

Presence Skills Arena

GOALS:

- increase flexibility in applying presence;
- develop confidence and experience in responding to a range of difficult scenarios;
- practice using a video camera.

TIME: 2-3 hours

SPECIAL MATERIALS: Video cameras (enough for a ratio of 1 camera for every 4-5 people)

Video players (some way for the group to watch the video they captured, preferably at the same ratio)

Depending on numbers, may require additional actors

TOOL MATERIAL: Presence Skills Arena Set of Instructions (see following pages)

FACILITATORS: As many as possible (though *can* be run with only one facilitator)



HANDOUT: Grounding, Centering and Breathing (page 227)

HOW IT'S DONE:

In this activity, participants get to practice presence in several different contexts (different "stations" in the "arena"). Before the group gets together, set up the various stations. While the group is all together, carefully explain the purpose of this activity and its design. (Since much of this tool is really run by participants, their clear understanding is necessary, especially regarding a fairly complex design.) Using a visual, explain that there will be different stations around the room. Facilitators will place participants into small groups (use groups of *no less* than four people). Each group will rotate to different stations every couple of minutes. A facilitator will be the timekeeper and announce when people need to switch stations.

After explaining the set-up, give an example of the type of situation participants might find. Explain what would happen at a station. At each station will be a set of instructions. *Before reading the instruction*, participants decide who will be the actors, who will be the video camera taker, who will be the nonviolent intervenor and (if extra people) who will simply be observers/supporters. Those roles will keep shifting in the group – so that everyone will get a chance to be actors, video camera takers and intervenors. Re-emphasize that this is a learning activity: so if there are skills people particularly *don't* feel comfortable doing (such as using a video camera), this is a great time to practice that skill.

The *actors* (and the actors alone) will read the instruction, prepare if needed (props will be at the station) and then begin acting in the scenario. The nonviolent intervenor will then come and practice the *presence* technique (*not* interposition) in that situation. During the entire incident, the video camera person will be keeping distance but capturing the exchange on tape. After the intervention has been successful (or when time is up), turn off the camera and begin a short debrief from the following questions:

- For the actors: what things did the intervenor do that worked?
- For the intervenor: what was it like intervening?

- For the observers: what did you notice that looked helpful or successful as an intervention?

Take questions and clarify about the running of the exercise. Then, put participants into groups of four or more. Send each group to a station. Review what will happen at the station – including having groups decide who is going to be actors first (have them raise their hands), who is the intervenor first (have them raise their hands), and who is taking pictures (have them raise their hands). And begin!

During the running of the exercise, facilitators will watch to make sure the logistics of the exercise are running smoothly. After assuring participants understand and are running it properly, facilitators support debriefing and generally supporting the group. At various stations facilitators will teach participants specific skills: for example at one station will just be breathing skills.

Make sure one facilitator is "time-keeper" and watching time for the entire group – including announcing when groups need to switch to the next station.

After groups have attended at least six to eight stations (enough so each participant can do each role at least twice) or when the energy seems done with the exercise, call time. Send the group into buddy pairs for feelings debrief. Then, bring folks to the large group and debrief for learnings around what behaviors worked (don't write them up just yet). Get some examples.

Have folks return to their group they were working with to watch the video of their group's work. Encourage the learning to continue as people watch – as well as some laughter and relaxation. Tell participants to look for things they did not notice about themselves or about their behavior.

Finally, bring everyone back to the plenary to write up learnings.

SCENARIOS

- **Guns:** At this station, two people will be arguing. At one point, one of the participants will flash a gun. The presence intervenors will be videotaped the whole time and try out some presence (not interposition!) technique.
- **"Button-pushing":** At this station, the Presence intervenors identify something that pushes their buttons (such as being called a certain derogatory name). Then the two actors role-play a conflict and, while the intervenor is trying to use presence techniques to affect the situation, they use that "button" to potentially throw off the intervenor.
- **Culture and physical distance:** At this station, the role-players will have a cultural norm of expecting large (or very small) physical distance between people. Thus, they would interpret the person with presence getting too close as invasive.
- **Level of emotional expression/body language:** At this station, the role-players will be highly expressive and actually (in their role) have a cultural norm that is okay with lots of threatening body language.

WHERE TOOL COMES FROM:

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