

FLOW CURIOUSITY

Discussions about life, diversabilities, and wellbeing



BY: SELF ADVOCATES OF NANAIMO

This pocketbook has been created from notes taken at a series of Learning Circles attended by the Self Advocates of Nanaimo between February and February of 2021.

A learning circle is a guided discussion on a chosen topic where peer learning is encouraged.

These circles were facilitated by Christle Lowe and hosted by Supporting Advocates in Leadership.

The learning circle format is a flexible tool and could be held with your family, at a coffee shop, or just by asking a really good question and going from there.

This is a resource for everyone and one that says
“We all have a lot to learn from one another.”

Learning Circle #1 – February 2020

What would you like to get out of tonight's circle?

Responses:

- To learn more about learning circles – have curiosity filled
- To know what I'm doing (in life)
- To help people to come together
- To share wisdom we don't even know we have
- Connection, togetherness
- To support one another
- Meeting new friends
- To learn about what a learning circle is
- Self-care
- worthiness
- A safe place to share how we really feel
- Building our support system
- To remind ourselves of how important we are to others
- Peer support and friends
- Advocacy for yourself and others
- Learn about different ways of sharing that are helpful for letting things out
- Personal safety
- Stress reduction

What does it mean to stand up for yourself?

Responses:

- To have a voice
- Making people know you are a person
- Letting them know you're not gonna take CRAP
- To be respected
- To respect other people's feelings
- To let other people know you are important

What does it mean to stand up for yourself “in a good way”?

Responses:

- So you don't hurt other people's feelings
- Let people know that you have feelings too
- Choose your words
- Don't "tell people off"
- Don't yell and scream
- Breathe
- Let out your feelings and emotions
- Take a walk to clear your mind
- Take a warm bath (but not in public!) ☺

What are some good words to use to stand up for yourself?

Responses:

- Instead of: "You shouldn't talk down to me!" *try*: "I don't like to be talked down to."
- Instead of: "You can't treat me that way!" *try* "I don't like being treated that way." Or "I would like to be treated with respect."

The group discussed two kinds of power:

- 1) power over (someone or something else)
- 2) power to (do things, stand up for yourself)

What does it mean to “stand in the circle of your power”?

Responses:

- Do it even if you are scared / try it
- Sometimes you don't have any control
- Open your mind
- Choosing your words
- Using your voice (in a good way)
- Be willing to make mistakes
- Be willing to laugh
- Take the "T" off can't!!!

Learning Circle #2 – March, 2020

What words can we use to stand up for our right to choose how we spend our time?

Responses:

- “I don’t appreciate people telling me how to live my life.”
- “I want to make my own decisions for myself.”
- “I need a day or two to make some time for myself.”
- “I need some time to chill, relax, to do what I want to do, to decompress.”
- “There’s a family history of heart disease, and I had a health scare, so I need to make time for myself.”
- “Thank you for your opinion, **AND** I’m still going to take a day for myself.”
- “I’m not leaving the house on Wednesdays.”
- “I’m not going anywhere on Wednesdays.”

What ways could you share these messages?

Responses:

- In-person, face-to-face
- Over the phone
- A letter / email
- On your message machine / voice mail

Ideas for answering machine messages:

- “I’m away for a while, please leave me a message.”
- “You’ve reached the house of _____. We are at an undisclosed location. Please leave a message at the sound of the beep, and we’ll get back to you as soon as we can.”

The group discussed rights and boundaries:

Statements:

- No one has the right to tell you what to do! e.g. how to spend your spare time e.g. when, where or how to do self-care
- If someone tells you what to do, and you didn't ask for their advice, they're violating your boundaries!!!
- If you tell someone what to do, and they didn't ask for your advice, and you didn't ask if it was ok to share your opinion, you're violating their boundaries.
- Exceptions: if someone is in danger, it's ok to tell them what to do to make sure they are safe. Or, if you have a job and your boss tells you to do a task, you are allowed to say no if it's unsafe, illegal or immoral, but not just because you don't want to.
- You can put up a boundary without being mean or unkind. Use your "I" statements.



Learning Circle #3 – April 2020

If you woke up as an animal tomorrow, what animal would you wake up as? and why?

Responses:

- Lion - because of big yawns in the morning.
- Dog - to be nice but also able to be scary or tough.
- Puppy - because they get spoiled
- Horse - because they are a therapy animal, good at useful things.
- Lion - I like lazing around in the sun.
- Dolphin - lots of room to explore
- Bear - Even though they can be kind of scary, they can also be affectionate. (Bear with a teddy bear heart)
- Raven - because I used to dream of them when I was young, and they also collect shiny things which I like to do as well.

Through this struggle*, what are you thankful for?

**referring to unfolding pandemic & lockdown*

Responses:

- Having a house to live in.
- Having friends, family (chosen), and a pet.
- Shared that I have also built my chosen family up, and can rely on them when in need.
- Grateful that my partner lives in the same house, and that they are no longer long-distance.
- Grateful for my birth family, as well as my chosen friends.
- Grateful for my support worker to help with groceries and all else.
- Grateful for my friends and many different ways of connecting with people that are possible (ie. conference calls etc.)

What is your Gem from this Learning Circle? (ie. What will you take with you?)

Responses:

- Learned that everyone seems to be going through the same issues right now, and we're all in this together.
- Take risks, and keep connected.
- Remember to keep going & keep trying new things.
- Learned about staying connected with people, and the importance of trying new and different ways of staying connected.
- Really enjoyed hearing everyone's voice: Glad to hear so much compassion and sharing. Great group!
- Thankful for the group, and the chance to learn something new.

Learning Circle #4 - May 2020

The group started with a mindfulness exercise focusing on grounding and relaxation.

What was the best thing that has happened to you since our last circle?

Responses:

- Learning to have patience.
 - Question: how did you do that? Answer: focus on what you have.
- Spending time in nature at least 15-20 minutes every day.
- Enjoying the spring flowers.
- Taking photographs of flowers and having them be acknowledged by people in a far-away country.
- Time with cat (cat never judges and gives unconditional love).
- Time in nature.
- Self care.
- Watching a sunset and taking pictures.
- Finding a pallet that will make making a garden happen more easily. Excitement about the idea of and the planning to make it happen.
- Receiving a birthday email that had pictures with captions of a friend's walk through a park that made it feel like I was there walking with her.

Turned it over to a participant who wanted to discuss something that came up for them.

- The issue was the use of the word “vulnerable” by the media and the government to describe people with diversabilities (as well as other groups it is trying to help).
- A participant shared a dictionary definition: “vulnerable – (of a person) a need of special care, support or protection because of age, disability, or risk of abuse or neglect” and described different situations when different groups of people might be vulnerable.

- The participant did not like being labelled vulnerable at first – “labels are for jars” but does not feel that way anymore.
- Other participants shared the feeling of not liking being called vulnerable because they felt put down by it too.
- We discussed the idea that sometimes labels can be helpful and sometimes hurtful e.g. a label can help you choose the right kind of jam, strawberry or raspberry; but sometimes labels can be hurtful (names other than diversabilities to describe self-advocates).
- We discussed the idea that we are all vulnerable as humans (death, disease, accidents, being lied to or betrayed etc.) but within that vulnerability is an opportunity – to share how you truly feel and what you truly think and to ask for help.
- We shared ideas about how to live your life well: life is full of opportunity; don’t waste time; don’t be afraid to ask for help; tell people you care about that you care about them; “paying it forward” and “paying it back.”
- Some ideas were shared from Brene Brown, an American social work professor, researcher, author, and speaker who studies courage, vulnerability, shame and empathy.
 - “Vulnerability is not winning or losing; it’s having the courage to show up and be seen when we have no control over the outcome. Vulnerability is not weakness; it’s our greatest measure of courage.”
 - “People who wade into discomfort and vulnerability and tell the truth about their stories are the real badasses.”
- We noted that there had been not only courage shown in our discussion tonight but also compassion which led into our next question.

Over the last couple months, what have you done to be helpful to someone else OR what do you plan to do to be helpful to someone else?

Responses:

- Talk to lonely people.
- Show kindness and respect to others, don't judge.
- Smile at people!
- Choose laughter. Keep and use your sense of humour – be silly, be a joker, use your “evil” laugh!
- Notice how animals tell you what they need from you – listen to them.
- Check in on friends who live alone by phone or text.
- Keep in touch with extended family.
- Share things that are funny, inspiring or hopeful on Facebook.
- **Helpful Resources** shared by the group:
 - Books:
 - Power of Positive Thinking – Norman Vincent Peale
 - Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway – Susan Jeffers
 - Making a Living Without a Job: Winning Ways for Creating Work that You Love – Barbara Winter
 - Authors Wayne Dyer, Louise Hay, & Deepak Chopra
 - Movies:
 - The Pursuit of Happyness
 - Apps:
 - “CBC Gem” app on your computer or smart phone – can stream movies and TV shows on 14 CBC channels for FREE.

Learning Circle # 5 - June 2020

Is there any other reason you want to come to this circle?

Responses:

- Outlets for social connection are even more valuable right now because we're still in a sort of "jail".
- Seconded sentiment about feeling "locked up"
- Invited the group to explore this subject further.
- I make lots of cookies and eat lots of cookies as a side-effect.

Everyone wrote their own recipe for "Self Care Pie."

Pie divisions (in 4 pieces:)

Top Left: Physical (your body)

Top Right: Mental (ideas)

Bottom Left: Emotional (feelings)

Bottom Right: Spiritual (what makes you feel a sense of awe)

- In each of these 4 quadrants, write down the things you do to take care of that part of yourself.

What are some things you do to take care of your physical self?

Responses:

- Morning walk every day.
- Walking - walking log to keep track.
- Walking, Farmers Market, healthy food, & yoga.
- Not doing too much exercise right now due to neighbourhood security concerns and one very bad experience in recent years. Arranged for a walking buddy 1/week with a friend.
- Raised the idea of Karate - as it helped her feel less afraid of walking alone. Shared that they used to be afraid of walking at night but has conquered this by attending SAN meetings last year, some of which were after dark.

What do you do to take care of your mental self?

Responses:

- Shared that she does puzzles, rug-hooking and exploring youtube. Strong in this quadrant, not as strong right now in the physical pie piece.
- Doing word search and other puzzles to keep her mind busy. She has been persisting through the frustration of learning a new thing

- (computer skills, and literacy skills) & managed to do a Zoom call
- Uses technology (YouTube) to access funny/ interesting materials to keep up his spirits.
 - Preserving a good sense of humour - when a good laugh comes along (with someone else) - seizing the opportunity to enjoy it fully and as it arises.
 - Keeping focused on positive self talk when facing different hurdles that arise (eg. today - home reno troubles)

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How do you take care of your emotional self / feelings?

Responses:

- People deal with and show their emotions in different ways - it's ok to be different.
- It's good to remember this when things are difficult.
- Karate, Zumba - taking care of physical which helps emotional self feel better. Nice to feel tired after exercising. Shared that when doing classes in bedroom, can jump in bed for a nice snooze after. Feels good to do something that is good for you.
- all the different corners of pie are connected to one another.

What do you do to take care of your spirit?

Responses:

- Breathing.
- Listen to music.
- Do not think about this very much or in this way. Enjoys nice scenery (ie. sunsets).

What will you take away from tonight's Learning Circle?

Responses:

- learned about new ways to stay positive.
- holding onto hope for things to improve after current circumstances improve.
- Be kind to yourself and to others. We can't predict the future.
- The specialness of the people in this group and the value of coming together in this way. Being kind to others and yourself.

Learning Circle # 11 – February 2021

"The Velvet Hammer"

The Velvet Hammer means setting a boundary with someone by being kind to yourself while also being kind to others.

How do you think you would use this tool in your life?

Responses:

- Be honest.
- Start with the velvet - not bring out the hammer right away.
- Think about what I want to say before having a tough conversation.

Think of something someone does that annoys you.

Responses:

- When somebody cuts in line (without noticing).
- When people eat corn on the cob and dip it straight into the bar of butter.
- When people forget to pick up after their dog when walking on my street.
- Same.
- When the neighbour's cat comes into our yard.
- When people leave their phone, keys, travel belongings on the table during a meal out.
- When people take pickles out of the pickle jar with their fingers.

“approaching the situation with kindness increases the likelihood that you will get what you want.”

Example:

Step 1. Ask the person for their help - ie. Can I have a minute?

*Step 2. I **noticed** that . . .*

Step 3. I am wondering what we can do about this. . .

(solution - putting our curiosity to work)

Participants tried out using "the velvet hammer" on each other's or their own situation.

- "Would you mind moving your cell phone/purse off of the table"
- "Would you please use your knife to put the butter on the corn?"

Thoughts from the circle:

"Using curiosity can help you get to the problem sooner."

When you find yourself starting to get frustrated, "be kind and ask questions."

For example: "I am wondering why ... is happening, because it can't continue."

- The group discussed avoiding placing blame on the person they are talking to.

The next step is to implement an "If / then" consequence. (ie. if this happens, then that will happen).

- If this next step doesn't result in a solution, then the next step would be to "widen the circle" and bring in another person / people with authority.

The group took a short 5 minute "dance break."

What do you say when the person listens?

Responses:

- Say thanks to the person.
 - A participant shared a situation which had been resolved by bringing up the issue with their friend (always paying the bill).
 - The participant shared that they felt better once this issue had been addressed.
 - The group discussed the advantage of solving problems like this before they grow worse which eventually can affect or end the friendship.
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Photo: Some of the Self Advocates of Nanaimo and supports at a winter gathering: From left to right: Crystal, Gwen, Richard, Charmaine, Gavin, Christle, Ryan, Barbara, Miranda, & Alexis.

About:

The Self Advocates of Nanaimo have been meeting since 2014 and engage with the community by way of monthly gatherings, learning circles, short films, television appearances and conferences as well as local presentations on self leadership. The monthly SAN meetings, where they discuss a wide range of topics relevant to persons with diversabilities both locally and globally, welcome guests and presenters alike. If you would like to connect with the SAN group or just learn a little bit more about learning circles in general, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us through the contact information below:

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& Most importantly “*take the T off can't!*”