skill in knowing themselves and being able to listen to others, the possibility for building new relationships and alliances emerges. By using the skills developed in support and organizing groups and through training, people are able to create the safe spaces vital to the development of better, more creative working relationships. These authentic relationships establish a solid base for developing better leaders and building a true community.

The *Be Present Empowerment Model*[®] provides support to:

- Define your own personal experiences.
- Understand how personal experiences shape definitions of self and of others.
- Give a voice to “silent” issues and identify the internal and external impact.
- Listen and be heard with openness and trust.
- Diffuse assumptions.
- Make the connection between theoretical and practical dialogue.
- Move from dialogue to strategic planning and action.

The *Be Present Empowerment Model*[®] enhances learning to:

- Bring a powerful perspective on how to holistically do the work of social and organizational change.
- Maintain individual knowledge and creativity and collaborate in the creation of new avenues of trust and understanding with a diverse group of people.
- Implement processes, create sustainable alliances, communicate ideas and lead effectively.
- Bring more of your whole self into your environment and identify more fully with the work you do.

The *Be Present Empowerment Model*[®] effects change on three interconnected levels:

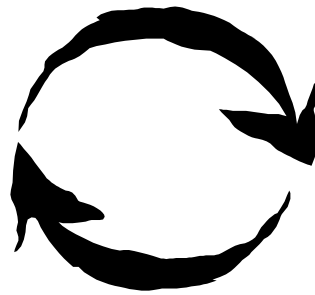
- On the **Individual Level**, the *Be Present Empowerment Model*[®] provides systems of support to develop skills and competencies regarding differences, learning new attitudes and behaviors for personal change. This approach addresses the challenges of people not knowing how to talk about racial and other differences; as well as the need for increasing awareness and knowledge of racism, internalized racism, white privilege, gender relations and other systems that divide. You learn how to strengthen self knowledge and ability to question, make connections, think creatively, take risks, reflect, make choices and collaborate with others.
- On the **Inter-group Level**, the *Be Present Empowerment Model*[®] brings diverse people together in structured dialogues and trainings to develop relationships across differences, seek understanding, increase their leadership skills, and develop skills to effectively work together. This approach dismantles stereotypes and myths, transforms conflict and increases collaborative work. You develop skills to consciously listen to and interact with others in the present moment, build trust, deal positively with challenging issues and move beyond them to create healthy, lasting partnerships – in your home, organization, school, workplace and organization.
- On the **Institutional/Community Level**, the *Be Present Empowerment Model*[®] provides organizations and institutions with tools to transform their policies, procedures, practices and culture to be more equitable and inclusive. This approach addresses the need for changing the structure of and access to opportunities; reallocating critical resources; and providing incentives for actions.

Interconnected Leadership Realms

Know Yourself Outside the Distress of Oppression



Listen to Others In a Conscious and Present State



Build Effective Relationships And Sustain True Alliances



Know Yourself Indicator Bulbs



Heart/Spirit/Truth



Places of Movement

Body



Feelings



Mind



Relationships



His/Herstory



Tools for Effective Listening



Physical Connection



Wait



Ask Questions



Let Talker Be the Guide



His/Herstory



Stay With Yourself

Build Effective Relationships and Sustain True Alliances



Trust



Diversity of Insights



Vision



Creativity



Mutual Responsibility



Sustainability



Community



Well-Being

DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP BE PRESENT PEER SUPPORT GROUP STRUCTURE

The most basic unit of leadership development is the Be Present Peer Support Group. This group is made up of individuals who meet on a regularly scheduled basis as determined by the group. The agenda for the Be Present Peer Support Group is each person's personal growth and development in a safe and trusting space. It is a time for each person to talk, feel/decode experiences, identify barriers, and create positive change in the presence and with the support of other people. S/he is not interrupted with advice, judged or blamed. S/he is listened to with respect and patience.

It is the responsibility of the other people in the group to simultaneously listen to and try to understand each person, while also being aware that what s/he is saying may bring up feelings and past experiences that can cloud their ability to really hear her/him. It is this awareness, and willingness to work on these issues as they arise, that allows people to stay present with one another and support each other's development. This process allows each member of the peer Be Present Support Group to speak honestly and openly, and for the group to move with a diversity of voices toward a common goal and build strong relationships that promote change.

PURPOSE OF THE BE PRESENT SUPPORT GROUP

- Emphasizes that our coming together is from a shared commitment to learn, be open and respectful to each other's voices as we explore core issues of collaboration.
- Introduces the idea of a linkage between our personal lives and relationships in our families, organizations, workplaces, and communities. We are our own best "tools".
- Clarifies the focus of the group as an opportunity to talk about ourselves as it relates to our lives and the challenges we face as individuals in a socially and politically diverse world.
- Reminds everyone that the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are developed and shared can be used to build successful and healthy relationship with each other, our families, organizations, workplaces, and communities.
- Enhances creativity and awareness.
- Creates a community of practice to weave together knowledge and experiences.

CREATING A SAFE SPACE

In order for individuals to engage in meaningful dialogue with each other, it is important to create a physical and emotional space. The physical space is the easier of the two to create because the task is tangible and easier to define. Creating the emotional space requires all participants to focus on themselves, rather than on each other. This process helps each person to listen to others in a conscious and present state and not from their distress.

THE EMOTIONAL SPACE

Preparing the emotional space is more challenging because it requires the participants to focus on themselves. This needs to be done before and during the small group session. If you know where you are emotionally and how you are doing in the moment and able to stay balanced in the state in which you are, then you will help create the space for each person to do the same. This knowing of your present state helps you stay committed to that moment, and that moment provides the greatest opportunity for establishing a basis for real, honest communication.

It is critical to learn how to use each moment as a guide to the next. We do not know what anyone else is really feeling or thinking until we ask. Sometimes the answer is not available to the individual, so each person must know enough about her/his state that s/he is willing to risk the moment to ask the next question that supports the individual in her/his movement. It is the ability of each person to stay out – to be present and conscious – and out of her/his own distress, but familiar enough with what is happening with her/him that gives her/him the ability to be with and listen to the individual.

THE PHYSICAL SPACE

The room should be open and welcoming. It needs to be in a location where there are minimal distractions – such as noise or people wandering in or out. The room also needs to be private so those participants are free to speak or make other sounds without feeling inhibited.

The arrangement of chairs does not necessarily have to be in a circle. However, this is an arrangement with which many people are familiar.

Think about the best seating arrangement to accomplish the goal of creating a safe physical space. Seating arrangement should ensure that people are in close and the space is open and relaxing. Use a variety of seats, like sofas, floor pillows and regular cushioned chairs.

Materials such as wall cloths, flowers, photographs, paintings, etc. also make the room more inviting. Use things that are important to you and to other people who are helping to create the space. These extra touches are important to making the room feel familiar and in communicating an unspoken message to the participants that the space has been specially prepared for them. If the people helping to create the space are from different cultures, encourage them to bring items from their culture to decorate the room.

HOW TO CREATE YOUR GROUP

- Take the time to think about what you want and need out of a group for yourself before you start the process of choosing group members. When you ask people to join your group, be clear about the commitment, your expectations, and the use of the *Be Present Empowerment Model*[®] as you lay the groundwork for their participation. Set up a consistent time for your meetings so that scheduling does not become a place where distress about doing the work gets played out.
- When you ask people to join you, they may say yes and sit with you. Or they may say no and not. Or they may see powerful changes in you as you work on yourself and decide they want the same for themselves. People choose to do this level of work, as well as leave, for many reasons. It is important to: 1) stay focused on yourself and your movement; 2) encourage your group members to do the same. When people choose to leave, celebrate the time you've spent together. And keep working on yourself so you can continue to hold open an authentic space for others.

HOW TO CREATE SAFETY IN THE SMALL GROUP

- Acknowledge that everyone contributes differently and validate the richness that it creates.
- When asking the questions, start by asking, “*Does anyone want to begin first?*” If no one steps forward, use yourself as a role model for taking a risk and sharing. Be careful not to monopolize the conversation and stay connected to others as you share.
- Don’t rush the process. Allow the group to create a pace that feels comfortable.
- Give time and honor. Reflect on silences as exciting and powerful messages of the strong emotions, risks and challenges at hand. Relate also how important it is for us to understand the nature of our silence. Wait for a response. Then gently re-ask the question... “*Does anyone have an example of?*” or share yourself.
- Use questions that are validating and open-ended so you will elicit more than “yes” or “no” responses.
- Emphasize this is a beginning process to create a safe space for people to be open and honest around their issues. It will not resolve or answer all the questions that may emerge.
- Listen to each person without interrupting or giving advice.
- Do not agree or disagree with what someone else says. Talk from and about yourself and your own experiences and feelings.
- Do not judge another person’s attitudes, feelings, or life experiences-try to listen to what is being said and why.

- Each person can take as much time as s/he needs. There is no time limit.
- If feelings come up in you while someone else is speaking, own them as your feelings. Do not intellectualize about what the other person is saying.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN YOUR GROUP

- Explore the connection between mind/body/spirit. Inherent in the *Be Present Empowerment Model*[®] process is the recognition that every being has many dimensions. As we work through the issues of our lives and our relationships with others, we will have responses that manifest themselves on four levels:
 - Physical
 - Emotional
 - Mental
 - Spiritual
- To see a person fully means we allow space for each of these aspects of their being to emerge and be seen. Ultimately, we strive to forge a connection between these aspects of ourselves so they are all working in concert together -- allowing us to be our most powerful and effective selves at all times.
- Tell your truth...even when it feels hard, impolite, and challenging to yourself or others. The key to doing this respectfully in this process is to share the information from a personal perspective--without analyzing, judging, or theorizing in an abstract way. In support groups, we are looking to create something real together, which often means breaking through silences, barriers and cultural codes that tell us it's not OK to talk about things the way we have them in our minds. In our groups, we are asking one another to take those risks and share your individual truths with one another, and take a journey together to forge a real relationship with those truths laid out on the table.
- Stay connected between meetings. Touch base with your support group members by phone (or email, but use sparingly -- not for hard conversations!) Continue the dialogue and relationships even when you're not sitting in group. And do so consciously, regardless of whether it is "group time" or hang out time. Ultimately, we want a world that looks different than this one. We start with our relationships in this space, and practice this way of being different with one another on a consistent basis. Clear up any misunderstandings or anything that is cluttering up the space between you as close as possible to when they begin.
- Respect differences in the ways people think, move, struggle and celebrate. Allow space in the group for these differences to emerge, and be fully seen, heard and understood.

HOW TO FACILITATE IN YOUR GROUP

- Always remain present with yourself, making sure that when you work with others, you are not coming from your own distress, but can be totally present with the person who is sharing. This does not mean that you are not having feelings or thoughts during someone's check in -- it means that you are clear about what is yours and are careful not to confuse what is yours with what is not.
- Recognize that everyone has a different process as to how and when they move. S/he can be working at different levels while group members sit together and support one another. The key is movement. The group's role is not to judge or prescribe the individual's movement; it is to ensure that movement is happening.
- Try not to focus on the question of "Am I doing it right?" and focus instead on determining if movement is taking place, and how you can support that movement and help someone emerge their own thoughts, feelings and understandings about where they are in that moment. Certainly it is important to be familiar with the guidelines about this process. But understand too that just learning the process is a process in itself that requires time, taking risks, and constantly working on you as the only clear path to being able to work effectively with others.
- A facilitator can help a person talk even when they are beginning to shut down by asking relevant questions about the person's state, such as: 1) What is happening now? 2) When did you start to feel yourself shut down? Understanding why and when we shut down is critical information that can lead a person to further movement and a deeper understanding of how they operate. A facilitator can also ask the person to take a moment to connect with the rest of the group while trying to sense where they are within themselves.