

Why Empathy Circles?

1) *We need to create a new culture and a healthier society – including in our communication with one another.* In our mainstream culture today, competition and scarcity are built into our everyday lives, through the economic system we live in.

Yet these attitudes are not just limited to jobs and money; they also tend to carry over into how we communicate with one another. Even though human attention does not need to be a "scarce commodity", we tend to behave as though it were.

2) *Learning to work creatively with conflicting perspectives is a skill we all need to cultivate.* This is key for strengthening our activist organizations and movements. The oldest rule in politics is "divide and conquer". Yet we need to build unity, not enforce uniformity.

It is also key for any efforts we may wish to make, to "bridge divides" and find common ground with those who hold vastly different perspectives. Yet even if we are not called to the work of "bridging divides", we still need to work skillfully with internal conflicts.

3) *Helping others feel heard is an essential first step and a basic key skill for conflict transformation.* Empathy circles allow us to develop this skill and strengthen this habit, in a relaxing and enjoyable manner. It's like engaging in mindfulness practice; we practice in a quiet, supportive environment, so that we can later call upon our mindfulness muscle, when we are in the middle of a stressful situation.

In fact, the kind of listening we do in Empathy Circles, IS a mindfulness practice; it's a form of mindful listening, mindful reflecting back, and mindful speaking.

4) *Having a chance to speak, is NOT the same thing as feeling heard.* "Sharing the air time" is great – and, whenever we take a step beyond that, and offer each person the opportunity to *know that they have been truly heard*, the benefits are enormous.

Yet this is not something that is a common part of our culture, and so it's helpful to practice it so that it becomes second nature.

5) *Feeling heard is both enjoyable AND good for our physical health.* Brain psychology is confirming the tremendous value of "feeling gotten" by another person. In her book *Love 2.0*, brain scientist and positive psychology researcher Barbara Frederickson writes about these interpersonal "micro-moments of connection"; she describes them as profoundly healing for our physical body, in addition to feeling great.

Empathy circles are a no-cost way that we can enjoy connecting more deeply with one another, while developing the deep listening skills and habits that are crucial for conflict transformation.