



Session 1

The First Step

Objectives:

- To become familiar with the goals and methods of the *Engaging Nonviolence* study program
- To begin getting to know each other
- To create common ground to work together
- To map expectations

Agenda:

- Welcome – 2 min.
- Centering – 15 min.
- Sharing Our Names – 20 min.
- Sharing Our Passion – 10 min.
- Introducing the Engaging Nonviolence Goals – 10 min.
- Groups Guidelines and Agreements – 25 min.
- Mapping Expectations – 30 min.
- Journaling – 10 min.

Notes for the Facilitator

Preparation: Before

- Review the Facilitation Guidelines in the Resources section. Pay special attention to the following: The **instructions** for the facilitator are unindented italicized text. **Dialogue** intended for the facilitator to *share* with the participants is shown in indented unitalicized (plain) text with the invitation, “Share the following in your own words,” or similar phrasing.
- Review the entire session in depth.
- Always attempt to put the material into your own words.
- Reserve an extra half an hour in each session to use when exercises require extra time due to participants’ engagement, interest, and level of comprehension. The times we allotted for each exercise are only guidelines.
- Find a site for the study program that is accessible. Give participants the address.
- Establish a meeting time that will work for everyone. Think about refreshments.
- Gather everyone’s contact information and make sure they have yours.

- Make a point of clarifying that it is absolutely necessary to be on time.
- We recommend that the Engaging Nonviolence Goals along with the Group Guidelines and Agreements be summarized and displayed during your first session. This can be done ahead of time on large easel paper or shown on PowerPoint.

Preparation: Day of the session

- Arrange the chairs, including yours, in a circle, with a small table in the center. If you wish, you can decorate and have soft music playing in the background while greeting people.
- As people arrive, ask them to sign in with their contact information and give them a name tag. This last item is particularly important for the first session.
- Make sure everyone has the *Engaging Nonviolence* book and a journal. These should be brought for each session.

Needed materials:

- Name tags
- Writing material and art supplies
- Relaxing music, small table, whatever you may wish to decorate with (candle, matches, flowers, scarves, etc.)
- Easel and easel paper (also known as flip chart—always useful to have handy)
- Letter-size sheets of paper for each person for Mapping Expectations
- A bell
- If you are facilitating for a group online, materials will not be relevant. You might want to check with each participant beforehand to make sure their technology is working properly.

Welcome – 2 Min.

Review the Facilitation Guidelines ahead of time as you prepare to begin Engaging Nonviolence. After people have arrived and have settled in, present the following in your own words:

Welcome to the first session of Engaging Nonviolence, an exploration of the power and potential of nonviolence in our lives and in the world. My name is _____ and I will be facilitating this program. In this opening session we will introduce the goals and process of this program to help prepare us for the journey of discovering nonviolence.

Centering – 15 Min.

Convey the following in your own words:

As a way to start our process, I invite you to come to the table one at a time and light a candle in honor of a person who has been an example of peace for you. Maybe this is someone you know personally. Or maybe this is someone you've heard or read about. Feel free to share this person's name out loud if you feel comfortable doing so, and to say a sentence or two about how she or he has influenced you.

Model this by going first. After the last person has finished, offer the following in your own words.

Let's take a moment of silence to honor and thank the spirit of all those who, in the past or the present, have worked to make the world a better place. May their work support and encourage us on our journey to explore and experiment with the power of nonviolence for personal and social change. Thank you! Before we start looking at the material, let me share a few housekeeping announcements.

Share any necessary housekeeping or logistical information.

Sharing Our Names – 20 Min.

The following exercise uses an easel, easel paper, and non-toxic felt markers. If an easel is not available, distribute a sheet of paper to each person to write his or her full name on. Distribute felt markers for this purpose. To introduce this exercise, put the following into your own words:

As we begin this study program, let's take a moment to get better acquainted. I'd like to invite each of you, one at a time, to write your name on the easel paper. This can include middle names, nicknames, or names you (or your family) no longer use. Then take a minute or less to share with the group something about your names. (This could include where they come from, why your parents named you the way they did, what your names mean, or anything else you'd like to share about them.) I'll begin.

Model this process by going first. As you are about to finish, share with the group the name you prefer to be called. When you are finished, ask the person to your right to go. When she or he is finished, ask the person what she or he prefers to be called. Welcome the person using her or his name and clapping. Then invite the next person to the right. Continue this process around the circle until everyone has shared. Then share in your own words the following sentiment:

Sharing our names, and where they come from, can help call to mind the web of relationships that has made us who we are: our families, our ancestors, our cultures, and the societies we have emerged from. This study program explores the importance of relationships and the ways we are connected to one another. Relationships and connectedness are at the heart of active nonviolence.

Sharing Our Passion – 10 Min.

Share the following in your own words:

Before introducing the goals of the program, I invite you to take a moment to think about an issue that you are passionate about, and interested in taking action on. As you shall see, nonviolence is not a passive venture, but an active engagement in the world around us. What is it that you hope to address with nonviolence?

After a minute or two of silence, invite the participants to share, at whatever level they feel comfortable, the issue that they are interested in taking action on. Ensure that they know that it is OK not to share. After all those who wish to share have spoken, thank them and conclude in your own words:

The *Engaging Nonviolence* study guide includes learning about nonviolence, and applying it by taking nonviolent action to transform injustices we are concerned about. Allow the issue you identified to serve as an anchor and a reference point for you as you continue through the weeks of this program. In the last several sessions we will plan and take a nonviolent action together.

Introducing the Engaging Nonviolence Goals – 10 Min.

Share the following in your own words:

Now, let's take a look at the goals of the Engaging Nonviolence program.

These include:

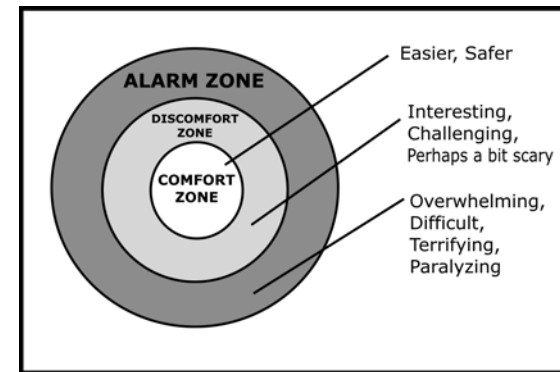
- To explore and experiment with nonviolence as a way of life.
- To examine our current beliefs and practices with regard to violence and nonviolence.
- To obtain practical skills for responding to violence.
- To connect with a community of people which supports, encourages, and challenges our practice of nonviolence.
- To understand strategic analysis in order to have effective actions.
- To take nonviolent action together as a group.

Group Guidelines and Agreements – 25 Min.

Present the following in your own words:

We want to create a safe space for sharing and learning. Safe spaces help create an environment where we are free to reflect deeply on our own experience of violence and nonviolence. For this purpose, I first want to explain something about our learning process and then make some agreements about how to work together.

Draw the diagram below on easel paper, have participants turn to their books, or show the Power-Point and read/explain it in your own words, with examples if you wish.



Share:

We are in our comfort zone when we have positive experiences that we're used to having and can still learn and grow from. We are in the discomfort zone, or "stretch zone," when we have experiences that are newer, that make us a little nervous. It's an event that's not too far outside our experience, but makes us uneasy. It provides us with a good opportunity to grow and learn. We are in the alarm zone when something happens that is so sudden or so unfamiliar that we find ourselves feeling afraid, stuck, lost, confused, and generally wanting to hide in bed. Perhaps it may be an emergency we witness on the street or an extremely short deadline on a very tough job assignment.

Personal transformation is more likely to occur when we step out of our comfort zone into our discomfort zone. But experiences that are too challenging can move us into our alarm zone, where fear and distress shut down our learning, growth, and transformation process.

The above diagram has been adapted from the handout, "Using Discomfort Zones For Learning" by Future Now: A Training Collective, which incorporated ideas first developed by the organization Training for Change.

If there are no questions, you can move on to the next part of the exercise: making a group agreement. Write the four points on easel paper (or display on PowerPoint) with some key words and share in your own words:

Based on experience and the work of other groups, we invite this group to agree to use or adjust the following four guidelines during our time together:

1. I agree to share and participate at whatever level feels safe and comfortable.
 - I will share what I want to share. If I choose not to share, that's fine. If I want to share a little, that's fine. If I want to share more, that's fine. Together we will create an environment where our feelings and thoughts are respected. I might want to voluntarily take opportunities to feel uncomfortable when that might aid my growth.
 - I understand that facilitators are not acting in the capacity of professional psychotherapists or counselors. They are ordinary people helping us explore alternatives to the violence in our lives and the larger world. If something comes up for me during our time together, I might want to seek assistance from an appropriate health professional.

2. I agree to maintain confidentiality about personal stories or experiences shared in my small group or in the large group, unless I have been given permission to share them with others.
 - I will not share a story or experience that someone else has shared in either small or large groups unless s/he has given their permission.

3. I agree to listen with my full and complete attention, and to wait until a person has completed his or her thoughts before I speak.

4. I will strive to appreciate and honor our differences.
 - Diversity is an opportunity for me to grow and learn in a new way. I will try to be open and celebrate persons, approaches, and ways of being that are different from mine. Within this context, I recognize that there are power dynamics in every group, including this one. I will do my best to be sensitive to the use of power based on race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, wealth, or class. If someone, for example, discounts another person's experience, I will try to respond to this situation in a clear and loving way.

If there is any objection, discuss the issue and adjust as needed. Participants are invited to add more guidelines. They can come to the flip-chart, propose their guideline, and if there are no objections, the person can add their guideline to the paper. Explain that the document is a "living document"; if people notice that there is a need for new agreements or a change, they can propose them. Encourage them to speak up if any of the agreements are broken and address the issue.

Mapping Expectations – 30 Min.

This is an exercise to map the expectations of the group and address them at the beginning. There are different ways to do this: the Head, Heart, Hands option or The Sail Boat. Distribute letter-size sheets of paper for each participant.

Head, Heart, Hands: Draw a figure, (if you like, you can draw yourself) with a head, heart, and hands. Then identify and write down:

- Next to the head write your worries or concerns about the program.
- Next to the heart write your dreams about nonviolence, building peace, addressing injustice, and improving their community/workplace/personal life.
- Next to the hands write the skills you hope to learn or the skills they would like to share. (Perhaps indicate "Learn" or "Share" to avoid confusion.)

The Sail Boat: Alternatively, you can draw a boat. On the body of the boat, draw your luggage and write what knowledge or skills you bring. At the sail, write down your hopes. And next to the anchor write your concerns or worries, things that hold you back.

Encourage everyone to share their expectations at whatever comfort level they wish.

Journaling – 10 Min.

Make time at the end of each session for people to write in their journals or jot down their thoughts in their own books below.

Share:

It is very helpful to write down our insights and track our growth in understanding. If you wish, you can choose a buddy with whom to share your experiences. Keeping a journal is very helpful in deepening the experiences this study brings. At the end of Part 1 of the book in Session 6, we have created space to have a group discussion about the important insights that have surprised us. Writing them down is a useful tool for tracking our growth.
