

## Session 8 – Brave Space Tools, Part 1

### Community Makers, Silence Breakers

#### Materials

- Agenda charted on the board or chart paper, or provided as a handout
- A meaningful talking piece
- A meaningful centerpiece
- Chart paper containing Community Agreements from Session 7
- AV equipment to play the video: [Mindful Breathing: Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#)
- Handout: Brave Space Tool 3: “Community Makers, Silence Breakers”

#### Opening Ceremony: Progressive Muscle Relaxation



Explain that some circle keepers start each circle with a mindful, grounding activity that helps people transition into the circle space. With time this can become a practice that can help us slow down, take a moment to “land” and check in with ourselves. These kinds of practices can also help us become more aware, grounded and present in the moment.

In the earlier session on courage, we talked about building a practice that we can come back to when the going gets tough, when we get anxious, stressed or when we get triggered, so that we can stay (more) present and engaged. Deep multi-sensory breathing and progressive muscle relaxation are the kind of practices that can help us with this. Some of you might have a mindfulness practice of your own and, as a result, are (more) comfortable leading your colleagues in a mindful, grounding activity. That may, however, not be true for all, which is why sometimes using a video or audio can help introduce these practices in a way that allows you to participate alongside your colleagues, rather than lead.

For today's opening ceremony, therefore, consider playing the American Lung Association's video: [Mindful Breathing: Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#). Invite people if comfortable to close their eyes, or to watch the video on screen as Candace Alexander, Director of Health Promotions, talks us through the practice.

At the end of the video, having “come back into the room,” ask participants to check in with themselves.

### **Go-Round**

Send a talking piece around, inviting people to share how they are in this moment.



### **Talk Participants Through Today's Agenda**

- Opening Ceremony: Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Check agenda
- Maggie Kuhn Quote & Reflection
- What Gets in the Way?
- Brave Space Tool: Community Makers, Silence Breakers
- Closing Ceremony: Martin Luther King, Jr. on the “Silence of Our Friends”

### **Even When Your Voice Shakes**

Read the words of Maggie Kuhn, founder of the Gray Panthers, an organization that works on issues of concern to the elderly, such as pension rights and age discrimination, but also to concern itself with larger public issues. She said:

“Speak your mind, even if your voice shakes.”

### **Go-Round**

Invite participants to consider what Maggie Kuhn might be talking about. Then send a talking piece around inviting people to talk about a time in their lives that they spoke their mind even as their voices shook.

Share an experience of your own when the talking piece comes back to you, then summarize the themes raised in the go-round.

If relevant, touch on the fact that our voice shaking is part of the body's stress and survival response. We might feel uncomfortable speaking truth to power, not knowing how it'll be received. It is why the stress response might kick in. Countering that with deep breathing and intentionally tightening and relaxing our muscles, can help to steady our voice so we can be heard more clearly. Not that there's anything wrong, of course

with speaking in a shaking voice, as long as we find our voice to speak up against wrongs, harms, misuse of power, oppression and injustice.

### What Gets in the Way of Speaking Up/Raising Our Voice?

Suspend the talking piece as you brainstorm a list of reasons of what gets in the way of people speaking up/raising their voice against wrongs, harms, misuse of power, oppression and injustice? Consider things like:

- Not knowing what to say, or how to say it
- Concern about how it will be received or perceived
- Fear of getting it wrong
- Not understanding the situation
- Not recognizing that harm is being done
- Fear of repercussions, etc.

Chart the reasons people contribute.

### Brave Space Tool: Community Makers, Silence Breakers

Distribute Morningside Center's Brave Space Tool: "Community Makers, Silence Breakers." Touch on the fact that many of us need tools like these sentence starters and questions, and practice with those tools, to help us interrupt, disrupt and stand up for ourselves and others in our community when harm is done.

Invite participants to read the handout collaboratively, going around the circle from one person to the next, reading a bullet point each, until each of the bullet points has been read out loud. Consider continuing around the circle until everyone has had a chance to read a bullet point, even if it means bullet points are read more than once.

Next, give participants a few minutes to review the silence breakers independently.

Invite them to think of a time when something stopped them from speaking up to interrupt a harmful interaction. What happened and how did it make them feel? Ask them as they look at the list of "Community Makers, Silence Breakers," to consider what they could have said to interrupt the harm, to improve the situation, and why.

### **Pair Share Reflection**

Ask participants in the circle to count off by twos. Invite the *ones* to turn to their right and the *twos* to turn to their left. If there's an odd number, consider joining the remaining one or have them join a triad. In their pairs, allow partners a few minutes to each share out the situation they thought of and the silence breaker they might have used. How might things have turned out differently? How do they feel about that?

### **Large Group Discussion**

Invite some volunteers to share out what they discussed in their pairs, while still maintaining confidentiality. How do they feel about these silence breakers? Can they see using them in these sessions with colleagues? What about with their students?

### **Closing Ceremony**

Invite participants to reflect on these closing words by Dr. Martin Luther King:

“In the end, we remember not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends.”

## Handout: Brave Space Tool: Community Makers, Silence Breakers

# Community Makers / Silence Breakers

- Can you say what you mean by...?
- I'd like to share another perspective on that.
- I'm feeling uncomfortable with...
- Are you saying...? (paraphrase)
- Can you say more about that?
- I am afraid I may offend someone, and please let me know if I do...
- I just felt something shift in the room. I'm wondering if anyone else felt it?
- I have heard that [x]. What are your thoughts on that?
- The author is arguing that only [x]. Can you help me understand that?
- I am having a "yeah, but" moment. Can you help me work through it?
- I am really nervous / scared / uncomfortable to say [x], but...
- I am still formulating this or developing my thinking on this, and...
- From my experience / perspective as (identity)...
- I am not available for that conversation. (and I'm not available "...," right now.)
- I want to acknowledge the silence in the room. Is there anything that needs to be spoken or cleared?

*"Community Makers" adapted from the work of social justice educators*

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