

**CHANGES GROUPS:
Safe Companionship in Community**

Suzanne L. Noël, B.A., CFT, CFC

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*Focusing enables a person to experience this inward bodily sensing  
of bits of concrete change. Having once experienced that,  
people can recognize when they are changing.*

Eugene T. Gendlin

*The body is living in an environment,  
and it cannot be separated from its ongoing interaction with the environment.  
The environment is not only air and food,  
but the other people, society, and the universe.  
It is an ongoingness, not a static something.*

Eugene Gendlin

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Below I outline the basic format for Changes meetings as we run them in the Costa Rica “West Side Changes Meeting,” based on Kathy McGuire’s model (See <http://www.focusing.org/changes.htm>), as I learned from Robert Lee, who in turn was influenced by the Quaker tradition. This model shares many of the guidelines used in Twelve Step Fellowships, including revolving “leaders,” no crosstalk (replying to shares), time limits on shares, and confidentiality (among others). These guidelines paradoxically help create a safe space for authentic sharing by establishing boundaries; that is, the clear group structure ends up allowing more individual freedom.

I wish to highlight that just as there are many styles of Focusing and Listening, so too there are many styles of meeting as a group or community. Please take what you like from this model, and leave the rest.

The “Prime Mover” is the person responsible for facilitating the group. This role changes regularly so that the group remains egalitarian.

Other roles may include a “Time Keeper,” someone who gently reminds the person sharing of the time they have left; and a “Process Monitor,” someone who respectfully guides the group back to its primary purpose should it deviate into other styles of relating -- while also honoring specific individual needs.

In this document I outline the major phases of a Changes Group Process, share some Guidelines for Safety, and offer a document which can be copied for Prime Movers to help them guide the group, so that anyone in the group can guide the group process.

It is suggested that a group have at least four committed core members to sustain it. Each group

can decide whether to allow newcomers to Focusing or be a closed group for experienced Focusers. The nature of the group will change accordingly. In Costa Rica we have a recent requirement that anyone bringing in a new person needs to meet with them for a one-hour session on the Focusing Pause and on reflective listening. Changes groups can be live or virtual.

May you have fun forming your own “Home Group” that deepens and enhances your and its members sense of connection and belonging. May it keep carrying forward everyone’s carrying forwards!

## **GROUP PROCESS** **Prime Mover Guidelines**

### **1. CHECK IN: Initial Sharing or Lead In Attunement.**

We can share how we are this week or today (Check In), going around so that each person can share (or pass).

Or the “Prime Mover” may do a “Lead In” attunement, such as, a Clearing a Space exercise or Self Empathy exercise, etc, followed by brief sharings.

**Prime Mover reminds each person to share for only three/five minutes.**

(Some groups may opt for no time limits on initial shares but this can create discomfort if a few persons tend to dominate.)

Some groups use egg timers to keep the sharing down to 2/3 minutes. A “Time Monitor” person may volunteer to keep the time.

Sharing can be “pop corn” style, where people individually share as needed, or the Prime Mover may suggest going around in the circle. Anyone can pass if they so desire.

Listening: In some Changes meetings, there is no reflection or commenting on what is being shared. In others, someone in the group may offer some reflection. Reflection often invites further sharing, so this must be taken into consideration.

Likewise, some groups may prefer round robin listening (where the person to the left or the right of each person offers reflective listening) while others leave it open for whoever wishes to offer a listening response.

In general, this “Check In” time is not intended for conversation.

### **2. Selection of partnerships or triads.**

Robert Lee often reminds people that while in this step of selecting partners, we wish to be proactive (initiate by stating our preferences); receptive to welcome the needs of others; be conscious of the group needs as a whole; and leave no one behind.

- Each person mentions with whom they would like to partner. Again, this can be done “pop corn” style or by going around person by person.
- Each person has an opportunity to express their preferences or lack thereof.
- Being “chosen” by someone does not obligate one to focus with that person; one can still express a preference for exchanging with someone else.
- When someone prefers to focus with someone else after you have chosen them, this is not to be taken personally. People choose partners for various reasons: for example, sometimes the issues that came up resonate; sometimes it’s simply not having Focused with this person for a while; sometimes it could be that we really like Focusing with one particular person because we feel safe with them and we wish to work on a difficult issue, etc.
- Sometimes we have to go around twice in order to find partnerships or triads that work for all involved.
- The Prime Mover may eventually have to sensitively suggest diads or triads..
- If no one has any preferences, partnerships can be broken up randomly.

### 3. **Focusing-Related and Non-Focusing-Related Announcements (“News”).**

These are done before the Focusing/Listening exchanges in case someone needs to leave early. If no one needs to leave early, then these can be done at the end.

### 4. **Splitting off to do Listening/Focusing exchanges for a set amount of time.**

**Prime Mover sets the time to return for Group Closing.**

**Usually, Focusing exchanges in Changes meetings are longer, averaging 30 to 45 minutes for each person. Again, this varies from group to group.**

Each person has equal time for Focusing. If one person ends before the allotted time, this time is not “given” to the other (this helps maintain equal power relationships within the partnership). The time is not used for any discussion on the contents of each other’s sessions (unless and only if the Focuser initiates conversation on their own content.) Best to end the session and return to group space or talk about other things not related to what came during Focusing.

Triads have a Focuser (A); a Listener (B); and an Observer/Witness/Time Keeper (C). In the second round, the Listener (B) will be the Focuser, the first Observer(C) now offering listening; and the original Focuser (A) will be the Observer – and so on (C, A, B).

### 5. **Closing.**

Return to group space at recommended time for closing. Those who wish to do so may share their “carrying forwards” briefly.

The time and date for the next group meeting is set.

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### **GUIDELINES FOR SAFETY for CHANGES MEETINGS**

Suzanne L. Noël, B.A., CFT, CFC

*Another person is a very powerful aid  
in letting one's feelings and meanings open up  
and develop through steps,  
but only if that other person can listen.  
...that means putting nothing extraneous in  
and receiving each bit of experience  
just as the speaker means to convey it.  
When people experience listening and being listened to,  
it soon seems like an inalienable right that goes with being human.*  
Eugene Gendlin

The following are safety guidelines I wrote up for my Recovery Focusing groups and shared with our West Side Changes Meeting in Santa Ana, Costa Rica.

Each Changes group finds its own right way of being together as a group. The following guidelines are *suggestions* that help maintain the most safety within a group process, enabling each member to share openly and vulnerably. You may wish to have the group itself establish its own safety guidelines and include Felt Sensing in this process.

Each group can decide whether it is an open or closed group -- whether it will allow only experienced Focusers in, or whether it is open to anyone who is interested to practice Felt Sensing and Felt Listening.

Safety guidelines may be read occasionally to the group by the facilitator or Prime Mover and could be read when newcomers or visitors are present.

To this aim, I suggest the following safety guidelines. Naturally, these can be expanded according to group preferences. Following these guidelines I offer a simpler version in a “Prime Mover Guide” which can be followed at meetings, thus allowing different people to be the Prime Mover without having had too much experience doing so.

To begin, the facilitator may say something similar to the following:

**Our main purpose is to get together to exchange Focusing/Listening turns. Outside issues, politics, or controversies should be left outside the circle.**

## **Our group greatly values safe companionship –**

We keep safe company to our emerging felt experience.

We as listeners provide safe companionship to the Focuser, understanding that respect, open-heartedness, and kindness are more important than anything else.

We as Focusers provide safe companionship to our listener as well.

We value and respect our own unfolding process, as well as our outer relationships with each other, and the group as a whole.

## **Below are some reminders and guidelines for keeping our process safe and comfortable:**

### **1. The Focuser is in charge of his or her own process and of choosing the type of listening they prefer.**

Focusers may specify whether they prefer only reflective responses, no responses, or are open to guiding, empathic responses, or advanced listening suggestions by the Listener. This is especially true when Focusing with new people.

We invite the Focuser to be kind to the Listener in requesting their preferences before and during the exchange.

We respectfully ask that listeners be open to receiving corrections on their listening if the Focuser prefers something the listener is not doing. Listening preferences are personal and do not imply anything about the Listener's abilities.

As Focusers, let us be willing to be open toward our listeners as well. If they do something different from what we are used to, let's check and see if it helps before assuming it doesn't. New perspectives can free us from our ingrained Focusing patterns.

Having stated our suggested safety guidelines does not mean they will always be followed. We remain forgiving of ourselves and others.

### **2. The Listener as a safe companion: following, not leading.**

Likewise, if the Focuser has not explicitly requested a certain type of Listening, the Listener may ask: "How would you like me to be with you today? Would you like guiding, empathic responses, or simply reflective listening?"

As a general practice, we encourage primarily reflective listening during partnership exchanges. If someone – such as newcomers - wants the Listener to be in "Actively Guiding/Listening" mode, they can request this; and then only if it is OK for the Listener to be in this active mode, as advanced listeners may wish to simply relax into reflective companionship.

### **3. No suggestions or "crosstalk" during or after our exchange.**

As a general preference, we suggest no guiding, advice giving, or making suggestions of any sort by the Listener. Suggestions include “Lead Ins” and inviting the Focuser to do anything other than what they are doing. Examples of suggestions include: “Maybe you could check to see how your body is holding this or sensing it.”

We honor the Focuser as they are, whether we consider they are Focusing or not. We are not there to “help” or “fix” in any way. We are simply there to offer our safe, warm, caring presence and companionship. If the Focuser is mostly in the story, we allow all that is to be just as it is. Some Focusers “stream,” meaning they are dipping into their felt sense as they are speaking (Robert Lee). We make no assumptions or evaluations.

We gently put aside any urge to guide, interpret, or comment.

4. **“Allow each soul to walk its path.”** (Neil Donald Walsh)  
**What you see and hear in the Focusing Space remains in that space.**

To maintain safety, we strongly suggest that you refrain from commenting on content in any way, shape or form during or after the session. Do not ask: “May I make a suggestion?” after a person has shared, for we are trusting each person’s inner unfolding life process – that is, we trust that each person will find their own insights and next right steps without our “help.” Making suggestions implies we know better than their own body wisdom and has a “one up” feel to it.

We as Focusers can of course bring up our content for feedback any time we choose, requesting help as needed. The request for advice comes from the Focuser.

Neither is it OK to ask or comment in the future about what the Focuser; such as asking, “How did it go with that?” Simply notice this urge in you and remind yourself that **suggestions and comments are not necessary**.

**Privacy and confidentiality regarding each person’s process is crucial to Focusing safety.**

Please refrain from sharing with others what came up during a person’s process. Focusing is our own personal and private precious unfolding.

5. **Honoring different cultures and languages.**

We prefer to honor the language and culture of each Focuser. If the Focuser uses Facilitative Language or connector phrases such as “I am sensing *something in me* that is sad” (See Inner Relationship Focusing), we suggest that the Listener reflect back the language as spoken by the Focuser.

Likewise, some Focusers do not use connector phrases. If we say, “I am angry,” please refrain from saying, “You are sensing something in you that is angry,” or “a part of you is angry.” Simply reflect, “You are angry.”

In order to honor different Focusing cultures, we trust that each person's style is working for them.

Again, we value companionship and community above all else.

6. **Each person has equal time for Focusing.** If one person ends before the allotted time, this time is not "given" to the other (this helps maintain equal power relationships within the partnership). The time is not used for any discussion on the contents of each other's sessions (unless and only IF the Focuser initiates conversation on their own content.) Best to end the session and return to the central group space or talk about other things not related to what came during Focusing.

7. **Consciousness of time.** Finally, during group sharings, please be aware of following time limits so that everyone in the group has time to share. We suggest sharing primarily the new insights and bodily felt shifts that came.

Again, each group and each person can decide what works best for them. Some groups may enjoy lots of directive guiding from the listener, welcome empathic/interactive responses, or perhaps even welcome dialogue and open conversations about what came up during the Changes meeting. These safety guidelines are suggestions only, not rules.

Below (in the next page) I offer a guide that the Prime Mover of a group may copy to aid their facilitation of the Changes meeting. This can be copied and can be available at each meeting so that people may volunteer to be the Prime Mover (and Time Keeper and Process Monitor).

## CHANGES GROUP PROCESS Prime Mover Guidelines

**Hello and welcome** to our (name) Changes meeting.

(Optional)Let's take a moment to arrive into our group space, pause and feel into our bodies, being with our inner silence or breathing for a minute or two.

(Optional if Prime Mover prepares for this and if the group likes this idea: **I will now read a quote about Focusing to bring us into the larger community** == paragraph?).

**Who is willing to be the time monitor today and just let us know when [three or five]**

**minutes have passed during a share? (Or use egg timer?)**

**Before we begin, I remind you of some of our suggestions for safety:**

- ◆ We share for three (or five) minutes each. (Time monitor) will gently let you know when 2 (or four) minutes have passed.
- ◆ What you hear here and in your partnership stays here.
- ◆ Please refrain from commenting on or referring to the content of another's story, and from offering suggestions or advice before or after the partnership exchanges or during the initial sharing.
- ◆ Our group prefers no guiding during our focusing/listening exchanges but please feel free to request what you need from your listener: less or more reflection, no reflection, guiding, etc.
- ◆ Please know that you are free to express your needs and to share whatever does not work for you.

**We will now do our initial CHECK IN and Sharing. Please feel free to pass at any time. I invite you to (Prime Mover picks one):**

- A) Share how you are this week and what is happening in your life.
- B) Lead the group in a Clearing a Space exercise.
- C) Invite the group to discover and feel what Self Empathy they need today.
- D) Honoring (Appreciation from Suzanne's H.O.W. Model)
- E) However you wish to do the check in! :-)

**Reminder: During the sharing we do not cross talk. We can simply say "thank you" or offer a reflective response if it feels right.** (Prime Mover can decide for pop corn style sharing or invite people to share as we go around in a circle. P.M. can also see if the group would like round robin sharing and round robin listening so that each person is heard.)

**Thank you for sharing. It's time now to select our partners for today.** We will each have a chance share with whom we would like to Focus today. Please remember that if you wish to focus with someone other than the person who chose you, you can say so. Remember that we pick partners for different reasons (issue that resonates, want to try someone new, haven't worked with this person for a while, etc.) Please do not take it personally if someone wishes to partner with someone else.

If clear diads or triads don't form naturally, I may make some suggestions for these, but please feel free to let me know if the suggested break outs don't work for you.

**So let's go around and pick our partners** (Prime Mover decides whether it is pop corn style or clockwise). If no one has any preferences, partnerships can be broken up randomly.

We share these before the Focusing/Listening exchanges in case someone needs to leave early.

**OK, let's all come back at -- SET RETURN TIME.**

(Usually, Focusing exchanges in Changes meetings are longer, averaging 30 to 45 minutes for each person. )

**Closing.**

Let's share our "carrying forwards" now; that is, the new insights or felt senses that came during your focusing process.

**NEWS: Are there any Focusing-Related or Non-Focusing-Related Announcements?**

**Let's set the time and date for the next group meeting is set.**

**Thank you for coming.**

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For more information see: [http://www.focusing.org/gendlin/docs/gol\\_2224.html](http://www.focusing.org/gendlin/docs/gol_2224.html)

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