

Table of Contents

This booklet describes part of our cohousing community's toolbox. It includes ways that we can help one another. *If you're reading this in paper form, each skill starts on a new page.*

[Beginning Anew](#)

[Clearings](#)

[Clearness](#)

[Helping Hands](#)

[Listening](#)

[Mediation / Facilitated Conversations](#)

[Nonviolent Communication \(NVC\)](#)

[Empathy Chart](#)

[Restorative Circles](#)

[Giving feedback](#)

[Principles of effective feedback](#)

[The Work](#)

Beginning Anew

Purpose: To overcome misunderstandings and cultivate appreciation of loved ones and neighbors. Informed by Thich Nhat Hanh.

Beginning Anew can be practiced between two people or as a group. As one person speaks, the other person practices deep listening without interrupting, allowing the first person to speak.

We have 3 steps: appreciation or “flower watering,” expressing regret, and expressing hurt and difficulties. These are done by the person bringing their difficulty or challenge to light.

In the 1st step, “flower watering,” we express our appreciation of the positive qualities of the other person, and this gives him the opportunity to recognize the positive qualities in our own consciousness.

In the 2nd step, expressing regret, we share our regrets for the things we have done or said that might have caused her pain. This requires humility and the willingness to let go of our own pain and pride.

In the 3rd step, we express our hurt or challenge with mindful speech, without blaming. We speak in such a way that the other person can receive our words. We ask the other person to help us to understand why he has spoken as he has, or acted as she has acted. Perhaps at a later time he can share with us so that we can understand more deeply. *If a strong emotion arises in us while we are expressing our suffering, we should simply stop and come back to our breathing until the emotion subsides. The other person can support us by following her breathing until we are ready to continue.*

We can regularly practice Beginning Anew with our partner, our family, or our colleagues. This prevents small misunderstandings from accumulating. We cultivate our awareness and appreciation for the positive qualities our loved ones and community members bring to our life. Beginning Anew is often taught and practiced in the monastic and lay communities guided by Thich Nhat Hanh’s engaged buddhist philosophy.

Clearings

Purpose: To overcome a “charge” we have toward another person. If you want to get something off your chest to someone and want to be sure you do it with integrity. Used in New Warrior Network/Mankind project.

This process serves to “clear” a charge we have toward another person, that separates us from them – and often from ourselves. The underlying principle is that charges are signposts, pointing toward triggers within ourselves that we project outward onto others, mistakenly believing that the issues originate in them. Clearings create the opportunity to identify how these issues really originate in ourselves and enable us to clear the charge that is separating us from others.

Setup

- Choose a facilitator, whose job is to lead the process from a place of neutrality, support and love
- Invite the person we have a charge with (our “mirror”) to receive our clearing
 - If they decline, options include
 - Ask another person to sit in for them
 - Clear with an empty chair to represent them
- Facilitator clarifies: clearing is about the clearer, the person with the charge, not the mirror
 - Invites the “mirror” to set a psychic boundary filtering *out* all communications that “belong” to the clearer, and filter *in* only communications that are useful or wanted
 - Asks the clearer if he or she is willing to let go of any expectations for the mirror to change?
- Facilitator asks for the clearer’s intention: what do we want to clear?

Clearing

- Facilitator asks us for:
 - **Data:** What's the objective reality – what would a video camera record?
 - **Judgments:** What do we believe – about this person's actions (and these kind of actions more generally)?
 - **Feelings:** What emotions come up in us
 - Mad, Glad, Sad, Scared, Ashamed

Projection

- Facilitator asks:
 - Whose behavior does this remind us of? How is this about us?
 - What have we projected onto this mirror?
 - Do we want to withdraw these projections?
 - Where else do we make these projections? Do we want to withdraw them there, too?

Healing

- Facilitator asks:
 - How do we accept this mirror – and ourselves – more now?
 - Is there some expression we'd like to share with our mirror?

Clearness

Purpose: To help making a decision. Quaker tradition.

Clearness meetings are an old Quaker tradition. A person who needs help making a decision (e.g. whether to adopt a child, what work to do, whether to move to a new place), or other question for which it would be useful to have a group of people to help think it through asks a small group (3-8 people) to meet for a couple of hours. They pick people they trust and respect, but who represent varied viewpoints. These people are not there to fix anything or to solve anything, they are there to facilitate the person finding the true answer within themselves.

The person calling the meeting writes up the problem ahead of time and gives it to the group. A person is designated to take notes if the meeting is not taped. These notes are given to the person at the end.

One member of the group acts as convener and facilitator. This facilitator begins the meeting with a review of the process and seeking agreement to the level of confidentiality requested by the focus person. In the first section of the meeting, the group may do one thing only: ask honest simple questions. These are not loaded questions like "why didn't you already . . ." or "why don't you try. . ." and they do not contain suggestions, personal stories or opinions. They are questions like "Have you ever been in a situation like this before?" "Is there anyone you know who would handle this in a way you admire?" They are designed to uncover the person's true feelings and innate ability to make the right decisions.

After an hour or so of questions, the convener asks the person how they would like to proceed. There are several possibilities: the group can ask more questions; the group can reflect on what they have heard; the person can refine the question based on what they have learned. The person may ask the group questions, ask for advice, ask for material help, etc. The group can affirm the person's abilities and gifts in the situation; there can be silence out of which anyone can speak as something comes to them; or there can be a silence out of which the group members share images which have come to them of the person and the problem. Or, of course, anything else the person can think of.

At the end the person shares what they have learned from the meeting if they are comfortable doing so. Another meeting can be scheduled if it seems appropriate.

Helping Hands

Purpose: To help with temporary acute physical need (like baby born or back from surgery).

Facilitator: See list of volunteer helpers and shepherd's below. (Of course, new people will jump on board to shepherd or help given the timing and the situation.)

Our community has a history of helping people who have *a temporary acute physical need* due to injury, surgery, a really bad flu, a new baby's arrival or other circumstances. Although it's not possible to guarantee that all needs will be met, Care & Counsel provides a Helping Hands framework offering temporary support. The time frame is limited to 4 to 6 weeks at most and not more than twice a year. Further assistance is beyond the scope of Helping Hands at this time.

Once the facilitator from Care & Counsel is aware of your need, she/he finds a Shepherd from our list of volunteers who is available to take on those responsibilities.

We have 2 tiers of volunteers: a list of **Shepherds** and a list of **Helpers**. If you like, you may be on both lists, and would volunteer in whichever capacity you are able to assist at the time of a need.

The **Shepherd's** responsibilities are:

- serving as the first and ongoing connection between the community and the Cohouser(s) in Need
- fielding questions on health status of Cohouser(s) In Need (if requested)
- assembling the current list of Helpers and services they can provide, and the best way to contact them
- checking in daily
- forwarding needs to Helpers
- followups when a need is met
- suggesting options for extended care (if help is still needed after 6 weeks)
- *2 or 3 people may potentially co-shepherd together*

The **Helpers** volunteer for:

- rides to appointments
- meals
- shopping
- light domestic work, e.g. chopping vegetables, laundry, washing dishes
- visiting and listening
- deliveries

The **Cohouser In Need**:

- identifies specific needs to their Shepherd
- updates their Shepherd if and when a need is met
- expresses their desire for their balance between privacy / visitors
- offers Helpers \$\$ for gas
- asks Helpers for shopping receipts and pays them

Listening

Purpose: To help heal hurt and anger when not feeling heard.

There are times when we all feel not heard, not listened to, not understood. This can easily happen in a large community like this, when everyone wants their say, and there are many diverging viewpoints. It can happen because people are actually not listening, or because we are not speaking up, or not communicating effectively, or just because there isn't time.

This can cause hurt and anger.

A Listening is for the purpose of alleviating this feeling. It assures that at least some people are listening and have heard your story, your side, or your views. A group of people get together for the sole purpose of listening to you and trying to understand what you are saying and what you mean. You can name the people, or they can be chosen for you. They are not judging or commenting or fixing anything – they are just listening, until you feel finished and heard. They can reflect back to you what they have heard if you want to be sure that they got it right.

Sometimes just knowing that you have been heard is enough to shift everything. Sometimes it just makes you feel better. Sometimes you end up with a new course of action. It can free creativity and good will, the qualities we need to continue to be engaged community members.

Mediation / Facilitated Conversations

Purpose: To have a meaningful conversation when emotional triggers make it difficult to do without facilitation.

Note: Mediation may include other approaches discussed in this booklet. What approach you use may make a big difference to you. See the descriptions of Non-Violent Communication and Restorative Circles and Clearings and Clearness.

Mediation is a structured way to facilitate a meaningful conversation between people in conflict, who, because of emotional triggers, are not able to discuss the conflict without help. The goal is for each person to feel that they have been heard, and that they understand the other person's point of view and feelings about the matter. The theory is that when this understanding comes, it will be possible to find a solution. For mediation to be successful, both people need to be willing to engage in it and willing for it to work.

A facilitator is chosen, and support people for the participants if they want them. The meeting is held in a neutral space. The facilitator asks for permission to direct the conversation, lays out ground rules (no name calling, use "I statements," listen when the other is talking, supporters' role, etc.) and then asks each side to talk about the issue as they see it for a certain period of time (say, five minutes).

The facilitator may ask participants to mirror back what they heard, rephrase something, stop someone if they have broken the ground rules, or anything else that s/he thinks will help. The participants then talk to each other, with the help of the facilitator, until they feel that an understanding has been reached, and the issue has shifted sufficiently for a solution to be found. They may find a solution right then, or agree to meet again, or do whatever is necessary to resolve the conflict.

Nonviolent Communication (NVC)

Purpose: Many purposes, including, among others: to get clear about your own feelings, to be heard, to prepare for a difficult conversation, to mediate a conversation.

Nonviolent Communication is a set of principles which shed light on why we find ourselves and others acting and speaking in ways which sometimes seem puzzling at best.

Some of the key principles are:

- 1** Everyone acts (and speaks) driven by universal needs, hopes and values, which may or may not be conscious. All human beings share the same needs.
- 2** If we can offer compassionate, curious, open listening to ourselves and each other, we can understand what hopes, needs and values are motivating our actions. Since experience with these are universal, understanding can begin to open up space for a more successful type of listening and communicating.
- 3** If we speak with respect, expressing our own experience, and creating space for others to do the same, we find ourselves connecting and caring about finding solutions which align with both peoples' most cherished hopes, needs and values.
- 4** It can also be very helpful to understand some of the key distinctions which NVC clarifies:
 - observations versus judgments
 - feelings versus thoughts
 - needs versus strategies
 - requests versus demands

Practices which are informed by NVC principals include some of the following:

Empathy for you. Having a listener present to help you explore and understand more deeply your own feelings and needs (wishes, vision or values) provides an opportunity to sort out what is most important to you in a confusing situation. The listener may guess at what you are feeling and what you are longing for. You may agree, correct or add to what they have guessed. NVC calls this giving/receiving empathy. This process can sometimes cause a shift in understanding and might be all the NVC support you need and want. The most direct path to peace is through self-connection.

Empathy for the "difficult person." NVC also offers the opportunity to more deeply understand what someone else may be feeling and needing (wanting, wishing or hoping for). You could receive listening to support you as you guess at another's feelings, hopes and values, which may underlie their actions. All human beings have the capacity for compassion.

Practicing for a successful conversation. As you get clarity, the listener can role-play as you practice what you might say to a person you have difficulty with. The listener can give you feedback

as well as empathy as you work to craft a conversation which has a better chance of being received, yielding connection as well as opening up the participants to creative problem solving. The feedback form can help with this clarity-seeking preparation.

A supported conversation. An additional option is to ask an NVC Practitioner to “moderate/guide” a discussion between you and someone you are having difficulty communicating with. Here the facilitator coaches and guides the discussion so that each person takes turns expressing and understanding the other’s feeling and needs. The facilitator may reframe what is said if blaming, analyzing, or judging arises. The goal is to increase understanding, connection and a willingness to support each other. Towards the end of the conversation, requests and suggested solutions may be made with the same back and forth structure used to respond and hone a solution to meet both people’s needs. Our world offers abundant resources for meeting needs.

Empathy Chart

<i>Empathy is:</i>	<i>Empathy is not:</i>
<i>•understanding</i>	<i>•fixing</i>
<i>•a receiving</i>	<i>•analyzing</i>
<i>•complete acceptance</i>	<i>•sympathy</i>
<i>•a quality of presence</i>	<i>•identifying</i>
<i>•caring attention</i>	<i>•physically comforting</i>
<i>•listening w/ whole being</i>	<i>•interrogating</i>
<i>•following</i>	<i>•leading</i>
<i>•guessing</i>	<i>•knowing</i>
<i>•translating into feelings & needs</i>	<i>•educating</i>
<i>•being</i>	<i>•doing empathy</i>

Restorative Circles

Purpose: To address conflict or hurtful acts.

The Restorative Circles Process is a community response to conflict. Through Restorative Circles, a group of individuals whose well-being is interconnected equips itself with concrete means to address conflict or harmful acts in order to find solutions together that will enable them to move forward in the situation that is affecting them.

The Restorative Circle process makes it possible to restore trust, dignity and a climate of learning, growth and safety. It also re-establishes the power to affect our own well being along with a sense of shared responsibility and community. It is empowering to all individuals involved in the process as well as to the community as a whole.

1 Pre-Circle

Goals: clarification of the situation (identification of the Act, the Author, the Receiver and the Community Members who should be part of the Circle so that the problem can be resolved); connection to the meaning that Act has for each individual; consent to the dialogue process proposed by the Circle.

Who and what: the Facilitator meets with the person who initiated the Circle, as well as the individuals identified as important to resolution.

2 Circle

Goal: allowing each person to be heard and to contribute to the improvement of the situation

Who and what: Author, Receiver, Community Members, Facilitators. Each person can be heard about what is alive in them now in relation to the Act and its consequences, as well as what motivated them to act as they did. After everyone has been heard, solutions are sought to improve the situation, and every person can make a contribution.

3 Post-Circle

Goals: to evaluate the success of the Circle, its consequences and the chosen solutions and re-adjust them if necessary

Who and what: Author, Receiver, Members of the Community, Facilitators.

Everyone's well-being is assessed. The agreements made at the end of the circle are reviewed in relation to their success in reaching their goals and in their current or further relevance to all the current situation. Look at what worked and what did not work so well and why. Celebrate or mourn, as appropriate and we also look for other solutions if they are needed.

Giving feedback

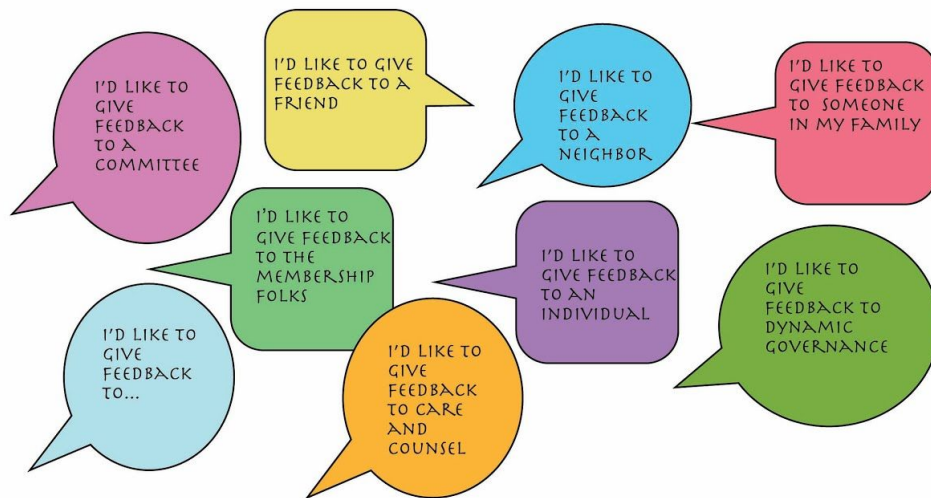
Facilitators: This descriptions is geared mostly at self-help. If you want help preparing to give feedback, call C&C. Many other techniques inform good feedback (Beginning Anew, Non-Violent Communication, Clearing)

Purpose: To effectively share insights to and about another person with clarity and kindness.

The purpose of giving feedback is to make a collaborative change. This is different from having a dumping session. We've provided a feedback form (front and back). There are various options for how to use it:

- as a self reflection tool
- in writing
- in person
- with a third party

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK FORM



MY EXPERIENCE:

WHAT I APPRECIATE:

WHAT I WAS HOPING FOR:

Principles of effective feedback

- *Engage willingness to receive feedback - checking to see if the willingness is there, and especially being willing to postpone the offering until a time when the willingness is there tends to increase the experience of mattering and thereby is likely to contribute to more openness. Meanwhile one may request some empathy from a member of Care & Counsel*
- *Invite feedback in the other direction - This encourages collaboration and self-responsibility.*
- *Use specific & concrete observational language when describing your experience - connecting feedback to tangible moments plays a key role in helping the receiver understand & connect w/feedback. This applies to both satisfaction & dissatisfaction.*
- *Providing feedback vs. sharing personal trigger - When the person giving feedback is aligned with the intention of providing feedback rather than personal trigger it makes it easier for the other person to receive the feedback. Sharing a personal trigger implicitly requires a much higher skill level & willingness level from the other person.*

For more support with how to effectively provide feedback, consider using [Brene Brown's Engaged Feedback Checklist](#).

The Work

Purpose: To lower or eliminate your own anger or fear around a situation.

The [Work of Byron Katie](#) is a way of identifying and questioning the thoughts that cause all the anger, fear, depression, addiction, and violence in the world. It is a simple yet powerful process of inquiry that teaches you to identify and question your thoughts. It's a way to understand what's hurting you, and to address the cause of your problems with clarity.

Experience the happiness of undoing those thoughts through The Work, and allow your mind to return to its true, awakened, peaceful, creative nature.

[This website](#) contains all the information you need to guide yourself through the work. It explains how to

- prepare for the work with a Judge-Your-Neighbor Worksheet
- answer the four questions of the work and
- do the "turnarounds."