

Interhelp Community Guidelines for Tending and Mending the Social Web

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See [Appendices document](#) for additional resource material:

- A. Facilitator's Checklist
- B. Creating a Welcoming Space (Opening Welcome, Sharing Gender Pronouns)
- C. Understanding and Undoing Systems of Oppression
- D. Methods of Learning, Feedback, and Dialogue
- E. Proposal for Giving and Receiving Feedback on Harm
- F. Protecting the Container of the Community
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Yet to come/to be added:

- H. Inner Awareness and Self-Regulation

1) Context and Invitation

In the culture that we are living toward, we bring strong intention to honor and value the diversity within each workshop group. We aim to create space for all to be seen and heard, and to learn as a community if and when misunderstandings, other difficulties or harm arise among us.

To this end, Interhelp's Tending and Mending the Web Action Circle, supported by the Interhelp Council, has prioritized the formation of community guidelines. We are also developing mechanisms for integrating and incorporating the guidelines, plus systems of support for all involved in this learning process.

The toxic norms and conditioning of dominant culture often replicate in workshop spaces until they are consciously interrupted and transformed. (Please see appendices for material on power, privilege and oppression issues, and on honoring the impact of trauma.) Systemic oppression tends to be normalized and is therefore invisible to many in the system, especially those with the most power. For this reason, it is important to make extra efforts to center the people most vulnerable to being harmed.

We choose to grow and build life-sustaining culture. Toward this goal, this document includes a set of guidelines that each facilitator and participant at Work That Reconnects events is invited to follow.

We develop this culture together with a feeling of spaciousness so that there is an ongoing commitment to learning and growth. We expect that not every person will find these guidelines familiar, useful or adequate. As each of us is learning how to carry them out, they at least give us a shared picture to hold.

These guidelines present a different paradigm from having rules, and a different paradigm from policing. Our paradigm is: *Everyone belongs, and no one is disposable.*

We want to be together in our community “wherever each of us is” within this picture. Ultimately we want to say, “You are not alone. We are in a social web. We are learners supporting each others’ learning.”

Facilitators may choose to present some of these guidelines at the beginning of a workshop. Beware however, of the ways that the process around Community Agreements can reinforce systems of oppression! See “Breaking the Rules: How Ground Rules can Hurt Us” on the [Tools for Change](#) website.

The material in sections 3 through 5 (below), and also in the separate appendices document, is intended to support people to live into – integrate and incorporate – these guidelines. Facilitators in particular take note!

2) Guidelines for Community

We strive toward creating a community where everyone is welcomed with respect and every voice is honored. You are invited to bring your emotions, intuitions, spirituality, body and socialized identity while remaining respectful of the rights and safety of others.

Here are guidelines that can help us create this community:

Balance care of whole group and care of self

Show up on time for sessions. If you need to miss a session, let someone know so that the group is not waiting for you.

Take care of yourself, attuning to and attending to your needs.

As needed, draw on methods you find effective to calm and center yourself.

Confidentiality

Do not share someone's name or other identifying characteristics in conjunction with speaking about what has happened during our time together, unless you first obtain their explicit permission to do so.

If you wish to follow-up with someone later about something they shared during program time, ask their permission first. It is perfectly fine for someone to say, "No, I do not want to speak further about it." You must respect their wishes, but do not take it personally or be offended by this choice.

Honor the experience and autonomy of self and others

Bring awareness to what is going on with you physically, mentally and emotionally.

Respect limitations and boundaries, for yourself and for others. Seek consent, especially around touch; attune to nonverbal communication such as tone and body language; when in doubt, ask.

Do not take without asking – either from humans or any species, e.g., ask permission before borrowing from another culture or picking a flower.

Mindful communication

The following Council guidelines can be helpful when sharing in the whole group: speak from the heart; listen from the heart; apply brevity of words and get straight to the essence.

Be mindful of what the person speaking may experience as respectful listening. In some cultures, respectful listening implies silence; in others a more interactive listening style is the norm. If in doubt, ask.

Use your "inner tuning fork" to discern if something needs to be shared in real time in the group, or if it is best processed internally, or with someone at another time.

Hold the intention of being kind in words (keeping in mind that "kind" doesn't necessarily mean "nice").

As much as possible, speak from personal experience and use "I statements." Avoid "we statements" that can inaccurately universalize your own experience and erase others' experiences. If you use the word "we," be sure to qualify who the "we" refers to, i.e. "*We in the industrialized world of middle and upper class means bear greater climate responsibility.*"

Allow silence to happen. Silence can allow space for emergence. At the same time, be mindful not to be normalizing one communication style.

Strive toward an open mind

You do not have to agree with all activities engaged in as a group or ideas that individuals present, but if it feels safe enough for you, try to be open-minded to others' ideas, feelings, worldviews and ways of doing things.

It is okay to disagree – respectfully, without blaming, shaming or attacking ourselves or others.

Move away from judgment and toward curiosity.

Grow in awareness of group dynamics, and work toward equality of opportunity

The intention is for all participants to have equal opportunity to speak, and for everyone's voice to be heard.

“Make space/take space” means that, if you have been socialized/conditioned to speak a lot in a group, you might try instead to consciously hold back in order to allow space for others. If you have been socialized/conditioned to not speak much, try speaking more frequently (assuming you feel safe to proceed). If you do not feel safe, consider raising the question of safety with a facilitator or with the group.

Safer space – reducing and repairing harm

Deepen your awareness about – and attentiveness to – harm and potential harm (especially from social conditioning) that you may be contributing to. When you are aware of contributing to harm, commit to interrupt the dynamic and transform it.

Empower/enlist everyone in the group to be aware of potential harm. Implement a process for pausing, noticing and shifting when harm is experienced or witnessed.

The impact of our actions does not always match our intention; strive to be aware of both. If your action has a harmful impact, listen and see if there are ways you can change your behavior out of care for all.

Be willing to exchange and receive honest feedback about the impact of your words and actions. For instance, a phrase you could say when receiving feedback is “tell me more.” (For more examples, see METHODS section below.)

Braver space: Commit to a learning community

Be willing to take risks, be uncomfortable and make “mistakes.” All living systems evolve through trial and error, by taking in feedback and trying a new behavior.

Speaking up when you see systemic oppression playing out can seem awkward or even impolite. It's also important to support people who "go out on a limb" with brave acts of naming or interrupting.

You can say "oops" (or a similar expression) to signal to the group if you recognize you may have done something hurtful or unconscious and you want to note it and own it.

Honor what for you is your "comfort zone." As you are ready, try pushing out of your "comfort zone" while not going beyond what is safe for you. Seek that middle space where you can risk, learn, and grow.

It can be helpful to invite ourselves to choose to learn rather than to defend. In a learning space, seek your inner compass and act as your heart guides you. Accessing our heart helps us stay in that place of wanting to grow.

Grow in compassion

Practice compassion for yourself and for others. No one is disposable – yourself included.

As you are able to stretch yourself, especially practice compassion (including for yourself) and sensitivity when providing feedback and receiving feedback.

Honor different kinds/ways of leadership

We are all leaders. We all have gifts to share. Leadership can look different ways, not just "front of the room" leadership, or top-down leadership.

Leadership can be emergent when many voices are honored and emergence is valued, so group members are welcomed to contribute and offer feedback and input.

Group members are also asked to respect and support facilitators in their role which includes making some process decisions for groups.

3) Incorporation and Integration

This living document has gone through three steps over many months. Drawing on several different sets of guidelines, including those used by Visions Inc., the bulk of the community guidelines were drafted by Aravinda Ananda with input from Joseph Rotella, Kirstin Edelglass and Markie Babbott for a program they offered in 2017. Further changes have been made by Interhelp Tending and Mending the Web Action Circle members Aravinda Ananda, Carol Harley, Kristina Orchard, Paula Hendrick and Sarah Pirtle, with input from community members.

The Guidelines in the above section are a work in progress. This is a living document. All people in the community are invited to work with the Guidelines and can offer reflections and suggest changes by sending an email to [Paula Hendrick](#).

The Action Circle group members hosted a Community Practice Day in April, 2018 and again in April of 2019. Contact Paula for information on this and future events.

The deep work of living into these Guidelines is ongoing.

4) Mechanisms for Maintenance and Repair

What about when agreements are not being met? Here we offer guidance and suggestions for steps to take when this happens. We also touch on the importance of skill-building opportunities, and describe the additional support that a “Repair Circle” can provide.

What to do when agreements are not being met in a group:

Having a thoughtfully crafted set of community agreements or guidelines, but lacking ways to respond if they are not being followed, can be demoralizing and even harmful. However, the influence of dominant conditioning can lead facilitators to ignore what is happening and to avoid taking action when this happens. Many of us need practice as we grow into naming and intervening when guidelines are not being held. Below are some important things to consider.

Though all facilitators watch for instances and patterns of guidelines not being followed, consider designating one facilitator who is not in a lead role to watch the community container and speak up when needed. In addition, you might assign someone (not a facilitator) the role of feedback collector/catcher. The feedback collected from participants may well include experiences and observations related to the community container.

You might also invite and encourage all participants to hold the container – and also to watch for how it is not being held. This helps build skills in peer-to-peer accountability.

Once you become aware that the container is not being held, options for naming include:

1. Speak to the person privately at a break.
2. Ask someone else to speak with the person.
3. Raise the issue in the whole group.
4. Invite the group to get into pairs; you pair with the person or persons who were not keeping the agreements. This is a way of intervening in the moment in a more private way.

Remember, this is not about policing but about building healthy shared social space. Please see “Proposal on Giving and Receiving Feedback on Harm” in the Appendix for specific guidance on communicating feedback and requesting a change in behavior.

Skill-building opportunities:

Living into some of these community guidelines will require many of us conditioned by toxic culture to unlearn life-long habits and worldviews. This process often requires practice and support. Interhelp has undertaken to provide opportunities for Work That Reconnects facilitators and community members to grow into these guidelines.

Workshop facilitators can offer skill-building/muscle-building opportunities to workshop participants within the workshop itself, so that people can learn and grow together. Please see the appendices for some skill building ideas.

Repair Circle:

The Tending and Mending The Web Action Circle, together with Interhelp Council, has created a Repair Circle of people skilled in interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, power/privilege/oppression issues, and trauma. The members of the Repair Circle volunteer to serve when called on to help heal hurts and resolve conflicts that arise in the community. Our intention is that no person or persons be left alone/without resources when harm happens.

Repair Circle members can be called on at any point, and in particular will be called on if communication breaks down or resolution cannot be reached.

Mending of the web is complete when apology or repair has been made and accepted. This process may happen only between or among persons directly involved, but may include the whole group if all present were impacted.

It is also possible that a facilitator may guide a group in amending a guideline in the course of a workshop, if the guideline as offered does not support a deep tending of the unique web of that workshop.

Please also see “Protecting the Container of the Community” in the Appendix.

5) Acknowledgement of Complexity, with Special Attention to Trauma

Complexity may arise in the process of living into these community guidelines. A growing edge for the Work That Reconnects is deepening in trauma awareness and growing in skillfulness as we understand and support ourselves and others.

One definition of trauma is an experience that is too painful or overwhelming for a person to handle; when it occurs the body goes into a protective mode. Frequently it involves feeling that one's life is in danger. Going through trauma is not rare. According to the national center for PTSD, about 6 of every 10 men and 5 of every 10 women experience at least one trauma in their lives. Another source puts that number at 70% of adults in the U.S. Violence is epidemic in our culture.

Responses to trauma can become incorporated into the body. People who have lived through traumatic circumstances can experience unexpected triggering and re-traumatization; when this happens their body is reliving the original trauma in the present moment. An emotional flashback can include feelings of fear, anger, confusion, humiliation, or distrust. Flashbacks come unbidden; people try to do inner work to sort out reactions and support themselves.

We acknowledge that responses to trauma can create complexity in upholding the guidelines. People experiencing re-traumatization need to be supported, along with anyone else in the group who is feeling an impact in the present moment.

Please also see "Honoring the Impact of Trauma" in the Appendix. We suggest that facilitators in particular read the appendices; they provide guidance for creating a resilient workshop container and responding skillfully to things that may come up in any workshop.

In Conclusion

We value the diversity within each group of participants, the communities we create together, and the unique contribution of each person both within our workshop space and in the world. Only by fostering each of these will our workshop process – the spiral of the Work That Reconnects – bring true wholeness.

The [Appendices](#) are intended to provide a deeper framework and understanding. We hope you find them useful.