

Handbook
for Starting and Keeping!
a Men's Group

By
Felix Markevicius

Vancouver Men's Evolvement Network

- 1996 -

mender.ca/felix/

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*Also available from (Vancouver M.E.N.) by the same author -
Handbook for Starting a Men's Self-Help Organization - See mender.ca/felix/*

Preface

Emotional Landscapes

Have you ever stood at a beautiful scenic viewpoint with a friend, enjoying the view, pointing out aspects to each other to soak in and absorb? And somehow the moment was more special because they were there.

And then another time, alone, wishing someone was there with you to share the moment - somehow knowing it would be better if there was someone there who could see what you were seeing - perhaps 'see through your eyes'. These moments when shared become somehow more precious and fulfilling.

Imagine now the long stretch of our emotional lives over the years as an 'emotional landscape', with ups and downs, pleasant green valleys with sparkling streams, or perhaps parched dry deserts, or dense dark forests or raging torrents of rivers, or a solid immobile entrapping glacier, or forbidding mountains...

Some of us may have been lucky and had friends to share our perspective or view with during this journey over our 'emotional landscape'.

Many of us have had to make it alone. There was no map, or guide; no one to point the way, or help us up if we stumbled. No one to say: 'Yes I see that', 'that is incredible!'; or perhaps: 'No, I see something else' and 'But look over here!'. No one, until now...

Dedication

This handbook is dedicated to, and my thanks go out to, the men of my men's group, who have shared their emotional landscapes with me. My journey began with me

being so cut-off from my feelings that it is no exaggeration to say it took me a week to realise what it was I experienced a week ago! Of course I stumbled more than a few times, not being able to 'see' the terrain I was in. These men helped me to start to 'see', and supported me when I couldn't/wouldn't, and eventually to 'connect' and be much more in the moment:

Thanks to:

Bruce Curry, Cory Bretz, John Solano, Steve Brown, Jim Cassidy, Andrew Hicks, John Hutton, Mark Jonn, Jim Sands, Jamie Shackle, John Calvert, Vince Vialogos and Kjell Olsen

Thanks also to Gervase Bushe, who wrote the first handbook for Vancouver M. E. N. - some of his ideas appear in this handbook - coloured by my own interpretation.

Felix Markevicius

Would you like to contribute?

This handbook does not presume to be the 'last word' in men's work, merely a source of material that you may benefit from working with. Any mistakes are my own and of course reflect my current level of awareness, or lack thereof! My hope is that this is a beginning, and that this handbook will grow to incorporate many more ideas and issues that a men's group could work with to raise its consciousness. Perhaps you would like to contribute (with accreditation), and write a meeting for us?- or perhaps a whole new level we haven't even considered! Please write to us at the address below

~~Vancouver M. E. N.~~

~~PO Box 57052,~~

~~2458 E. Hastings St.~~

~~Vancouver, B.C. V5K2K6 - no longer exists~~

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Our number for phone messages is:

~~(604) 290 9988~~ - no longer exists

Visit our web page at

<http://www.netlegal.com/vancouvermen/> - no longer exists

Your Safety Net - Don't fall through the cracks!

Your men's group is the place to go to begin to examine your issues and to heal your inner wounds - a lot of healing takes place just by talking about what is going on for us.

Sometimes this is not enough; sometimes group itself may seem to bring up issues we didn't know we had - sometimes.

WE MAY EXPERIENCE OVERWHELMING FEELINGS OF ANGER, RAGE, SADNESS, DEPRESSION, LOSS, BETRAYAL and so on.

Sometimes group may not help us move through these feelings - in fact if group is bringing these up we may need to take a time-out from group if there is any danger of 'losing it' or being unable to cope. Maybe you feel as though you just need to take better care of yourself, see [Appendix 1](#). On the other hand, beware of isolating, sometimes we need to be around sympathetic people who are prepared to listen and share time, now more than ever, and not just drugged into numbness, the quick-fix of choice for many medical practitioners who 'work' with people suffering emotional disturbances.

IF YOU ARE BEING OVERWHELMED BY YOUR FEELINGS IN ANY WAY, AND IT SEEMS AS IF YOU CAN'T COPE, THERE ARE MANY PROFESSIONALS AND OTHERS AVAILABLE TO HELP YOU - YOUR SAFETY NET - BUT IF YOU DON'T PICK UP THE PHONE FIRST. IT'S AS IF THE SAFETY NET BELOW DOESN'T EXIST...

REMEMBER: IT IS OK TO ASK FOR HELP!

IN FACT, MAKE IT YOUR RIGHT; BUT IT MAY NOT HAPPEN ON THE FIRST CALL, OR THE SECOND, BUT KEEP TRYING ANYWAY - DON'T TAKE NO FOR AN ANSWER, KEEP TRYING AND YOU WILL GET WHAT YOU NEED.

TELL THEM: "I AM EXPERIENCING OVERWHELMING FEELINGS OF _____ AND I CAN'T COPE. I NEED HELP NOW". (To be heard you must ask clearly)

Fill in the phone numbers below where there are blanks, this is your safety net; sometimes one person may not have the time, the next one will - or ask if they can set some time aside for you. Don't fall through the cracks...

My Safety Net

Note that the list below was published in 1996 and is hence now outdated

For an updated list, see the [wiki](#)

<p>Friends & understanding relatives you can talk to</p> <p>1) _____</p> <p>2) _____</p> <p>3) _____</p>	<p>Local ministers</p> <p>4) _____</p> <p>5) _____</p> <p>6) _____</p>
<p>Local crisis centres, referrals</p> <p>7) (604) 872 3311 Vancouver</p> <p>8) (604) 279 7070 Richmond</p> <p>9) (604) 540 2221 Coquitlam</p>	<p>Men's organizations, and magazines</p> <p>10) (604) 290 9988 Vancouver</p> <p>11) (250) 370 4636 Victoria</p> <p>12) (206) 285 4356 USA</p>
<p>For abused men</p> <p>13) 1 (800) 583 9949</p> <p>14) (604) 682 6482 Vancouver</p> <p>15) (604) 875 6381 Counsellor referrals- check phone books or</p>	<p>Family Services; counselling and programs - anger management etc</p> <p>16) 1 (800) 668 7808 Canada wide</p> <p>17) (604) 731 4951 Vancouver</p>

<p>magazines eg Common Ground, Shared Vision</p>	<p>18) (604) 279 7100 Richmond</p>
<p>Your doctor or walk in clinics-24hr? -Psychiatric referrals</p> <p>19) _____ 20) _____ 21) _____</p>	<p>Hospitals - go to 'Emergency' (24hr) for severe emotional distress or disturbance</p> <p>22) (604) 875 4111 Vancouver 23) (604) 434 4211 Burnaby 24) (604) 581 2211 Surrey</p>
<p>Other-see phone books eg Social service agencies; Self-help groups for addictions</p> <p>-AA - Alcoholics Anon. Coda - Codependents Anon. Gamblers Anon, etc; Psychologists etc</p>	

Want to form your own group? Need more men for your group? Then call Vancouver MEN for names of men looking for groups, or place an advertisement in your local paper, or photocopy and distribute this poster-

Men's Group!

forming in your area

Call me! - _____

at- _____

Why?

*To share issues, to express, to let go, to feel,
to be supported, to celebrate, to witness other men,
to break out of male isolation, to connect..*

Introduction

Welcome to men's work and welcome to your Handbook!

This handbook has been created to respond to three needs:

1. The need for Vancouver Men's Evolverment Network to express its philosophy in a tangible format, so that others could understand and see who we are.
2. The need for men's organizations to be more visible, responsive and available to the community of men looking for men's services.
3. The need to create a format or methodology whereby men's groups could do good work, and have a structure in place so groups could maintain themselves through the inevitable ups and downs of group work - the realization being that the simple good intentions that bring a group of men together are not enough to *keep it together* when things start to get heated.

Of course any 'leader-less' men's group is ultimately self-defining, and creates its own experience, and thus is free to use or discard any procedure it chooses. Other manuals on men's work recognise this self-authority and do not offer a structure to the degree that this one does. The 'prescription' laid out in this handbook is intentional and defines a *philosophical orientation* to group work that, it is felt, will help create a healthy, safe and beneficial group experience.

The 'approach' that this handbook attempts to describe/establish is as follows:

- The essential orientation of one man towards himself/others is of respect & honour.
- We speak our truth as we are able to, ie as we are aware/conscious of it; this

means doing the work of honestly looking inwardly at our feelings/intentions/impulses.

- We take ownership for our thoughts/words/actions/feelings and take back our 'projections'.
- We openly and consciously discuss and establish healthy/appropriate group rules/guidelines which seek to create a safe non-shaming, non-abusive place for us to do our men's work.
- The support and healing we experience comes from sharing and witnessing each others journey; from taking the risk of revealing ourselves, becoming vulnerable and so developing deeper intimacy and trust - this can only happen in a safe non-shaming, non-abusive place.

At first glance all of this might be overwhelming to someone approaching group work for the first time. But remember, this is a 'process', a journey undertaken in the company of men, who, like you will be learning things as they go along. I applaud your courage for stepping into this place, and I invite you to begin your journey into men's group work with hope for a good outcome, with openness towards your fellow travellers and your **Handbook for Starting and Keeping! a Men's Group** - your guide through unfamiliar territory.

Felix Markevicius

Statement of Principles of Men's Group Work

Fundamental Principles	How We Treat Each Other	Outcomes
1. Principle of Non-violence	Each man has the right to safety of his physical and emotional being; this implies no physical violence, threats, use of intimidation or put-downs or shaming of other men. Each man obliges himself to respect Principle of Non-violence.	Safety
2. Principle of Non-judgement	Each man has the right to not be judged as he speaks his truth. Each man obliges himself to respect the Principle of Non-judgement; this implies no blaming, condemning, advising, challenging, 'fixing'. Trust is not a right, but a mutually shared experience that grows as we observe each other respecting the Principle of Non-judgement.	Trust
3. Principle of Supportive Listening	Each man has the right to be listened to. Each man obliges himself to do the work of listening to other men.	Release, support
4. Principle of Speaking Your Truth	Each man has the right to speak his truth, as it pertains to him, not what he may think/feel/believe is going on for any other man. Each man obliges himself to do the work	Self-realisation

	of discovering and expressing his truth.	
5. Principle of Taking Ownership	Each man has the right to own/have all his feelings, thoughts, wants. Each man obliges himself to do the work of owning all his feelings, thoughts, reactions, actions, statements.	Taking back power and 'projections'
6. Principle of Asking for What You Need	Each man has the right to ask for what he wants/needs insofar as these do not conflict with already stated rights & obligations. Each man obliges himself to do the work of understanding and supporting his own needs, and those of other men.	Validation
7. Principle of Celebrating Masculinity	Each man has the right to positive, supportive respect for his way of expressing his identity and masculinity, insofar as these do not conflict with already stated rights & obligations. Each man obliges himself to do the work of understanding and supporting the full diversity of masculine expression.	Mutual respect & non-discrimination

Notes on the Statement of Principles for Men's Group Work

Generally this approach to group work is the desire is to create certain outcomes ie safety, support, trust, by prescribing certain interactions as helpful and beneficial to these outcomes, and designating others as harmful or in opposition to these outcomes.

This approach may not work for all men, but in this context of an autonomous self-led beginning men's group it is felt that these are reasonable principles upon which the group can establish itself, avoid the numerous pitfalls and do good work together. These Principles are intended as guides to group work and it is not expected that every man will have complete understanding of them initially; this is why it is called 'men's work' - work is involved over time as the group experiments with its interactions and processes to find that approach which best works for this particular group.

1. Non-violence

Group work can only be feasibly done in a 'safe space' - we are 'here to heal' ourselves and support each other, not be subject to harm or abuse by another man, whatever his intentions might have been.

2. Non-judgement

This implies acceptance of a man just as he is ie he does not have to measure up to any outside 'cultural' standards that all men are continuously judged by. We set aside these judgements to allow a man to experience support and validation just as he is - perhaps for the first time in his life. Within the group of course a man is judged by his ability and desire to accept to group standards and processes - perhaps not all men can work together, but the principles as laid out will allow a wide spectrum of men to work together. Work is involved to build trust - which stands or falls by how well men are able to accept and not arbitrarily judge each other; trust is necessary for 'deep' group work, as men become vulnerable by revealing their deepest selves/issues -issues for which men may have been shamed in the past -'healing' of these past wounds requires a safe non-judgemental space. We do not challenge each other on the basis of allowing each man to come to his own healing in his own time, and also on the basis that we do not act as each others psychotherapists (even if we are qualified practitioners). See [Appendix 2](#) for further discussion of 'Non-Judgement'.

3. Supportive Listening

The self-evident basis for any group work.

4. Speaking Your Truth

This involves working at the reflective process of being present and expressing your feelings in the moment, trying to understand and express what is really going on for you and what that might be, or is, about. It can be helpful to focus on bodily sensations - sometimes only later do we realise what the motivation for a feeling or reaction is. This can be a powerful way to 'come back into your body' and get a balance between head-space and feelings. 'Your Truth' pertains only to your own thoughts/feelings /actions/reactions - not what you think/believe/guess might be happening for another man - these are judgements/projections - allow him to speak his truth.

5. Taking Ownership

When we are disconnected from our true feelings we lose our power to act authentically and in a self-directed manner; arguably men are 'trained' or 'socialised' to be this way to perform useful social tasks and thereby themselves receive benefits/rewards for their service. The social rewards are tangible and obvious, the costs are often hidden - men disconnected from their inner selves unable to understand or validate their own feelings. In group we do the work of trying to 'own' everything that is going on for us - all our feelings, all our reactions, actions, statements. In this way we reconnect to our true selves and stop being manipulated by or victims of outside forces. No one is to blame for how we are, each man takes responsibility for himself and thereby reclaims all parts of himself and his power.

6. Asking for what you need

Arguably men often deny their own needs to serve a 'greater' purpose, in group we learn to understand and validate our needs as important and thereby learn to take better care of ourselves individually, and also as a gift or benefit we can provide each other. This is part of our healing journey and also increases our ability to cope with difficult situations/crises. Too many men and boys have committed suicide, and will commit suicide because, they are unable to ask for what they need, and arguably society is currently unable/unwilling to respond to men's and boy's needs. Group is a place to challenge and change this attitude that male needs are unworthy.

7. Celebrating Masculinity

As we heal our past wounds we come to realise that there is no strict definition of masculinity, that each individual man expresses his own uniqueness to create a vast diversity of masculine identities that can be celebrated just for their uniqueness as well as for their positive and life affirming qualities. Undoubtedly there are many more men who seek to create than destroy, more who support and nurture than harm or abuse. As we heal our woundedness we heal the planet, as perhaps only victims beget victims.

Structure of this Handbook

This Handbook is organised into various sections called 'Levels'. This is partly to give it some kind of organisation, and partly to reflect the different phases that a men's group might go through.

In addition, each level is broken down into several 'Meetings', wherein a topic is presented that a men's group might profitably discuss and work with. These 'Meetings' could be followed as they appear in the handbook, but it is not required. In fact a men's group will find its own issues, and would better follow its own energy rather than adhere to an imposed structure - in which case it may find itself dipping into the handbook for insights as required.

The idea of 'Levels' is to reflect the fact that your men's group will not always 'feel' the same. Over time attitudes and motivations will change; the deeper we go into our issues the 'hotter' it will get and the more volatile our reactions may be. We may not even be aware it's happening - but as we can name it and make this stuff conscious we have a better chance of dealing with it and ultimately finding the 'connection' that brings us to group in the first place.

Groups will cycle through these 'Levels' in their own time eg when first forming, or when a conflict arises, or when a new man joins the group and some old ground needs to be recovered and reworked. A group may jump from one level to another very quickly, eg as an issue comes up, or perhaps at the request or invitation or need of one man. If you can see what's happening you may get a sense of the 'process' involved, *why* it's happening, where the group has come from and where it's heading - your insight may help understanding and group process.

Level 1 Getting to Know You Finding out where you fit in-are you included? Can you work with these guys? Feels ok? Motivation: Desire for company of men

Level 2 Exploring Issues Getting down to own inner work and witnessing other men's journeys Motivation: Deeper

self-knowledge; intimacy

**Level 3 Whose Rules
Are We Using and
Why?**

Questioning how things are done Motivation: Want
say on how it impacts you

Level 4 Celebrating

When it's good - it's really good! Motivation:
Exploring positive masculinity

Level 5 Conflict

Discovering that we want different things
Motivation: Getting wants/needs met...

Level 6 Stuckness

Low energy; needs something, no insights
Motivation: Can't chose 'next door' to go thru; or fear
of what's behind it?

Level 7 Taking A Dive

Facing fears & going into an unknown place
Motivation: Do it - or walk away...

**Level 8 Renewed
Commitment**

Re-establishing basis for group relationships
Motivation: Lets go for it! - again.

And back to Level 1 again (or any other)...

The Parable of the Two Travellers

Once upon a time two old men met at a roadside rest-stop. Many years earlier they had been close friends, but had lost touch with each other a long time ago. In fact both of them had so much on their minds, they didn't recognise each other at first, even though they had stood next to each other in line to buy refreshments.

Of course they sat together, and after a few awkward questions, they just sat in silence, looking at each other and just sharing the pleasantness of each others company. Both of them knew that, for now, the words were not important; each was happy to notice the feelings that were coming up, along with remembrances of past events - some brought smiles to their faces along with a quiet chuckle, others were sad and came with a surprise because of just how much emotional energy they still carried.

There was a crossroads a short way ahead, and it turned out that each was heading in a different direction,, one on business, the other had a family matter to attend to. After they'd rested, they decided to walk on together to the crossroads. By now there was a comfortable familiarity between them and the words flowed smoothly; reminiscences, jokes, family news, there was so much to say, and so little time. They found themselves walking more and more slowly, stopping to turn and face each other to emphasize first one point and then another. Of course they both realised they were reluctant to reach the crossroads where they must part.

But there was a third way; it was a little out of the way for both of them, and not exactly what either had intended, and it would mean arriving a little late at their final destinations, and it was actually a fair bit more arduous for both of them, because of the steepness of the route. And it was a little more dangerous, because of frequent rock slides. As they reached the crossroads they saw warning signs posted, of dangers ahead along that route. And remember, these were old men, so there was not a little fear in their hearts at the extra burdens along this route, and how much energy they would need to find along the way.

The two men stopped at the crossroads and one drew out his flask of water and offered it to his friend so he might drink first, before he tasted its sweetness. They looked at each other, smiling, and then one said: "Shall we?", extending his arm towards the third way; and the second man said: . "Of course!" with a laugh, and then, "Who shall lead first?".

A short while later, if you were there, you would have seen two old men climbing a steep and slippery path, but laughing with an energy beyond their years, and with an easy spring in their step - for they had found in their hearts the hope for what might be, which had overcome the fear and doubts of what could be, and were happy, for today at least.

Introduction to Level 1

Getting to Know you

As we sit down together, let us recognise that each of us has been through our own journey before we got to this place. Each of us will have gifts and joys to bring, though we may have to dig long and deep to find them. Each of us will probably have been wounded in some way, emotionally, psychologically, physically, and group may be a place to find healing for some of those wounds.

As we look across the circle into the faces of the other men, we realise that each of us holds in our heart hopes and fears; hopes for a new beginning, new possibilities, a new connecting and breaking free of isolation - fears of what may happen, fears of failure or inability to 'bridge the gap' and being 'alone' again once more.

Each of us digs into our reserves of courage, without knowing what our limits are. Each of us works to find the words that say what is true for us - for some they may flow more easily than for others. Beneath it all, we are implicitly saying: 'I am here to do the work of getting to know myself better, to reveal myself, my issues, to a depth I may never have reached before; and I am here to get to know you, and witness you, and ultimately to honour you and your journey'. Through it all may there be insight, wisdom and growth for all of us.

But in these first few meetings, what are our major (inner) concerns?

Firstly:

'Do I fit in, am I included?'

'Can I work with this group of men?'

'Am I ready to reveal myself, take that risk?'

'Can I trust these men, will they shame me?'

'What issues are being revealed - what's not being revealed?'

'What does my intuition say? - What's my gut reaction?'

'How does it feel to sit-in with this group of men?'

'Which man/men do I react to? - Why? - What don't I like? - Who do I like? - Why?'

'Does anyone not feel included? - Why?' 'Who is being excluded? - Why?'

Secondly:

'Am I being heard?' 'Does what I say/want mean anything to these men?'

'Are they able/willing to respond to my concerns?'

'Will I have sufficient influence (to satisfy me) with how the group creates and runs itself?'

Thirdly:

'Am I ready to do my inner work, and be vulnerable/intimate with these men?'

'Is this enjoyable, or just a pain in the neck?'

We will probably be acutely sensitive and observant of what's going on, what kind of attitudes are being shown. We may be aware of a lot of energy stored up, looking for a place to come out... We may be pleasantly surprised if it goes smoothly, and flows. We

may leave the meeting feeling buoyant and supported already. Or we may realise and be confronted by all the work there is to do, and have a sense of needing to find even more energy and courage. We may decide that now is not the right time to do this work... Or we may reserve judgement for a few more meetings (ideally, at least five); or we may be ready to commit right now, knowing that this is what we've been looking for all along. Good luck!

Level - 1 Meetings

- 1-1 Listening and speaking from the heart
- 1-2 Mission Statement - attempting to define what the group is all about
- 1-3 Initial Guidelines - starting to create the 'container'
- 1-4 Speaking your Truth
- 1-5 Naming the group, Initial Commitment Period, Working Guidelines
- 1-6 Statement of Group Agreements

Meeting 1-1

Focus: Listening & Speaking from the Heart

The basic structure of this meeting is very simple (and all following meetings):

1 Welcome ie greeting the men who have taken the risk to show up (and at subsequent meetings any new men who arrive) - men will be introducing themselves - let's not leave anyone out who may be shy

2 Introduction The man taking a leading role in initiating/facilitating ('leader') the group briefly introduces

- a. The initial aim of the group, as he sees it - But - also invites the men present to participate in creating and defining the group - ie this group belongs to everyone

- b. The basic structure of the meeting

3 Opening Ritual Some groups may like to explore the tradition of opening and closing rituals, these are used widely in men's groups and could be eg lighting a candle (s) - 'smudging' - banging a drum - group hug etc

4 Check-In The 'leader' will announce a round of 'check-ins'

"Each man will now have 5 minutes to 'check-in' - this is 5 minutes of UNINTERRUPTED time to say what's

going on for you right now. or what significant events occurred for you during the week. Please focus on the feelings you are experiencing or experienced. We are not here to advise or fix or blame or judge each other - in this exercise we focus on listening and speaking from the heart".

5 The Big Bit in the Middle

For meeting one our obvious focus is on getting to know each other - so at this point (with check-ins completed), we have an opportunity for each man -

- a. to give a little biography of himself by way of an introduction
- b. to say what he hopes to get out of being in a men's group
- c. to say if he has a specific issue or focus or ideas he wants to explore

This is an opportunity for more interaction eg discussion, questions etc but we are still focused on really listening to and hearing another man's story.

6 Check-Out

The 'leader' will announce a round of 'check-outs' -

"Each man will now have 2 minutes to 'check-out' - this is 2 minutes of UNINTERRUPTED time to say what's going on for you right now, how you experienced the meeting, what feelings came up for you - what sensations you have in your body right now - compare how you felt at the start of the meeting. Also do you want to set a challenge for yourself for next week?"

- 7 Next Time?** Set the time and place for the next meeting, exchange phone numbers/addresses. Call if you can't make it - it's disappointing waiting to see if you will show up. Usually the host will lead the meeting, ie establish the exercise/issue to work with
- 8 Closing Ritual** eg blowing out the candles - a poem - a chant - group hug - a minute of silence - a minute of noise! - a short saying or story from a book etc

Notes for Meeting 1-1

On Rituals

Rituals have numerous benefits

- a. a therapeutic benefit - signifies this time as 'special' or 'sacred' and helps to imbue this meeting with significance - let's get some special time in our lives! - guess what else starts to feel special...
- b. Defines a boundary between outside and inside (the meeting) - here is different - here is a different focus, different rules - what are they? - let's work at being conscious...
- c. An opportunity/challenge to celebrate our diversity - everyone likes to celebrate don't they?...
- d. ?

As each man takes on role of hosting a meeting in the weeks ahead, he may like to experiment with the ritual and this is one way we can support each other & celebrate our diversity.

On Check-Ins

It is always a good idea to get into check-ins quite quickly; it helps men be 'present', after all, it is 'their' meeting - someone may have an issue he needs to get into like right

now and it may be difficult for him to wait too long...

Options - go around the circle (alternate clockwise, anti-clockwise each week?), or just leave the floor open to any man to speak as he chooses (talking stick?).

The 'leader' will need a watch to keep track of each man's allocated time, only he may interrupt a speaker to let him know his time is up (one minute warning?)

Noticing the energy...

Sometimes a man checks-in with an issue that is so profound and *happening right now*, that it is obvious this needs to be focussed on and given more time. The best way is to follow agreed-to time limits, so all men are allowed to check-in, but then to ask that man, and the group, if they wish to spend more time on that issue. Other men also may have significant issues to discuss and so the group negotiates and allocates time to each issue (timekeeping is important). It's ok for a man to ask for what he wants. If a group can dynamically respond in the moment to this energy and these issues it will better serve men's needs than by rigidly hanging on to a predetermined program.

Periods of silence are ok - the men are processing/getting ready to speak - it is also ok to pass, occasionally - but if a man passes consistently, week after week, he should be *gently encouraged or invited to speak* - ask him to try to focus on what he's feeling, or one specific issue - often he's wrestling with too many items and doesn't know where to start.

Each man has 5 minutes (or 7 or 10 minutes, by group consensus) to speak uninterrupted and especially to focus on and say what he is feeling (are there any sensations he notices in his body, for instance?).

This is designed to help a man get into his feelings/body (and out of his head).

UNINTERRUPTED? Yes! - There are direct therapeutic benefits we can share and give to each other simply by listening without interrupting. If you have a question, (ie something wasn't clear to you) please wait until he has finished speaking - and then ask permission to ask a question - respect his answer - he may not be ready to hear you - he may need to sit in his own space without disturbance - this is one way we can support each other.

Talking-Stick

Some groups like to use a 'talking-stick' - a first nations tradition that encourages listening and respect for the speaker by establishing the requirement that only the man holding the 'talking-stick' may speak.

Meeting 1-2

Focus: Mission Statement

Note - this meeting requires some preparation - bring large sheets of paper and markers

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Mission Statement

"One of the things that will assist 'group process' and help define what this group is about is a Mission Statement. So what are we here to do? Why are we here? What does your picture or vision of a successful group look like? Each of us individually should attempt to answer these questions."

"This is a good opportunity to listen to each others ideas and wants - to allow each man here to participate in defining what this group is about."

"When each of us has had a chance to share our ideas, we can

work together to create a Mission Statement that attempts to reflect the main ideas expressed by the men in this group."

When discussion is complete and agreement reached the 'leader' should write down the Mission Statement -for future reference - and to tell new men as they join.

Mission Statement

Notes for Meeting 1-2

One technique to use requires some preparation beforehand - Brainstorming - need a (several) large sheets of paper and markers to write down ideas as men express them - encourage ideas from each man until we've gone around the circle a few times - then when every one has had an opportunity to participate in expressing individual ideas - attempt to create phrases by joining the ideas together - then attempt to join those phrases together to create the group's mission statement.

This process may take more than one meeting!

Encourage each man may work on it between meetings and bring to group his suggestions.

If a man/some men have not returned this week...

Some men may not have returned for the second meeting - they may have not felt secure enough to continue - they may not be ready to deal with their issues - they may not have liked someone else in the group, or perhaps the 'energy' was wrong - or they decided to take an evening class instead or whatever... We could keep on guessing, sometimes they may even call and tell us, but the important thing is to *not 'take it on'*. We may simply accept that this is a journey they do not wish to take. Or maybe they missed their bus and show up the next week! In the moment we may wish to accept that each man is doing what he thinks is right for him as his perception and awareness allows.

The 'leader' for this meeting should announce who has called ahead to say he can't make it, if someone hasn't arrived on time you may wish to wait 5 or 10 minutes, but not any longer than that. If you were expecting someone and he didn't arrive for the meeting, it is a good idea to call him before the next meeting to ascertain his situation.

As the group gets established over the weeks ahead, commitment levels become apparent, and the group will try to discuss and agree on appropriate attendance frequency. Regular attendance obviously will assist 'group process' - if 'key players' in an issue absent themselves this can prevent the group from moving ahead/resolving issues. It will take a bigger effort to 'get back' to where you were if too many weeks have elapsed in between. In fact, being absent can be used as an avoidance tactic and may be intentional. This can be very difficult to deal with.

Meeting 1-3

Focus: Initial Guidelines

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

When a group first gets started, it hasn't yet had time to define itself, or how it wants things to run, but it does need to spend a little time considering a set of initial guidelines. This helps the men present to know what the 'boundaries' are, what's expected, and it also helps to define a safe space.

Please consider the following items - these help to establish group process and may be decided on now or in the fifth meeting.

1. What is our stand on violence within the group?
2. Are these meetings confidential?
3. Is alcohol (or other drugs) allowed before/during group? Or only coffee/tea? Smoking?
4. Is each man ultimately responsible for himself?
Is group process helped by each man 'speaking his truth'?
- ie being open and honest?

- and telling his own story?

Is group process helped by a man interrupting/advising/using put-downs/diverting/judging/telling others what they should or shouldn't feel?

5. Do we start our meetings on time, or wait for people who are late?
Should men call beforehand if they can't make a meeting or are going to be late?
Should meetings always end on time? - Under what circumstances will we agree to extend a meeting?
6. If someone decides to leave the group, do we want to be informed? How?
7. Should a man acknowledge and accept the groups authority when it makes a decision?
What if a man disagrees and refuses to go along with it what should the group do?
8. How many men do we want in our group?
 - a. Is the group open to new men until we've reached number we want?
 - b. Is the group closed and new men or guests may only come by invitation of whole group?
9. ? - Any other items that any man wishes to propose as a group guideline.

The group may come into immediate agreement on some of the above items; others it may need a longer time to consider and should be deferred until the fifth meeting. Whatever is agreed to should be written down, perhaps on back of page, and ultimately in the 'Statement of Group Agreements'. This helps to formalise what the group stands for, is useful for future reference, if an agreement is changed or refined, or to inform any new man that may join the group at a later date.

Note 1:

[Meeting 3-1 Working Rules](#) explores group process guidelines in greater detail. At this level the group will have had some experience and be ready to debate the issues in greater depth.

Note 2:

The group may wish to consider changing/refining any guideline as it sees necessary, and this can be done at the initiation or suggestion of any member of the group.

Meeting 1-4

Focus: Speaking your Truth

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Speaking your Truth

"One of the most important aspects of men's work is how well each man understands the idea of, and is able to - 'Speak his truth'. In fact this will go a long way in determining the 'success' of the group."

"This is not something that just happens, but is a skill that needs to be considered, practised and learned. It involves doing the work of owning what is going on for you - no matter what is happening with anyone else."

"Essentially you tell your own story without advising/judging or telling another man what to do, or how he should feel."

"When a man is sharing his own issues/experiences, quite

often it brings up a reaction/feeling in the men who are listening. We should recognise that these reactions/feelings are our own, and take ownership - no matter what they are. They are not wrong - they simply do not belong to him, but to you and reflect your own orientation/attitude to the issue being shared."

"There is a real tendency in group work, especially when we start, to think that we are supposed to advise or fix someone when they have a problem. This must be avoided - as it means we are projecting our own beliefs and values and even inadequacies and issues onto that man -

[ie we advise them/tell them what to do, to (ostensibly) fix 'their' problem, but underneath it may be our own issue we're avoiding...]."

"A group that supports taking ownership and speaking your truth will fare better than others who may get bogged down in projections, lose clarity and get into arguments over who 'owns' or is avoiding issues."

"Finally, speaking your truth means saying what is going on for you alone. NOT what you think is happening for him or what he should be/do/think/feel; allow him to find his truth and experience your support and patience."

Exercises

1. Can you remember the last piece of advice someone gave you?
Did you ask for it? How did you feel listening to it?
Did you follow it? If yes - why? If no - why not?
2. Can you remember the last time you gave advice to somebody?

Was it asked for? - or did you just give it?

How did you feel giving that advice? How was it received?

Was there one of your own issues underneath prompting you?

Did you follow your own advice in that instance?

- If not why not - what stopped you?
- What does it mean when you give someone advice and you don't own it yourself?
- Do you think you'd like them to show you how to solve your problem - like a kind of rehearsal?

3. Have you ever stopped yourself from giving advice to somebody as they were talking about a problem? What stopped you? What was that about?

- Do you think they may have just wanted to be listened to?

4. How do you feel about giving advice when someone directly asks for it?

5. Do you have any general conclusions about 'advice giving'?

6. Think of a time when another man was sharing and you had a reaction.
 - a. What was that about for you? Did you want to 'fix' it - make it go away? How?
 - b. What was the 'felt sense' of that reaction - unpleasant? - uncomfortable?
 - c. Did you feel an impulse to advise or tell him what to do? Did you? How was it received?
 - d. Were you able to 'own' your own reaction at that time? Do you now? Did you have a sense that it was your own issue? - Do you now?

7. Again, think of a time when another man was sharing and you had a reaction (same or different occasion).
 - a. Were you judging that man in some way? ie if you wanted to fix it, did that imply he was somehow inadequate to the task?
 - b. If your reaction was a strong one, were you perhaps 'blaming' him in some way? Was he 'wrong' in his attitude/approach? - did he need to be 'straightened out'? Did he need to be confronted and 'changed'? What can you own about that reaction now?
 - c. Were you able to move into a place of 'allowing' that man to say/experience/do what he needed for himself?
 - d. Do you think he felt supported? Ask him!
 - e. Is it ok to ask for support in your group? How can that be done?

8. What options do you have if you suspect a man is 'projecting' onto you?

- a. Can you ask him to speak his truth without referring to you?
- b. Can you ask him to say what he wants without referring to you?
- c. Can you ask him to own his own feelings/reactions as you speak your truth without referring to him?
- d. How can you not 'take it on'?

Notes for Meeting 1-4

Most men come to group with the intent of being open and honest; this meeting attempts to reinforce that healthy ideal, raise consciousness around 'projections' and promote a group dynamic that supports 'speaking your truth', thereby reducing the chance of confusing projections taking root.

If men are advised or even judged, blamed, perhaps even shamed, as they attempt to speak their truth, then the tendency will be to not risk revealing, to not be vulnerable and so avoid this 'wounding'. This unhealthy group dynamic can be very difficult to change once it is established - a lot will depend on the 'maturity' of the men in the group and their willingness to work at taking ownership. The watchword perhaps needs to be: 'Are you willing to take ownership?' - then sort out who owns what from there.

Meeting 1-5

Focus: Naming the Group, Guidelines and Time Commitment

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

By the time we reach this meeting we should have a good idea of who is committed and ready to do this work. We are no longer complete strangers to each other; we've taken some risks, and trust is beginning to develop. There may still be some uncertainty, but at least we are ready to give it a go. In this meeting we are to focus on some important 'group development' issues:-

1. **Time Commitment**

We've probably already established how often we're going to meet; now we need to decide, as a group, how long to meet for: 6 months? - a year? - no fixed end-date? What feels best - for you - as a group?

2. **Naming the Group**

This doesn't have to be a long drawn-out affair - just brain-storm a few ideas until you come up with something that everyone agrees on. Why is this important? - It helps to give the group its own 'life' or essence; it helps to give group members a sense of belonging, and a sense of being connected to something bigger than themselves. This in turn helps members to respect and honour group process -and may yet turn into pride at helping to create and be a part of a worthwhile project. It's like giving birth to something - it needs a name - just as any new-born infant does.

3. **Initial Guidelines**

In a [previous meeting](#) (1-3), the Initial Guidelines were introduced; some may have already been agreed upon. Now is the time to focus on those that are still outstanding. Even if you don't have a clear sense of their implications, it is still a good idea to come to some agreement on them, after all, the group can always go back and change them at a later date if it wants to. There may be little discussion, some guidelines may seem 'obvious' - common sense; or perhaps one item is contentious and will take more time than the rest - this is men's work too. ([Meeting 3-1](#) has more information).

Important Note:

There is often a tendency to want to skip over this 'structural work', and move on into the 'real' stuff, our personal issues - we may even feel frustrated at times - always discussing how to do it rather than doing it. Unfortunately this is inevitable, but necessary work - we have to learn how to make a strong enough container before we can really 'cook'. Things may/will fly apart on us in the future and we'll find ourselves having to go back and strengthen the pot before we can continue on again. In fact, this

may be the place my commitment is tested the most - am I willing to go back and do it all over again? Are they really willing to honestly renegotiate? Am I? What is my/their resistance about?

As we conclude and reach our agreements, these should be written down on [page 1-6](#), the Statement of Group Agreements.

As the group decides how it wants its meetings to run, and what are appropriate standards of behaviour for group purpose, it will make agreements or rules or guidelines which it is expected each group member will follow.

These allow the group to function normally and purposefully, and restrict the possibility of any one man to upset (or in extreme cases even destroy) the groups ability to function. The desire is to contain interactions within a safe space and to support healthy/appropriate self-expression, and to exclude actions that are shaming or otherwise abusive and harmful.

Statement of Group Agreements

For the purpose of normal group process and healthy and appropriate interactions, this group

(group name)

makes the following agreements:

Introduction to Level 2

Exploring Issues

At this level, we've already covered some of the basics - how the group is going to run itself, what the 'container' looks like, and now we are ready to throw some 'ingredients' into the pot.

Why do we come to group? - To know ourselves better and to get to know each other. Which means we start to focus on and talk about what is going on for us in our lives, and probably significant experiences of the past which colour the events of today. As we share we may get insights into behaviour patterns or perhaps new understanding of why we feel the way we are feeling; maybe we're seeking to change how we experience life, but aren't quite sure how to do that. As we witness other men and the journeys they have taken we may gain a greater appreciation of what it means to be a man and what issues other men are going through.

Insights - understanding - appreciation etc - all of these add up to the possibility of mutually shared support and healing of old wounds, in an environment that increasingly is about deeper and deeper 'becoming', and deeper and deeper bonding, based on the truth of our (sometimes parallel) experiences and on our mutual willingness to take the risk of being open and intimate.

This doesn't just happen by itself. We each undertake a demanding inner process of finding the courage to step into vulnerability - despite the fact that we've been there before and we've been wounded or hurt in some way, by someone who was unable to appreciate or honour the boundaries of appropriate action towards another human being. We are also here to grieve the fact that we too may have inflicted wounds on those around us, this we acknowledge, and perhaps may be able to move into a place of being able to offer an amends.

And so we begin to share what is really going on for us...

Note:

There may be a tendency for us to judge ourselves (or another man) as inadequate, or perhaps 'weak' as we go into those vulnerable places, as another man reveals his stuff - these are just our old tapes playing again - tapes that say 'a man is supposed to be/do...(whatever)' - what we need to realise and tell ourselves is that we're attempting to speak our truth and move away from the denial that has probably blocked our feelings and ability to experience life to the fullest. Again, part of the difficulty is that we're learning this as we go along, and none of us have had role models for this behaviour.

Level 2 - Meetings

2-1 [What it means to be a man...](#)

2-2 [Fathers](#)

2-3 [Intimacy](#)

2-4 [Noticing the Energy](#)

2-5 [Trust](#)

2-6 [Shaming](#)

2-7 [Anger](#)

Meeting 2-1

Focus: What it means to be a Man

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: What it means to be a man

"One of the hardest things for a men's group to come to terms with is the idea of 'what it means to be a man'. We've been taught that somehow we have to prove our manhood - we have to measure-up to someone else's definition."

"Each of us comes in with our own experiences, our own lessons learned, our own understanding of what manhood is - some of these lessons may have been learned in healthy and supportive ways, some may have been learned in inappropriate and painful ways."

"How do we apply those measures to ourselves today?"

"How do we judge other men in this way?"

"How do we let ourselves be judged in this way?"

Exercises

1. Reflect and share on experiences and lessons learned around 'manhood'.
2. How have some of these experiences impacted you - were they painful or pleasant?
3. Who gave you these lessons? What do you think motivated them?
What do you understand about their level of understanding now?
Were they wrong/right? Why?
4. How have some of these experiences influenced life decisions?
5. How have some of these experiences influenced relationship decisions?

6. What would you change in these experiences if you could?

7. Who decides what it means to be a man - now - for you?

8. Is anybody judging you in your life right now about 'manhood' ? - ie about what you 'should be', or be doing for them, because you are a man? Why?
How do you feel about that?
Are they 'right' or 'wrong'? Why? What motivates them?

9. How many different ways are there of being a man?

Notes for Meeting 2-1

This meeting is an opportunity to share, release and raise awareness about our experiences in this area. Some of these experiences may have been very painful. Our self-judgements continue to control and direct our lives - as do judgements other men have of us - and - judgements we apply to others around us. As we become more aware of these expectations and judgements, we are more able to consider their appropriateness, both when (self applied to us, and when we apply them to others. (See Meetings - [Shaming](#); Emotional Violence).

Meeting 2-2

Focus: Fathers

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Fathers

Explore! (see exercises)

Exercises

1. Describe your father - physically - what physical interaction did you have with him?
How do you think that has influenced your life?
2. Describe your father - emotionally - what emotional interaction did you

have with him?

How do you think that has influenced your life?

3. Describe your fathers experience of life.
What lessons, if any, did he teach you?
Did he draw from his own experience?
4. How was he excluded from your life?
What choices did he make that impacted you?
How was he included into your life?
5. Share high points and low points in your relationship with your father.
6. How well do you know your father?
Do you know what his father was like? Have you asked him?
Do you know what their relationship was like? Have you asked him/them?
7. Were there other men in your life who played a fatherly role or gave you masculine guidance?
8. If you could change and improve your relationship with your father, consider how you might do that.
9. If you are a father, describe your relationship with your son or daughter.
How is it the same as, or different from, your relationship with your father?
What do you think they want/need from you that you might not be giving?
What one thing could you do to 'make it different'?
10. ?

Notes for Meeting 2-2

This may take more than one meeting.

Any meeting that focuses on father issues may bring up strong feelings - some of us

may have been abused by our fathers, physically, emotionally, sexually. We need a strong container to hold these revelations, a safe-space - our consciousness may change as we go into core issues - one man may be ready for his 'descent' into that dark place - but it may freak another man out - as much as we can, if we can ritualise this process by opening and closing ceremonies eg drumming, meditating, chanting (something physical preferably to move the energy) then it will help enclose the space, help us all to be 'present' and help us all to move out of that space at the end.

Meeting 2-3

Focus: Intimacy

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Intimacy

"A men's group, at least an emotional support group, can define its success by the level of intimacy it reaches."

"The more we are able to share and reveal about ourselves, the deeper will be the support and healing we will find through group. Each of us has the opportunity to experience 'enlightenment', the release of burdens/secrets too long carried, and the healing of wounds too long untended."

"This can only happen, however, if we are able to set up a 'safe space', a space where we can reveal those inner issues without shaming or abuse. This depends on our ability to successfully negotiate and establish healthy ways of 'doing' group. As we are able to do this, men will take risks in sharing their stuff, and if they are not shamed/abused for it, a greater sense of

trust develops, and the group will move into deeper & deeper levels of intimacy."

"With deeper intimacy comes greater vulnerability - the 'closer' we are to someone, the more they can hurt us - hence our need to work at and establish healthy group guidelines. This is a dynamic process of learning through experience, and if we are smart enough, and open to it, it can work for us."

Exercises

1. Is intimacy a normal human need?
2. Where do we usually get our intimacy needs met?
3. Does intimacy, or fear of vulnerability keep men out of men's groups?
 - a. Are men 'supposed to be' invulnerable?
 - b. What isolates men from each other? Speculate.
4. Has another man ever 'shamed' or abused you?
5. What was your experience of intimacy with your father? Mother?
6. Are men able to get intimacy needs met appropriately in men's groups?
 - a. Compare to personal relationships - why are we sometimes manipulative?
 - b. Is this likely to happen in men's groups?
 - c. How can we establish healthy & appropriate relationships?

7. What are your earliest recollections of intimacy? What was the 'felt sense' of that experience?
8. What is your most recent recollections of intimacy? What was the 'felt sense' of that experience?
9. How have you tried to get your intimacy needs met in the past?
 - a. Was it a healthy way? If yes - what were the benefits?
If no - who suffered?
 - b. What have you learned from this?
10. How do you make choices around relationships now?
11. Have you ever experienced the 'come here, go away' syndrome when you're developing a relationship with someone?
 - a. Compare this to the need for human warmth and the fear of vulnerability.
Are you able to recognise what's motivating you in a relationship?
 - b. Do you think this will happen in a men's group?

Notes for Meeting 2-3

It can be surprising to some that our relationship issues are quite often paralleled in our men's group, and played out on a new stage, with new players, and yet the theme remains the same. Intimacy touches the core of our experience as human beings from our earliest moments. Too many men experience isolation and lack of intimacy in their lives, or perhaps it could be said are unable to establish and maintain intimacy. Why should this be so? Is this an innate human characteristic? Is it a culturally learned response? A prescribed way for men to be in our culture? If so, who wins?; who loses? - Why? Should it be changed? Are men's groups about changing it? How? (Explore!...)

Meeting 2-4

Focus: Noticing the Energy

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Noticing the Energy

"Part of good group process is to notice what's happening right now - where the energy or the issue is - what's happening to it."

"This typically will be up to one man, who happens to be in that 'space' where he can notice and 'call' what's going on - everyone else may be so into it as to not notice until its pointed out to them."

"The idea here is to bring it into consciousness, or give another perspective that may be insightful, helpful, fruitful - adding clarity and fresh energy to group process. The group may go with it - or choose to stay where it was."

"The idea is not to necessarily stop/divert/avoid what's happening in the moment - that energy may need to be followed and played out - but to give new energy at an opportune moment. And if you don't do it - the moment may be lost."

Exercises

1. Where is the energy in the group - right now? Compare to last week; or weeks ago; or months ago; or earlier, ie Where were/are we? - Where have we moved to?
2. Why does energy change in the group?
3. Have you noticed what happens to the energy level when the group avoids dealing with an issue?
What other symptoms of avoidance are there?
4. What do you notice about your own energy level?
How does your energy level relate to what's going on in your life?
What eats your energy up? What gives you energy? Can you relate this to the group context?
Do you have any ideas about how to raise the group energy level?
What do you want? What does your intuition say?
Don't be afraid to say it.
5. This is your group and your experience!
What effort are you willing to make?
What energy are you willing to bring?
Now - next week - next month?
6. Do you 'work smarter, not harder'? - to create the group you want?

Notes for Meeting 2-4

Sometimes your energy may not be enough... You may need to be very smart to set-up and establish a healthy foundation within your group to get your needs met. Likewise you may need to be very smart to set-up and establish a healthy foundation within your group to confront and overcome a dysfunctional situation - you may need to go back to square 1, more than once - to defeat dysfunctional patterns that may have been established over a lifetime... One simple idea may need to be made prominent and reiterated on an ongoing basis, until all men finally/consciously/intentionally buy into it.

Of course the energy of group changes as men bring the energy of their issues into play. It may get 'hot' because one man has energy intensely invested in a particular issue, or a perspective of that issue; other men may see it differently and opposing perspectives can raise the 'heat' considerably - if the men choose to take those positions and get into conflict. This is all played out against the backdrop of the groups intent, its mission statement, its rules and guidelines - of course we're not supposed to drop them (or our gloves!) when it does get hot - the very opposite in fact - they're the safety net that allows this process to happen - that allows/sets up the possibility of it getting hot.

Coldness or Low Energy in the Group

1. Have you established supportive/healthy rules and guidelines? If not, men may be reluctant to share (bring their heat) for fear of being ridiculed, shamed or otherwise abused.
2. Men may still be being 'abused' despite those rules - are they being 'enforced'? What our rules say and how we treat each other may be very different things-make it conscious.
3. Some men may not have reached a comfortable space within themselves to allow sharing their issues - they may open-up as they see others modelling this way of being. It would be very unusual for all the men in a group to be in this space.

4. At some point you will be ready to leave group and move on and take on other challenges - and maybe the first indication of that is that your energy becomes low - or you may have had those thoughts but been reluctant to leave behind a comfortable supportive routine in your life.

IF IT'S GETTING VERY COLD - ASK YOURSELF:- 'AM I READY TO LEAVE GROUP?' or

1. 'WHAT AM I / ARE WE AVOIDING AND WHY?'
2. 'WHOSE RULES ARE WE USING AND WHY?'
3. 'ARE THEY THE GROUP RULES?'
4. 'HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?'
5. 'CAN I/WE CHANGE IT? - HOW?'

Confronting 'coldness' or low energy in the group may be a very difficult thing to do. It may have evolved over a long period of time - you may have to dive deep to bring it into consciousness - there may be strong resistance from others who are comfortable as is and who may not wish to confront a new reality and change. The 'way things are' may not be a conscious group decision - it may not have been debated and decided consciously - if it were, then perhaps to change would simply mean changing that decision... That may still be difficult, if one man is strongly and consciously invested in the status quo for his needs and his process. Work will need to be done to find the middle path. It will be much more difficult if that man is covert and/or unconscious in this process. Covert? - Yes; to hide and avoid confronting an issue he may manipulate group process. Unconscious? - Yes; he may not be aware that he's doing it - and he may not welcome you showing him (or the group) this truth!

Why do we want it to get hot?

The energy of passion is hot; the energy of pain is hot; our wounds burn us deep inside; imposed barriers enclose and cage us - tell us to 'be cool' and freeze our hearts...

Good group is about bringing our heat, our passion - creating a 'cooking pot' strong enough to contain what has been hidden away for perhaps too many years - and feasting at our hearts banquet.

Yet paradoxically it may seem to some - we need rules to 'make it cook' - ideas that the outside world may value little - ideas like 'honour'; 'respect'; 'allow'; 'support'; 'speak from the heart'; 'not to shame or violate' etc. These ideas break down the barriers between us, break our freezing isolation, and let the heat begin to flow...

Meeting 2-5

Focus: Trust

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Trust

"When you trust someone, as a friend, or business partner, or emotionally intimate partner, or even in your group, you open up yourself to them, and you become vulnerable. The opportunity exists for betrayal."

"Many of us have been betrayed by someone we trusted; sometimes this has had an incredible and unforeseen impact on our lives - why then do we trust?" "What benefit do we get from 'trusting' personal relationships?"

Exercises

1. Reflect on a significant instance of a trust that was betrayed - How did it impact you?
2. Have you betrayed someone else's trust? - How? - Why? - How did it affect them?
3. How do you figure how to trust someone? In a relationship? In a business deal? In group?
4. Is there someone you don't trust? Why?
5. Who do you trust? Why?
6. Reflect on whether you've changed your process over the years of how you decide to trust-Why?

Notes for Meeting 2-5

This meeting is an opportunity for men to release past betrayals that can often be deeply disturbing.

It is also an opportunity for men to reflect on their process of 'trusting someone' - and perhaps achieve some insight or clarity from the wisdom and experience of other men.

Additionally it is an opportunity for men in the group to reflect on their relationships within the group and to contemplate that space and share their thoughts/feelings about each other.

Whether I trust someone or not is my issue - and doesn't have to mean they are not 'trustworthy'.

There is some danger in this process of projecting my fears/doubts onto another man, and blaming or judging him for some other internal issue or past experience that has nothing to do with him. This is something that the leader may need to remind the group of.

Of course it is legitimate and healthy to not trust someone on the basis of their own past actions/statements - we may begin to trust them again as they are able to speak sincerely of their intentions and challenges.

Meeting 2-6

Focus: Shaming

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Shaming

"One of the hardest things for a men's group to come to terms with is the idea of 'what it means to be a man'. We've been taught that somehow we have to prove our manhood - we have to measure-up to someone else's definition."

"How is this done? - How is this attitude enforced on us?"

"Typically a man will be shamed by someone else who implies or says that -'he's not up to scratch' or somehow 'inadequate' or 'he should pull himself together' or 'he shouldn't cry' giving the impression that this behaviour somehow isn't what a 'real' man would do - as if this person somehow has exclusive determining rights on what a man is or should be."

"This attitude may have come from parents, teachers, others in authority, and from friends - we may have taken-on these judgements and in our core-essence be carrying these wounds of shame, a felt-sense of inadequacy - not good enough etc".

"In our men's group we confront these attitudes, we attempt to heal those shame wounds of the past and to adopt healthy behaviours that allow a man to be who he really is, as he discovers and begins to express himself, perhaps for the first time, in a safe place where he won't be shamed or arbitrarily judged."

Exercises

1. Reflect and share on an incidence when you were shamed.
How did it make you feel? How did it impact your life? Relationships?
2. You may have developed trust for someone in a relationship in the past who may may have betrayed that trust by shaming you - what happened to that trust?
How easy (or hard) is it to trust that person again? Why?
3. Have you ever shamed someone? What did you do?
Why? - What motivated you?
How did it impact them? - Your relationship?
How do you feel about it now? Can you make it up to them?

Notes for Meeting 2-6

Again, an opportunity for reflecting, sharing and healing past wounds. Group process will be greatly served by raising consciousness about how men are arbitrarily judged and controlled by shame in our culture and by promoting healthy non-shaming behaviours in group because men are aware of shaming attitudes and behaviours

carried over from past experiences and seek to avoid shaming each other.

Meeting 2-7

Focus: Anger

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Anger

"Anger, and the abuse and violence that stems from it, could be picked as the single-most significant men's issue of our time. Yet all of our emotions are normal, valid, valuable human experiences. We are meant to have them; the feeling itself is meant to be expressed, not repressed - at this basic biological level, our anger is a defence mechanism that emerges when we are hurt or perceive ourselves to be threatened in some way - our anger is a hot strong emotional energy that human beings were 'designed' to use to stop the pain or prevent the harm from occurring eg repel physical attacks."

"So, anger is a normal useful human emotion - we are not abnormal for experiencing anger."

"Having said that, we must realise that IT IS NOT OK TO ACT OUT OF THAT ANGER OR PAIN OR FEAR TO BE ABUSIVE OR VIOLENT TOWARDS ANYONE. Abuse and violence are harmful and destructive and can only cause more pain to all concerned."

"The difficulty here is that few of us have had good/any role models for the appropriate expression of anger. In fact we may not have had role models for the appropriate expression of any emotion; arguably our culture asks males to repress (promotes/rewards) their emotions (disallows) from childhood on upwards (still).

[It would take a whole book to discuss this, but the idea seems to be that males are 'socialised/conditioned/taught' to be 'strong' ie unemotional to somehow better serve their culture (eg soldiers) and 'take care of the problem' - compete, 'bring home the bacon', fight, kill, die...]."

"In this scenario of emotions being repressed, perhaps over a lifetime, the internalisation of these strong emotional energies can become intolerable in their effects of pain and suffering, no matter the supposed 'rewards' being offered. Just as a rope has a certain breaking strain, every man has a breaking point, and can only take so much. "

"It is at this point of crisis, and of being overwhelmed by (finally) irrepressible pain, that some men lose control and become abusive and violent, with sometimes tragic consequences; some others may turn the violence in on themselves, and attempt suicide (too often succeeding, in at least this final task)."

"The better way, of course, is to acknowledge all our emotions as real and normal, and worthy of expression, even anger. And secondly to find appropriate ways of expressing that energy, without causing pain to others, and yet not

internalising it and causing pain to ourselves."

Exercises

1. Lets examine our emotional 'social conditioning':-
 - a. Has anyone ever told you it was ok to have all your feelings - that they were normal?
 - b. Or has it been the reverse - that you've been told to repress your feelings? Which ones?
 - c. How was your emotional growth/expression supported or encouraged by your parents? Others?
 - d. Who 'filled the emotional space' in your home as a child? How about now?
 - e. Are there any significant times/issues that stand out in your memory as either validating or denying your emotional expression? How do you feel about them now?
 - f. What's your perception on how males are raised in this culture with regards to emotional validation?
 - g. How do you support yourself emotionally now? Any other groups attended eg 12 step?

2. Is anger an issue for you now? Are you able to talk about it?
 - a. Describe the feeling? How do you react to it?
 - b. What 'causes' that emotion to emerge for you - who does what?

(or doesn't do). What would happen if they didn't do it? Would you still be angry? - ie are you already angry and then this makes it worse? If so, what else are you angry about?

- c. If something were to be a certain way, would it take your anger away? If so, what is it you want, or what is your expectation? Is it reasonable? If it's another person, if they were to change the way you wanted/expected, would that take your anger away?
 - d. Is it realistic to expect another person to change (be a certain way) to solve your problem? Are you trying to control them eg spouse, child, colleague? See note 2 below. Is your anger about betrayal? Is there a feeling of loss or abandonment, even fear, behind it?
 - e. Are you in a power struggle with someone? Why is your way so important?
 - f. Do you feel helpless? Is your anger about getting even, or not losing?
3. What can you do to support yourself and get your needs met without forcing someone or something to be a certain way for you?
- a. Can you accept the 'change' - despite how painful it may feel now? Your anger and resentment will probably hurt you the most in the long run.
 - b. Are you able to talk of your loss/betrayal, and move into grieving that loss/pain?
 - c. Your fear is real and may be devastating to you in the moment - again, finding a place to ask for and receive support could be the best way of taking care of yourself. Where is support available for you?

4. Have you ever been close to losing control? What was the situation? What were your feelings? Do you have any new perspective now?

5. Have you ever lost control? What 'pushed' you over the edge? What was the outcome? How do you see that situation now?

Notes for Meeting 2-7

If you are experiencing overwhelming feelings of anger, a leaderless men's group may not be able to give you all the support you need in an appropriate fashion. It is recommended that you seek out professional counselling from a qualified and sympathetic therapist; or consider anger management workshops that may be run by a local family services agency. Remind yourself that it is a strength to be able to ask for help even when supposed 'professionals' are unhelpful/unsympathetic - we're still confronting a cultural mind-set that says it's not ok for a man to ask for help.

Introduction to Level 3

Whose Rules and Why?

How does group 'feel'? If it feels ok, we may be happy to let the 'process' continue as is. But at some point, for somebody, it may start to feel not ok. Some inner tension will be created, and they may (eventually, or straight away) ask that the group consider doing things another way ie change group process. Or they may be unwilling/unable to ask for what they want, and their dissatisfaction may grow to the point where they leave the group - not wishing to deal with that inner tension any more.

At some point, the men who are willing/able to do the work, will stay and say what it is they want, ie they enter into conflict; and the essence of this conflict will be 'Whose Rules and Why?' (Perhaps all relationships go through this phase: Am I respected? Being treated fairly? Why shouldn't things happen the way I want them to? - And perhaps once we enter this debate we never really ever leave it...)

Many things can happen during this debate. Some groups will find cohesion and common purpose as they pursue and make conscious those standards by which we live and want to live our lives, both inside and outside group. Some groups will fail at this barrier, unable to make conscious and agree on a common standard for their group purpose. Some men may leave at this point, licking their wounds (sometimes real, sometimes only perceived that way), and the group reshuffles and tries to start all over again.

It is the desire for mutuality that brings us together, and keeps us working at it. In the experiment called a men's group, sometimes we will find mutuality and journey together, and find support and healing along the way; sometimes we will not find it, or perhaps lose it along the way, and despite our best efforts at going back and looking for it, many of us will finally end up taking separate roads into our own new possibilities.

Level - 1 Meetings

- 3-1 Working Rules - Establishing basic ground rules for the group
- 3-2 Confidentiality - What is, what isn't confidential?
- 3-3 Consensus Decision Making - Exploring mutuality through consensus
- 3-4 Conscious Agreements - Making a strong container
- 3-5 When Agreements are Broken - Exploring 'whys - hows -responses'
- 3-6 Statement on Non-Violence - Are we committed?
- 3-7 Leaving the Group - What issues come up here?
- 3-8 Inviting a new man into Group - Are we ready? Is he?

Meeting 3-1

Focus: Working Rules

When a group first gets started, it hasn't yet had time to define itself, or how it wants things to run, so it needs a set of working rules to use in the meantime. This helps the men present to know what the 'boundaries' are, what's expected, and it also helps to define a safe space. It will be more helpful to take a closer look at the rules at a later date when the group is more established and comfortable with defining its own boundaries. The Working Rules as presented below are drawn from experience and have been used successfully before by men's groups.

Working Rules and Guidelines

1. No violence or threats of violence - this requires immediate exclusion from the group.
2. Confidentiality - anything heard or witnessed inside the group is not to be repeated outside.
3. No drug use before/during group (except for eg tea, coffee).
4. Take full responsibility for yourself ie- Speak your truth - Own your words/acts/feelings.
5. Call and tell someone if you can't make a meeting or are going to be late, even at the last minute.
6. Please let someone know if you won't be coming back to group - this is helpful and considerate.

7. Membership in the group is based on a man's commitment to recognise the groups authority in setting its rules, by whatever method it deems appropriate, (eg majority decision, consensus).
 8. Once the group is established - a new man (men) may only be invited with the group's ok.
-

Notes for Working Rules

1. ie each man commits to never threatening or using violence against anyone in the group. (See [Statement on Non-violence](#))

Anyone who uses violence/threats is seriously missing the point of what the group is about and should be immediately required to leave. Anyone who has been on the receiving end of this has been violated and it is intolerable for them to have to sit through the aftermath of this action in the presence of the perpetrator.

If the violator is not excluded, the victims only other recourse is to leave the meeting himself. This is an unhealthy situation that rewards the violator and punishes the victim and should not be allowed.

The violator may be allowed back at a later date if

- a. he re-commits to non-violence, understands that this is a fundamental basis for group process
- b. he is able to make an amends/apology to the victim with good intent
- c. the victim is able to accept the apology/intent and feels ok with allowing that man to return Philosophically - we support all our feelings and right to have them, but we also support appropriate methods of expressing them in a group context ie non-violent and non-abusive.

2. See [Meeting Confidentiality](#).
3. Anyone in a drug induced state can be very disruptive of normal group process.
4. The more self-responsibility each man can recognise and own, the greater clarity our group process will have - in fact many contentious group issues are often around who 'owns' what and who is trying to avoid responsibility...

As we accept self-responsibility there is less and less judging/blaming and projecting that will be going on - the less we become victims of 'circumstance' (or someone else's action) and the more we start to own and create our reality the way we want it to be.

Taking full responsibility includes:

- it's up to you to respect the rules, any mission statement etc ie the intent of this group
- you must take responsibility for what you say/do, how you feel OWN YOUR STUFF (ie no-one else makes you say or do anything - its not their 'fault')
- speak your truth
- use 'I' statements and speak to your experience rather than generalisations re. men
- it's ok to ask for what you want - in a group context there are competing demands, so we may not always get what we want when we want it
- it's ok to pass on any exercise

- it's not someone else's job to fix me or answer my question or respond to me, I may ask, and they may respond, if they choose to - the rest is all my issue, not theirs also. They may not want my feedback right now - can I respect their choice?
 - likewise its not my job to fix/advise/blame/judge/lay a trip on anyone else
5. In the early days you may discover/decide/realise that this group, what it offers, is not for you -it is ok to leave- there is no blame or failure attached to that choice. You may have a sense of what it is you're looking for, or what's missing for you - if you are able to share that with group it will help them to evaluate and consider what's working for them. (See Meeting - [Leaving the Group](#))
 6. The group collectively has the right to establish how it will work . If a man disagrees with a rule then he should follow any procedure the group has established to discuss/review/change that rule. In other words he should not just arbitrarily break that rule - this is serious breach of trust and group rights and potentially very damaging to the group. The group reserves the right to exclude any man who chooses not to follow established group procedures/rules.
 7. Unexpected guests can be very disruptive to normal group process, and in extreme cases may actually be set-up to do just that, by a man wishing to avoid an issue by creating a new one. In these circumstances uninvited guests or men wishing to join may simply and courteously be requested to leave - explaining that the group has a procedure to follow regarding inviting guests or new members.

Meeting 3-2

Focus: Confidentiality

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Confidentiality

"As we get to know each other more, we will start revealing aspects of ourselves that are sensitive and private, things we may not have revealed to anyone else before, things that we may not wish to be revealed to others outside this group."

"In group work, part of developing trust and a feeling of safety comes from the confidence that whatever we share at group is kept confidential. In fact our ability to do our 'work' ie working through our emotional issues is based on this trust."

"It can be a shattering experience, and is a violation of trust, to discover that intimate details shared in confidence have been released to an outside party."

"The group needs to discuss, understand and find agreement on what is to be kept confidential, and what is ok to reveal to an outside party".

When discussion is complete and agreement reached the 'leader' should write down the confidentiality agreement - for future reference - and to tell new men as they join.

Confidentiality Agreement

Notes for Meeting 3-2

It is always a good idea to discuss what levels of confidentiality each man requires. Some men may specifically say, at they begin to get into an issue, that they want what they are about to reveal held strictly confidential. In any case it is a good idea for any group to have a general understanding/agreement on confidentiality. Some men may like to know how much can they reveal in a private therapy session... Or perhaps how much should a man discuss of group process to friends or partner? Some men will be more sensitive to this issue than others.

Meeting 3-3

Focus: Consensus Decision Making

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Consensus Decision Making

"This means that the group enters into discussion, exploring an idea or decision, its pros and cons, what each man feels about it, and stays with that discussion until each man in the group can support it and agreement is reached."

"What it means for 'group process' is that individual points of view are welcomed and respected - sometimes one man will 'hold-out' for something that he feels is important - sometimes he will be persuaded by the group - sometimes he will persuade them."

"This also helps to prevent an 'inner group' within the group forcing its ideas or agenda on the remainder of the men in the group, without full and complete discussion, as may happen with simple majority decision; the focus instead becomes each

man's 'truth' as he sees it - and exploring our individual perspectives on the 'truth'."

"The classic example is the movie '12 Angry Men', with Henry Fonda, who is the lone hold-out in a jury on a murder trial, who thinks the defendant may not be guilty, when 11 other jurors believe he is. He's not sure... But he wants to discuss it. In this case it turned out the majority were 'wrong'..."

When discussion is complete and agreement reached the 'leader' should write down the/a statement about consensus decision making - for future reference - and to tell new men as they join.

Consensus Decision Statement

This process may take more than one meeting!

At first look it may seem that this is a process that will prevent the group moving ahead, after all isn't majority decision a normal procedure we're all comfortable with? Well yes, but just listen to all the minorities complain about not being heard! - and decisions being made that don't take them into account -without their consent.

But this group is not just about making decisions, the process is really about learning to listen and giving each man a voice and opportunity to speak his 'truth'. In this process we discover 'being heard', we discover what it means to sit in that place of disagreement (conflict?) - and how to appreciate and give weight to each mans opinion. We're learning how to negotiate, respect each other, and ultimately find compromise, that middle way that we can both/all live with - rather than win-lose, we start to explore win-win.

Does this work? Yes! for many reasons:

1. Think about it - to find compromise, you really do have to *listen* to what he wants.
2. The group moves ahead, in a direction that is determined by all men in the group - we all 'buy into'/ invest in the process - we all feel 'a part of the group. Where-ever it goes, it's something that each one of us has helped to create. It's less likely that 6 months down the road someone will say 'this isn't what I wanted' - Why? because he was there, and he helped to consciously create it.
3. Passion! If we can go with the passion - and stay with that energy we will do some good work together. Every idea ('good' or 'bad') has to occur in one individuals/man's head first! And one idea can change the world. It is normal to experience resistance to change - but if a man is passionate enough about something I have a choice to make - do I support him or not? Part of what a group can do, and sometimes the best part, is to support a man who is passionate about an idea ultimately it's his idea - it will either work or it won't - and he's taking the biggest risk. Consensus welcomes, allows, and validates a man's passion - sometimes extraordinary ideas that might not otherwise have made it past 'the committee'.
4. ?

Problems with consensus decision making

Sometimes one man may be unable to come into agreement on a specific issue, it will seem as if compromise just isn't possible. Numerous things could be going on - ask him to speak his truth and say what is really going on for him in this process - maybe there is some underlying concern that he needs to deal with before being able to come into agreement. Consensus says it's ok to stop one process and deal with another, if that's what it takes - maybe this is his way of saying 'Hey, you guys aren't hearing me'. Ask!

1. "Are we hearing you? - Is there something you need to say/deal with/get out of the way?"
2. "Is there something going on for you?" - (He might need space/time to connect with what is going on for him...)
3. "What can we do to support you right now?"
4. "Can you say what you want?"
5. "Is there something you have a problem with?"
6. "What would a successful resolution of this situation look like to you?"

If he is not willing to let go of his position, and is unable to persuade the rest of the group, one method to try is both! ie what he wants for a fixed number of weeks, and then flip to the other position and try that for the same number of weeks. At the end of this trial period - renegotiate!

All of the above discussion assumes an attitude of 'reasonableness' on the part of each member of the group ie the group can only function (and reasonably be expected to function) from the point of view of 'good intent' toward group process being held by group members. However, when the stuff hits the fan, often good intentions are lost as we

- I. Try to get solution that suits me best, ignoring others needs/wants

- II. Inflict 'retribution' eg psychic, emotional - on someone who we perceive has harmed or hurt us in some way; or perhaps just holds an opposing viewpoint...
- III. harbour resentment towards someone (for above reasons) covertly, without revealing our 'perception' and waiting for chance to get even...(perhaps when they are most vulnerable).
- IV. forget our rules and guidelines and 'drop the gloves'...
- V. Hold to personal viewpoint and refuse to be accommodating for selfish reasons (above), thereby effectively blocking group process (like the kid who has to have his own way)
- VI. ?

Essentially we are trying to move to a 'cooperative' system with consensus decision making, rather than 'competitive'; most of us have grown up using and being victims of a competitive system - moving to a cooperative system is not going to be easy.

- Are we willing to trust and give up personal power? - ie not just block group process selfishly?
- allow others to participate fully where otherwise I might dominate or lead or impose by dint of my personal power/personality/style?

If it's Not working...

Is something happening that's similar to what's described above?

Are you spinning your wheels and getting nowhere - unable to come into agreement and move on?

Is someone imposing their ideas covertly? ie diverting from the real issue? Do you see

it?

Can you name it?

Is there a logical sequence that can be uncovered? ie if we decide 'a', then we can decide 'b', then 'c'.

- Sometimes 'c' can't be resolved until 'b' is taken care of, but 'b' can't be decided until 'a' is!

This does get complicated and can be very exasperating in the heat of a meeting(s).

Sometimes a man will want to focus on item 'c' and refuse to budge (for his own reasons), or perhaps refuse to acknowledge the connection between a or b and c - sometimes he's just stalling and is using this as a tactic to avoid issue 'c' ever being resolved - he wants to be in that place/tension, and if he can hold you in that space too, well that's a bonus (for him, but not for group process, which is blocked, and may fizzle out as individuals get tired of the stalling and lack of movement).

Resolution...- Sometimes it won't be resolved - nothing anyone can do seems to fix situation - but that doesn't mean you have to stay stuck in that place; it is always legitimate to have a group divide time on different issues, and if one issue is stalled, taking a step back from it can be a healthy/helpful breathing space (this requires a special effort, as the tension from other issue will still be there). This means accepting current situation of non-resolution, despite tension and feelings and desire for resolution, and moving onto a different topic to take heat off the pot.

Alternatives

- a. See [Conflict Resolution](#)
- b. Suggest a time limit for a specific issue/discussion - at end of which if agreement is not reached then a majority vote is taken to resolve the issue.

In the final analysis, 'stuckness' also teaches us something of the very real human tendency to hang onto something that's not working; moving from that place of

resistance and resentment into acceptance and compassion can be a worthwhile and healing journey - good luck!

Meeting 3-4

Focus: Conscious Agreements

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Conscious Agreements

"This group, and all groups or associations, are based on agreements. The group may stand or fall simply by how conscious it can make agreement. After all, aren't we 'agreeing' to come together and be a group in the first place? But what does that mean? What are we agreeing to do, or be, as a group? (See [Meeting on Mission Statement](#) - Read it out to the group)."

"What's happening when we decide, as individuals, to come into agreement?"

- We're saying we have a common purpose- that we'll work towards it together.

- We're saying that we will extend respect and regard to others by keeping our agreements."

"As we do work towards our common purpose or vision, we see each man 'keeping his word', or agreement, and trust develops based on the observed integrity of each man - 'he's a man of his word'."

"Unity and group process stands on this foundation stone - agreement."

Note: this discussion extends to group process, ie how the group wants to run itself; obviously men will have differing opinions/attitudes/ideas and don't have to agree about everything!

Exercises

1. What agreements does the group have? - What do they mean to you?
2. What other agreements do you have, in jobs, relationships etc? Why?
3. What governs our inter-relations? The law? Manners? Common sense? Roles & Expectations? What agreements do we have here - conscious?
4. What agreements do you have with yourself? Why?
5. What happens when agreements are broken? (in your experience...)

Focus: Conscious Agreements

Which of our agreements require a response from the group if

they're broken. Under what circumstances would a man be excluded from group? What other responses are available?

Meeting 3-5

Focus: When Agreements are Broken...

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: When Agreements are Broken...

"Unity and group process stands on this foundation stone - agreement. Not only do we work to make agreements, we work to keep agreements, and it would be naive to assume that agreements will never be broken, thus we must also work to enforce agreements."

"We as a group will support group process by making our agreements conscious, by writing them down, and thus committing to be responsible and to be held accountable for what we've agreed to. If we don't, then we are 'avoiding' a very important aspect of men's group work that may eventually lead to the group breaking up because - we haven't done the work of making a strong enough container, ie the road ahead can be a planned conscious route (to some extent), not the dark slippery precipice of our unconscious..."

"Think about it, if we can't agree, or even agree to agree, then moving in any direction as a group becomes impossible; we're all doing our own thing, moving in our own direction as and when we please - this is a definition of 'separateness', not of group - sitting in the same room together may give the appearance of group, but it will quickly fall apart over one issue or another because there is no commitment to 'agreement'."

Exercises

1. What experiences have you had around agreements that were broken? eg with family/friends/colleagues/partners...
2. How do you feel when someone has broken an agreement made with you?
3. What impact has it had in your relationship? (in your experience...)
4. Reflect on an instance when you broke an agreement. What were the circumstances? What motivated you? How did you justify it? How did they feel? How did they respond? Were there lasting effects?
5. What broken agreement has had the biggest impact on your life?

Focus: Broken Agreements

Which of our agreements require a response from the group if they're broken? What kinds of responses are available? eg acknowledging action of an agreement being broken (what was said/done) working to discover issue or intent behind/motivation for the action what response is appropriate? Under what circumstances would a man be excluded from group? How?

Notes for Meeting 3-5

One of the hardest things a group will take on will be the attempt to recover from broken agreements. What will determine a groups success in this task will be its ability to:

1. Name and achieve consensus on what's going on - (paradoxical - can we agree that an agreement has been broken! - in the face of sometimes strong resistance/avoidance from the man who has broken the agreement)

Sometimes the group as a whole may go into denial and refuse to 'see' what's going on - and be afraid/unwilling to tackle it.

(See [Meeting - Conflict Resolution](#)).

[The psychology behind this is that of being unwilling to acknowledge a violation has occurred (still in 'shock'?) - unwilling to admit our own or another man's 'woundedness', to ourselves].

2. Review and re-read actual agreements made (did you write them down?)
Our ability to deny, or justify avoidance, is almost unlimited, the only recourse may be what you actually wrote down.
(Even then each man may have his own interpretation... good luck!)
3. Establish and impose meaningful responses to 'violations' that effect an amends to any man who has been violated.
4. Satisfactorily deal with the issue behind the 'violation'.
5. Effect the re-commitment, and intent of commitment, towards group agreements.

Why and How do agreements get broken?

It would be naive to assume that our motivations are always going to be fair and reasonable, whether in a group or elsewhere. This will become apparent when we engage in the agreement making process, each of us wants to ensure that our interests

are taken care of. Some men may even attempt to destroy group process (and group) if they don't get their own way, this has happened and will happen again.

Some men may have a cavalier attitude towards agreements, and make and break them as they choose -seemingly with little conscience; others may have a particular issue and may actually be setting up a conflict/confrontation; others may be testing the groups boundaries, seeing what they can get away with, seeing if the agreements are important enough (for you) to defend; maybe he can't trust himself if the other men in the group aren't willing to make the container strong (for him) by defending/enforcing the agreements - ie he's pushing you because he wants you to push back! This is men's work too...

Working to support agreements and group process - Responses and Sanctions

See 1 to 5 above - this extends item 3: Meaningful Responses

If a violation has occurred ask for an amends... eg an apology -

- a. if given, and sincere, it says that man accepts his responsibility and acknowledges the inappropriate action/statement and impact it has had
- b. if not given - that man may not accept the fact of a violation or be unwilling to be accountable - this has serious implications for group process - it may stop meaningful progress - our ability to work together hinges on our willingness to be accountable to each other. A choice must be made by the group, to either:-

LET THIS MAN'S WILFUL SELFISH ACTIONS DESTROY GROUP PROCESS, AND MAYBE THE GROUP, or IMPOSE SANCTIONS ON HIM which may mean EXCLUDING HIM FROM THE GROUP, either temporarily, until he's had a chance to consider under what basis he will ask to return ie does he choose to be accountable? -does he choose to work towards and be guided by agreements? - or HE MAY BE PERMANENTLY EXCLUDED if unable/unwilling to comply with accepted group standards.

- c. Renew commitment to 'Mission'/group process/agreements, recognizing

that group membership is an earned privilege, not a right; and start to build trust again.

Statement on Non-Violence

The whole premise of men's group work is Non-violence - if we cannot make group a safe place to come, then men will not come, or will stop coming, and rightly so - this is not about subjecting ourselves to abuse.

Every man here, by taking his seat in this group,
commits to non-violence.

Signed by the members of this group:

The reason is simple:

Violence, threats of violence or intimidation and the resulting pain and wounds they cause are at the root of what keeps men separate and isolated from each other

Here in group, we are exploring a new way of being together and supporting one another that does not cause further pain and wounding.

This does not mean that we have to hide some of our feelings away; on the contrary

-good group work is about validating, allowing and finding appropriate ways of expressing all of our feelings - 'appropriate expression of feelings' meaning we do not harm or abuse another person in any way.

If you 'feel' the need to be violent towards someone in group, perhaps the most appropriate way of dealing with it is to take a 'time-out' to cool-off, or release energy; this may take 5 minutes of stepping outside - it may take the rest of the meeting - or perhaps several meetings - until you find some clarity about what that violent impulse was about -perhaps a third party can assist you in naming your anger or rage and where it came from - and then returning to group when you can express your feeling appropriately.

If a man is unable to voluntarily take a time out - then the group collectively has an obligation to every individual man in the group to intercede to prevent an act of violence from occurring and require that man to step-outside and cool-off.

If violence or threats have occurred that man must be excluded from group until such time as all members agree on his return, and he is able to re-commit to non-violence, and to the intent of finding non-violent means of self-expression.

Non-violence is the fundamental basis of men's group work, without which it will be almost impossible to create a meaningful group process, and will almost certainly cause the group to collapse.

Meeting 3-7

Focus: Leaving the Group

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Leaving the Group

"Leaving the Group can happen in many ways - the group may lose energy and decide to wind-up; or a man will find he's enjoyed the support he's received and given and is ready to move on to other challenges that are calling him; or perhaps the way a group is developing is not what he wants; or perhaps an issue has come up that the group can't or won't resolve and is intolerable or abusive for one particular member; it is even possible for one man to create a conflict, not wanting it resolved, in order to destroy the group, or get rid of someone else (typically to avoid dealing with 'his' issue)."

"The question becomes 'What obligations do we have towards each other?' "

"In short, the final obligation each man assumes is to tell the group that he is leaving - and - if he is able - why he is leaving. This helps the other men to understand his departure. This may actually be a difficult thing for any man to do - he may be judged or blamed in many ways - he may even be shamed."

"If a man has been subject to abuse in group, whether shame or any other kind of abuse, and the group avoids the issue or is otherwise unable to stop it from occurring - then the healthy choice is for that man to not go to group - they may not be ready to hear him - he need not oblige himself to attend group or communicate with them in any way if he will only receive further abuse."

Exercises

1. What obligations do we have towards each other?
2. Where is the energy in the group - right now?
Compare to a few months ago, or earlier.
What has happened to the energy? Why?
3. Can you envisage a picture of what a healthy graduation from group looks like? Who decides?
How do you decide what a healthy graduation looks like?
4. What's a worst case scenario for group collapse?
5. How do you decide if/when a conflict could lead to a break-up of the group?
What solutions are there? (See [Meeting - Conflict Resolution](#))
6. How do you recover when a man leaves - does it help if he says why he is going?

7. How do you recover when a man leaves group without saying why?
If it is possible, and if it's appropriate, is there a respectful way of asking him? Are you ready to hear his words?
Are you ready to spend a meeting considering his viewpoint?
Are you willing to respond, respectfully?

8. How do you 'call' a man who is acting out?
Is there a procedure you could establish?

Notes for Meeting 3-7

1. Over the months that a group has been working together, emotional bonds have been developed and trust established between the men in the group. In fact this is what enables us to dig into our 'stuff/emotional baggage and do our work. The deeper we go, the hotter it gets, the higher the emotional stakes and investment; the more tense and volatile group can become.

Group can sometimes successfully navigate this journey, and men find support and healing with each other and the bonds remain intact. A man may decide he's ready to move on and deal with his stuff independently now - he's grown and is ready for it, and makes that choice for himself - that's healthy - and the group may feel a sense of loss but wishes him well on his next journey - that's healthy too, as opposed to 'codependent' ideas of 'you owe us...' or 'you should stay and do x, y, or z...' or 'you're not ready yet...'. Group needs to grieve the change (not blame), and be ready to react and define itself out of those men who are ready, willing and choose to be there. In other words - Group sets up/allows a successful and healthy way for a man to graduate and leave the group.

Too often a man is unfairly judged and blamed when he decides that the time is right for him to depart. This often includes projecting our own unfinished business/issues onto him. A man will learn the lessons of his own choices and sometimes all he needs is support, which translates to courage, so he may begin his journey - this is a great gift we can share with (or deny), each other.

2. On the other hand - sometimes it gets so hot during group process that the bonds break, friendship and trust is broken - what else is left to fall back on? Well, if the group has set-up its rules and guidelines, and is willing to enforce them, each man knows he is obliged to follow them and be respectful and non-abusing. If this climate has been established then a resolution to any issue is much closer than it might otherwise be.

And yet, if clarity is achieved through respectful group process, a resolution may still mean that a man decides to leave - this just isn't for him, for his own reasons, which he may or may not be able to share. It has been said that any change, good or bad, has sadness attached to it and needs to be grieved - each group will find its own way of doing this. It is of course out of this sense of sadness, that we may sometimes blame that other man, after all he 'caused' the sadness by going away - it may bring up deep abandonment issues - again this is projecting our stuff onto him and more appropriately needs to be owned and worked with.

3. If a respectful and non-abusing group process has not been established, then a group can get itself into all kinds of mess with projections and non-ownership of 'stuff. It may indeed get very volatile, even hostile and abusing. It can be very difficult to achieve clarity and pick your way out of the mess towards a resolution (See [Meeting - Conflict Resolution](#)).

In fact, this is a frequent and unfortunate scenario for group demise. Once it gets this hot, and no tools/guidelines are in place to work with, a man can get into his 'dysfunctionality' so deeply, that there is no hope of pulling us/it all back together again. He may even be using the lack of guidelines to get his own way, knowing that he can push and push and 'act out' because there is no model of appropriate behaviour to pull him back, or to be applied against him. Psychologically he may be 'acting out' of a deep resentment or need to release this energy - this is true and real for him as it's happening, and he/we may not comprehend its source or even a deeper underlying desire for it to be controlled/dealt with by a smart enough group.

Meeting 3-8

Focus: Inviting a new man into the group

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Inviting a new man into the group

"Inviting a new man into group can be exciting and rewarding - after all, we are potentially offering a man more support than he's ever received before."

"A new man will have a definite impact on the groups energy, and will change the feel of the group. It is unwise and unfair to assume things will be just the same as before - they won't! He will have his own issues and ideas, and these will become part of group process."

"A group may in fact be looking for more energy and ideas, and will recruit to get that new stimulation; or perhaps the group is in crisis - men have left - and any new man will be

walking into a 'hot' or 'stuck' situation."

"Whatever the motivation for having a new man join, there will be obligations and expectations on both sides. These can be explored in the exercises below. On the face of it, it's no big deal, a new man joins, we carry on - right? But there may be a lot more going on..."

Exercises

1. Does the group have clarity about why it wants/needs a new man to join?
 - a. What are the underlying issues? (Have other men left? - Why?)
 - b. Are you working with them?
 - c. Is the group in denial?
 - d. What do you hope to achieve by having a new man join?
 - e. What will you reveal to him?

2. Does the group have clarity about what process it will have to go through to bring a new man up to speed?
 - a. What is the history of the group? What have been its main issues?
 - b. What is its 'Mission Statement?' Has it done that work? Is now a good time?
 - c. What conscious Agreements does the group have? (unstated?) Are they written down? Is now a good time? (Did men leave over

conflict around process? What process (rules) exist now?)

- d. Will you repeat early meetings/concepts eg 'Speaking your Truth'?

3. What does the group want from the new man?

- a. Does he agree to work within our 'Mission Statement' - or does he want something else?
- b. Is he ready to go along with our conscious agreements?
- c. Is he ready to do this work?

4. Commitment

- a. Do we want him to attend 2 or 3 meetings before we decide?
(How do we decide? - See notes below)
- b. Do we want him to attend 2 or 3 meetings before he decides?
- c. What time commitment do we have as a group? Will he commit to this?

5. What if the group needs 2 or 3 new men in a short space of time? What is the best way to deal with that?

- a. Work them in one at a time and attempt to maintain previous group process?
- b. Bring them all on board at the same time and let the new group (re-) define itself - working from scratch?
- c. Are current members prepared for upheaval of b) above? Is it required anyway, otherwise group may fold?

6. At what point does he become a full member?
 - a. How do we formalise/signify that fact?
 - b. What mental adjustment do I need to make to recognise that?

Notes for Meeting 3-8

How do we decide if a man is ok for our group? Is it open to any man who wants to do the work? Or if one man objects do we say 'sorry' and move on to 'try-out' the next man? How can we be fair to him? - and the other men in the group, who have already made an investment? Are we obliged to at least give him a reason for a refusal?

(Note:

Sometimes we may have an immediate 'reaction' to another man - eg strong positive or negative feeling. This may help us decide, - but, we may often do our best work with someone who we react strongly negatively towards - they are bringing something up for us - and this is a place where we work to own our feelings/reaction and work to understand them and not just project/dump them onto another man. On the other hand, is this man conscious of and able to own his 'stuff' ? - if not, we may not be able to work with him at all... or it may be a gruelling arduous journey... How brave are we feeling? How energetic are we feeling? Sometimes that is all it comes down to.)

Introduction to Level 4

Celebrating

How do we get here?

We've done our initial sharing and risk-taking and are starting to feel very comfortable with each other. There may be a sense of 'looseness' or ease within the group, as opposed to tension and 'watchfulness' - we look forward to coming to group - perhaps even mentally plan what we'd like to share at the meeting as we go through our week. The meetings are enjoyable and we leave them each time with a sense of 'fullness' or closeness that comes from the emotional bonding that has and is taking place.

We've set up a 'group process' that is working and meeting our needs in the meetings. We've gone into debate and conflict, and come out on the other side with a group dynamic that we've all helped to create, and that we feel a part of. We have the realisation that we can work together, the proof being that we are actually doing it. And in the face of past miscommunications with men and isolation from men we have the pleasant understanding that there are other ways for men to be together, and that we have the skills to create that.

There is a 'lightness' that comes from speaking our truth, and from being in a place where that is supported and validated - this has to be experienced to be believed - and it can have a profound effect on how we see ourselves and how we view the world. We start to open up to the endless possibilities of 'positive masculinity' and start to create new ways and have new ideas about what we as a group can do together. This of course is supportive to each of us personally

and will have positive repercussions in our lives - in the relationships we have, and in the community at large around us - as we start to act from a positive, healthy supported place, rather than from a 'wounded' or isolated experience.

What do these celebratory experiences/meetings look like? Well, part of the fun is for you to create them, but there are also some ideas on the next few pages...

Level - 4 Meetings

- 4-1 [Playing! - Finding ways to have fun together](#)
- 4-2 [Planning a trip together - Quality time in each others company, and more!](#)
- 4-3 [Life Stories - Honouring and celebrating our journeys](#)
- 4-4 [Community - Acting in the community](#)
- 4-5 [Relationships - What I'm learning](#)

Meeting 4-1

Focus: Playing

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

The focus for this meeting is to explore ways of playing together and having fun.

This will usually require some fore-thought on the part of the leader for the play-activity; he will need to consider what kinds of things are appropriate - what the impact will be - any costs involved? - if an outside activity is it legal (eg fire/beer on the beach?) - how will it affect others? - is privacy important? and so on.

However spontaneous play can be a lot of fun too. Someone may come in with that particular 'mood' and make a spontaneous (unplanned) suggestion to the group to devote some time to some lighter stuff/play for a part (all?) of the meeting rather than staying with heavy issues all the time. This can be an excellent way to zoom us into another place of consciousness and be very enjoyable at the same time. Hopefully it won't be used as an avoidance tactic; if a man is into an issue, he may need our support this week as well (or is he avoiding play? - go figure...!).

The group may want to plan ahead - say every 5th meeting will be a fun activity of some kind, and each man in the group will get to plan it in turn. This can be an exercise in trust, if it is to be a surprise; and can also be an exercise in examining boundaries - do I go along with this or not? - why? - is it a group rule that I can pass on

any exercise?

Follow-up to any play activity

It is also a good idea to have a follow-up meeting focusing on issues that came up during play.

What was expressed? What behaviours were there?

What was the intention? How was it experienced?

How did it feel? - was my experience different from yours?

Where was I in resistance? Why?

Why do men take risks/get hurt in play? etc...

Exercises

1. If the fun activity is a game, do we want to make it co-operative instead of competitive? (Men know how to compete - and that can be fun - but we end up with winners and losers -this can be a good source of 'issues' to follow-up; Do men/we know how to be co-operative? What comes up here? Why?)
2. When was the last time you played? Why? Who was it with? How did it feel?
3. Would you like to play more? What kind of activities? How can you make that happen? Who can you ask? When are you going to schedule it? Are you worth it?
4. Is play/fun/laughter important?

Follow-up Exercises

1. Share your experiences and feelings you had during the play activity.
2. Is there any correspondence to past play activities (or lack of them) in your

life?

3. Are you able to own what came up for you? Did any other man experience it that way?
4. How much of what came up for you was a judgement of another man? Why? Did it remind you of a past experience?
5. How much of that play activity was spontaneously you? How much did you just let yourself go? - Why? - How did it feel? What did you stop yourself from doing? - Why? - How did that feel?

Meeting 4-2

Focus: Planning a Trip together

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

The focus for this meeting is to explore planning a trip together

At some point, someone in the group will think it's a good idea for the men to consider planning a trip together, and may even have a particular idea in mind. This can be an excellent way for the men in the group to get to know each other better (and themselves).

For the group to reach this point, it will probably be fairly comfortably established, the men will be used to each other, and perhaps won't be 'stretching' themselves very much in their regular meetings. It is quite easy to wear a 'mask' for 2 or 3 hours once a week, ie modify our behaviour to fit the expected standard (we all do this as a coping mechanism in any environment we enter, unless we are aware enough to see ourselves doing this, and confront that behaviour, and are strong enough to chart our own course in spite of what others expect...). However, over a longer period of time (a trip together) there is the real possibility of the real man leaking through and the masks coming off - as the tension builds internally to say what you really think and are experiencing/feeling.

On a trip together, not only do we have the shared experience (and hopefully some fun!), but we also have the opportunity to go deeper into self-knowledge and self-revelation, and probably conflict-resolution!

Exercises

1. Are we ready to plan a trip together?
2. Do we want to start small, then build from there? ie an evening trip (same evening as meeting or another night that is convenient for all?) - perhaps a specific event - a lecture/workshop - or social or sporting event?
3. Is there a special event that someone would like to 'promote' as a good group opportunity?
4. Is there a cost involved? Is it restrictive for some men? How can we finance it?
5. What about a day-long 'adventure' type event eg river rafting? What are risks involved?
6. What about week-end or 3-day retreat? - Perhaps a men's gathering. Is one happening soon? Who's putting it on? Perhaps you can find your own facilitator?
7. Maybe it starts by finding a secluded spot on a beach, or in a wood, or somewhere in nature? Does someone know a place? What about going looking for one - and making it happen?
8. Who is open to it? Who is a maybe? Who is out? Is it something we can/want to all do together? What are the restrictions? Risk? Time? Money? Other obligations? How can we make it happen?

Follow-up Exercises after a trip together

1. Share your experiences and feelings you had during the trip. What did you learn?
2. Is there any correspondence to past trips you have had? Any insights?
3. Are you able to own what came up for you? Did any other man experience it that way?
4. How much of what came up for you was a judgement of another man? Why? Did it remind you of a past experience?
5. How much of that trip were you being spontaneously you? How much did you just let yourself go? - Why? - How did it feel? What did you stop yourself from doing? - Why? - How did that feel?

Meeting 4-3

Focus: Life Stories

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Life Stories

"In this meeting we honour one of the men in our group, who now has the chance to tell his life story. This is a story he may never have told before, even to himself. In the telling of his story, we all receive a blessing - the speaker for being able to speak his truth, perhaps for the first time - the listeners in experiencing the 'respect' they are able to confer on another man, and also in receiving the insight & 'wisdom' of another man's reality. This is one man's story, but today we all share it with him."

"Let him begin now and if he needs to ask for anything, we are ready to hear that too."

Exercises

1. At the end of the story, the group should mark its completion with some kind of ritual, which may be asked for in the moment, or discussed previously.
2. Let the man who shared his story reflect on how it felt to do so and share that too. What came up for him as he was sharing?
3. What came up for you as he was sharing?
4. What did it 'mean' to you to
 - a. help create this event?
 - b. hear this man's story?
5. When would you like to share your Life Story? What do you need to ask for?

Notes for Meeting 4-3

There will normally need to be some prior preparation/discussion before this meeting, so as to decide who would like to and is ready to tell their life story next week. On the other hand, a man may be willing to jump in 'cold' and eager to have this opportunity and not ask for any preparation time. That's ok too.

The image I have in mind is of an expectation building, and even a celebration, where each man in the group knows that next week is going to be a 'special' meeting where one man is going to be honoured and witnessed in a way never before experienced. This is a special meeting, and this is an opportunity for the group to mark this event in a special way.

However, having said that, we still need to bear in mind that each man's story will create a certain feel, or energy-space that needs to be recognised and respected - for instance it may be inappropriate to set up a party if a man's story goes deeply into grieving and releasing core issues and wounds. Follow your heart.

This typically is a meeting that a man will request when he is ready for it. He will ask the group to slot it into its agenda in the upcoming weeks. Some men may take a long time before asking for it, some may never ask, some may need to be invited...

Group should decide how long to give each man for the telling of his story: perhaps one whole meeting, or even two, maybe just an hour, or perhaps as long as it takes; of course normal check-in and check-out is still observed so all men have a chance to share in each meeting.

Meeting 4-4

Focus: Community Action

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

The focus for this meeting is to explore community action possibilities

A men's group often gets to a place where it wants to be able to reach out into the community at large and do some kind of work, or task, to assist the community in some way. This motivation arises out of the growth and support experienced in group. Additionally some men may want to respond to the needs they perceive in their community, and it may well be that a coordinated effort given by a group of men could be invaluable assistance. This is an opportunity to explore, to act from a positive and supportive place and effect a healthy change or outcome within a community.

In addition it could be argued that there is a desperate need for healthy male role models for young men and boys to be visible within the community, to counter-act the often negative stereotyping of what 'masculinity' is within the media, as a result of their focusing on the sometimes tragic and harmful behaviours perpetrated by a small percentage of men.

Exercises

1. Is there anyone with a specific idea or task that they want to focus on?
 - a. What is required? Time commitment? How much help is needed? What skills are needed?
 - b. Who benefits?
 - c. What is the potential outcome?
 - d. Are we ready to tackle this? As a group? As individuals?
 - e. What is my resistance about? Limited energy/time? Low interest? Other?
2. If we do want to be involved in the community, how do we select the 'right' task? Do we start small (ie short term project) and build onto each success in a stepwise fashion? Or do we go for the high-profile high-effort big issue? Is this realistic/achievable?
3. How do we find out what areas could benefit from our help?
 - a. Volunteer agencies?
 - b. Newspapers?
 - c. Charitable organizations? Men's organizations?
 - d. Food bank; churches etc
 - e. Neighbourhood watch?
 - f. School programs?
 - g. Other?

4. What areas best suit us, ie this group of individuals, what interests us most?
- what do we perceive our skills to be?
5. Where have we volunteered in the past? What was the result? How did we feel about it?
6. Does someone want to research this and set it up for the group?

Follow-up Meetings

If the group does undertake community action tasks, it will be helpful to take the time to explore the issues and feelings that come out of those experiences at the next meeting after each 'task' - so as to keep things conscious, real and in the moment. See follow-up exercises for Meetings [4-1](#) or [4-2](#).

Meeting 4-5

Focus: Relationships

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

The focus for this meeting is to explore 'relationships'

During this meeting we will reflect on any new understanding we may have of what makes relationships work, and any growth we've experienced or changes that we've been able to create in the relationships in our lives.

Exercises

1. Has group process helped you with understanding your relationships outside group?
2. If it has, reflect on what you thought before, as opposed to what you think now?
3. If it hasn't, what do you think are the relationship challenges you face?
4. Are you in an intimate relationship right now? (Or reflect on a past

relationship.)

- a. How did it develop?
 - b. Was that a 'healthy' process?
 - c. How would you change that process if you could?
 - d. To what degree do you 'relate consciously' with your partner?
 - e. What would you change if you could?
Who 'needs' to change? Your partner? Or you?
'What' are you trying to change? How?
 - f. Where do you see that relationship going?
Are you happy to have that experience?
Are you learning from each other?
5. Has the loss of an intimate relationship motivated you in any way to join a men's group?
- a. If yes - Why? - What needs are being met in group? - is there any correspondence to needs met in intimate relationships?
 - b. If yes - is it working for you? - what do you think that means?
6. Has the inability to be in an intimate relationship motivated you to join a men's group?
- a. Were you judging yourself in any way?
 - b. How do you feel about yourself now?
7. If you were asked to share your wisdom on relationships to a young man, what would you say?

8. Have you learned anything in group that you are applying to your relationships outside group?
 - a. What?
 - b. Is it 'working'?
 - c. How do you feel about it?
 - d. Is it something you've discussed with your partner?
 - e. If yes - How did they feel about it? - Are they using it too?
 - f. If no - What is your/their resistance about?

9. Explore the idea that 'We manipulate others (our environment) in order to get our needs met'.
 - a. Do you think this is true? Inevitable?
 - b. Would it help to make our motivations and actions conscious to our partner?
 - c. To what extent must I/do I hide this from them? - from myself? Why?

Notes for meeting 4-5

One of the most frequent motivators for men to join men's groups is the loss of a partner and the intimacy shared in the relationship - this can be devastating for anybody, especially a person who has no other opportunity' to get their intimacy needs met. Group offers the chance to explore healthier and more appropriate ways to get intimacy needs met - and the more conscious we are - the fewer surprises there'll be.

Introduction to Level 5

Conflict

Conflict in simple terms, is when I want one thing, and you want something else. In appearance it may look like a friendly discussion, as two friends decide what movie they'd like to go and see; or it may look like 'armageddon', with one group or culture (or individual) inflicting pain or mayhem on another. We usually try to rationalise it - 'he done me wrong!' - now he's going to pay; they're the aggressor, they need to be taught a lesson; you're doing it wrong, you need to be straightened out, and I'm the man to do it... Or sometimes we react to something he said, with no thought of rationalisation - we just respond to an inner impulse or feeling eg of anger or fear or rage - and our response allows us to vent that feeling and may also stop what he was doing - if he was intimidated or scared enough; of course it may not stop, and things may escalate...

Conflict, of itself, isn't bad or evil; it's just a normal human process whereby we try to get our (real) human needs met. Anger, of itself, isn't bad or evil, it's a normal human process that allows us as human beings to respond to perceived dangers and defend ourselves from threat or harm.

The problem of course is to find the appropriate level of response. And how do we pick our way through this minefield of doubts, fears and mistrust? What is an appropriate way of 'doing' conflict? What is an appropriate response if I feel threatened or wronged? How do I say what I want in order to get my needs met?

Some ideas that may help...

- How do I normally react to/deal with conflict? Am I ready to try another

way?

- Misunderstandings are at the root of some conflicts - we heard what he said, and took it one way when really he meant something else. Am I ready to take the time to find out what he meant?
- Is this a 'real' threat? What is its motivation? What would be the outcome?
- How do I respectfully deal with a 'wrong' idea of his?
- How do I ask for respect from another man?
- If I'm saying what I want for myself, and you are too, and we are both open to and respectful of the other man's wants- we're more likely to find a compromise. (ie are we taking ownership of our own feelings and wants?)
- If I'm trying to get you to do/be/say what I want ie trying to get you to be a certain way (and vice versa), then we're much more likely to be unable to find a resolution (because we're not being open to and respectful of his want). We may be projecting our own inadequacies/fears/doubts onto him, and because he isn't responding the way I want him to, guess what? -I get to dump all my anger and rage on him! If two men get stuck here they will need a smart mature group that can intercede and take them back to 'ownership'.
- Is the group mature enough to intercede and bring us back to 'ownership'. Do I want that?/my own way?

Level - 5 Meetings

5-1 [Conflict and Me](#)

5-2 [Projections and Dumping](#)

5-3 [Denial](#)

5-4 [Resolving Conflict](#)

5-5 [When it all craps out...](#)

Meeting 5-1

Focus: Conflict and Me

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Conflict and Me

"In this meeting we have the opportunity to explore our personal experiences and issues around conflict."

Exercises

1. How do you react (ie describe your feelings, any sensations in your body?)
 - a. When you see a conflict on the street?
 - b. When you are part of a conflict?

2. Are you reacting now, as you remember and talk about these incidents? (ie

describe your feelings, any sensations in your body?)

- a. If you are reacting now, reflect on the power of these 'reactions'/emotions.
 - b. Do you have an impulse to do something? What?
 - c. Do you wish you'd done something then? What?
3. If you are not reacting now, how have you dealt with those issues?
What actions did you take?
How do you understand them now?
4. Reflect and share on conflicts in your family.
- a. What were they about? What caused them?
 - b. How did each of your family members deal with them? Or avoid? Or deny? How well did anyone take ownership of their issue? What stopped them?
 - c. How did they affect your family/relationships? Then? Now?
 - d. Did they have an affect outside your family?
 - e. Were you powerless to change anything? Did you try? Were you asked? What were your needs?
 - f. How did/do you feel about a) through e) above?
 - g. Is there any 'unfinished business'?
How could you resolve it for yourself?
Do you want to 'change' someone else, hope they could see it your way? Is this realistic?
What about 'timing'? Are they ready?
Are you ready?

How will you deal with it if it still isn't resolved?

What do you need; what are you trying to get (from them?) from this action?

Can you give it to yourself?

h. What would you do differently now, if anything?

5. How do you deal with conflict?

a. Is this a trait you learned in your family?

b. What would you like to do differently?

c. How could you create this? When?

6. Reflect and share on a non-family conflict that is particularly significant for you.

Repeat 4a) through 4h) with respect to this conflict.

7. Reflect and share on group issues/conflicts that have occurred and are significant for you.

a. How do you see them now? Has your view changed? Why?

b. What, in your view, needs to be re-discussed? Why?

c. What were your feelings then? Now?

d. What sensations are you experiencing as you reveal what you want?

8. How well do you feel this group deals with conflict?

a. What are the rules the group has agreed to around conflict?

- b. Are they being followed?
 - c. Is there an 'unspoken' rule being applied? What is it?
What is its effect? How can the group address this issue?
Is a rules debate required?
Will it make a difference - are men agreeing to one thing and then doing another?
 - d. How are you taking care of yourself?
9. Having done the above exercises, can you write down
- 1. What the rules for conflict were in your family?
 - 2. What the rules for conflict are for you personally, as you apply them now?
 - 3. What the rules for conflict are for this group?
10. What do you think your new rules for conflict should be? For you? For this group?

Notes for Meeting 5-1

Our consensus reality around conflict is that it can be dangerous - people sometimes get hurt, relationships may be broken, people go away and abandon us, they may stop liking us and stop being our friends. Sometimes (I) we learn dysfunctional rules about how to do conflict, from our families or other people, who themselves don't know how to do conflict well/appropriately. All of which adds up to the likelihood of us isolating from each other to avoid the seemingly inevitable pains of conflict. Yet here we are in group, 'being' together, confronting 'isolation' - guess what's going to happen? - yup, you got it, conflict!

So here we are trying to do good group work - Well it just so happens that groups are

good at four things:

- I. Denying that there is indeed a conflict (Why? - because it's scary going into that place - that energy is powerful and potentially destructive)
- II. Avoiding dealing with it, even if it is recognised to exist (Why? - because we all know that conflicts can't be resolved...)
- III. Trying to rush through conflict and get it over with as quickly as possible, without understanding and focusing on exactly what is going on - ie not setting up a good process (Why? - because it's still scary!)
- IV. Not wanting to go back and reconsider old issues/conflicts (Why? - because it confronts the status quo and how we got here-someone is usually invested in that)

So conflict will only happen if someone is brave enough to insist on something different from what everyone else seems to want. There may be considerable pressure to 'go along' with everyone else (or one man, who 'isn't ready' and must take everyone along his path...)- and yes all of us do that to some extent -but at some point it will be time to be different and 'do' conflict.

How successful will it be? That will depend entirely on how conscious we can make our own personal issues around conflict (this can be a fruitful source of men's work) - how much of that we are willing to own - and how open we are to considering learning and maturely applying new healthy rules around conflict. And if a mature group can successfully mediate & require ownership from two men who are 'stuck' in their stuff.

Sometimes we get bogged down on what is healthy and/or appropriate for how we treat each other; sometimes this takes us to a moralistic place of right or wrong - of course with 'me' being right, and 'you' being wrong! As much as we can, we must shed light on and be clear about just exactly what is being suggested, ie spell it out - where will it take us? - what outcomes? Sometimes we can't decide and to be fair must try both ways, and see how comfortably each one sits with us. This can take time and require patience on both sides.

Meeting 5-2

Focus: Projections and Dumping

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Projections and Dumping

"In intimate relationships there are some intriguing dynamics at play:-

- **There's what we say to each other; and what we don't say**
- **There's what we know about them, and what we guess is going on (ie stuff they haven't yet revealed or don't want to reveal -perhaps we are giving them space until the time is right for them, if ever)**
- **Our intuitions may be right in figuring it out (perhaps before they do), but sometimes we're**

wrong, perhaps our doubts/fears/own issues not yet recognised have misled us

- we/they may avoid/deny issues -because not ready to deal with them
- our partners may expect us to be more or less intuitive about their needs, or they may wish us to be more open in our communications
- some tension arises for them, and in the course of our interactions they become upset and 'dump' a lot of emotional energy on us, which is out of proportion to the issue at hand."

"All of the above describe a situation that leaves lots of scope for problems and difficulties in our relationships as communicating is an inexact art. Perhaps the best way to look at it is as a process of discovering what is really going on for me, and for them. And in this process we are sometimes very good at fooling ourselves (them?); but they may have it all figured out."

"Of course we bring these intuitive skills and learned behaviours to group, but what part do they and should they play?

- do I share my 'insights' on his problem? - do I insist I am right?
- do I recognise that I may be wrong?
- Is there a respectful way of sharing my insights?
- What would be disrespectful of his needs?

- **How do I avoid projecting my own fears/doubts /issues onto him?**
- **How do I recognise when I/he has dumped something on him/me?"**

"What needs to be explored once more is 'ownership', acknowledging what really belongs to you and speaking your truth, and allowing another man to speak his truth as he sees it without forcing our perspective onto him."

Exercises

1. How much do you reveal what is really going on for you to your partner?
How much do you conceal? Why?
2. How much do you reveal what you think is going on for your partner? How much do you conceal? Why?
3. Do you always know exactly what is going on for you?
 - a. How long does it take you to 'clue into' your own experience/feelings? (As in - 'Oh yeah, *now* I know what that was about...')
 - b. When was the last time you were confused emotionally?
What was that about?
How long did it take you to figure it out? Why?
Were you in resistance?
What were your needs then?
Where have you moved to?
 - c. When you're not sure of yourself, what do you think that is

about?

Are you always/ever in a space to hear what someone else thinks?

Is your own process important?

Or would you welcome someone 'telling' you?

4. How can you respect another man's process?
 - a. Respect his wish to 'just be heard'?
 - b. Ask if he would like some feedback? Respect his answer?
 - c. Consider if the time is right for him to hear your insights? And ask?
 - d. Are you really just offering advice? Would you like some back?
 - e. Are you trying to 'fix' him? - and avoiding your own parallel situation?
 - f. Is your desire to change him causing you to miss an opportunity to support him?
 - g. How can you change your judgement of him into support? - without changing him?
 - h. What are you really feeling?
What is that about for you? (- not him)
His situation might have brought it up, but who does it really belong to?
 - i. Are you ready to offer him support?
Can you say 'Is there anything I/we can do for you?' - and be ready to respond?
 - j. If you want to tell him to do something, consider what that

would 'fix' for you? - can you own your own situation?

5. Do you have any new insights/suspensions of when you think/feel someone 'projected' some of their stuff onto you without owning it? Outside? In group?
 - a. How did it feel then? Now?
 - b. Did you feel supported?
What would support have looked like for you then?
 - c. Are you more able to ask for support now?

6. Do you have any new insights/suspensions of when you think/feel someone 'dumped' some of their stuff onto you without owning it? Outside? In group?
 - a. Describe the interaction and why it was inappropriate for you.
 - b. How did it feel then? Now?
And after you've talked about it?

7. Does the group need any new rules regarding 'projecting' and 'dumping'?
 - a. What would those rules say, for you?
 - b. Is the group ready to engage in that process? What are the issues?

Notes for Meeting 5-2

Projections can be a thorny problem for any group; quite often a man is only projecting because he has difficulty seeing what is true for him - so a conflict ensues about who owns what and who is avoiding what. In the same way, 'dumping' is about

off-loading some emotional baggage onto someone else because that man doesn't want to/is unable to deal with it, and wants *you* to 'carry' it.

Often again, the man who is picked as the 'target' may be quite vulnerable (often the reason to be *picked!*) he's into his own issues and going through his emotional work, when suddenly out of left field comes an altogether inappropriate remark: 'Pull yourself together' - 'Men don't do...' - 'you should...' etc. That man may experience it as an extra burden to carry when he is least able to, and must now consider confronting and being forced to move away from the emotional work he was involved in. If a mature group can intercede to prevent this type of occurrence, and to require ownership, it will be helpful to everyone who needs to get into his stuff - in the moment often the much more pressing need.

Meeting 5-3

Focus: Denial - Avoiding what's really going on

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Denial

Denial is the inability to see - or the refusal to acknowledge - all of the issues. Sometimes issues are buried deep in our psyches ie a child who has been abused may hide it deep inside because of the tremendous psychic and emotional wound. This is an innate survival instinct or coping mechanism for all of us.

The reason it is buried is because there is no support mechanism available (eg for a child overwhelmed by parental abuse) and/or it's not safe to do so - a threat to survival or possibility of further wounding is perceived.

Examples occur at different levels - Individual - Families -

Organizations;

- a. **Individuals who have come from abusive backgrounds**
 - I. **May not be conscious of wounds suffered**
 - II. **Conscious of pain - but unable to deal with it so far "My father/mother wouldn't do anything to hurt me, they're supposed to love me"**
- b. **Families not 'dealing' with an addiction - eg alcoholism etc -its kept a secret - in an attempt to have sense of a 'normal' family and 'save' family unit by projecting 'normalcy' to self/others ie how it's supposed to be and not how it really is**
- c. **Organizational dysfunction - abuse uncovered and not confronted eg priests sexually/physically /emotionally abusing children in schools.**

Insofar as men in group have a safe place and are supported in and are able to speak their truth, they may be able to bring up and deal with some long-denied issues, and find some healing for past wounds.

However, it is also true that groups are 'family units' in the sense of bonding and relationships that develop - and we may bring our dysfunctional ideas/behaviours to group with us - as these are what we've learned from our families of origin. Thus denial may be repeated within group for reasons noted above.

In addition group will create its own issues within itself and will constantly need to work with ideas of 'Truth' and 'Denial' - both as individuals and as a group.

- 'Am I speaking my truth? - What is really going on for me? - for them?' We may have a sense of a man not 'revealing' himself, this can be frustrating and 'crazy making' and can often be a source of conflict - ask yourself
- 'How can I take care of myself in this situation? What do I want from him? Why?' 'How can I support (not force) him to speak his truth - What does he need?'
- 'Why aren't we talking about _____?' eg Why Jim left; Last week's conflict etc

Exercises

1. What is really going on for you?
 - a. Are you able to say it to the group?
 - b. If not, what is the issue for you?

Lack of support? - State what support would look like to you and ask for it. Can the other men agree to give you that support? If not, then perhaps now is not the right time to risk revealing yourself/issue.

Fear of further wounding - from whom? - how-? Again, you may not want to reveal this to group until you have established a 'safe place' as a group.
 - c. What active steps can you take to create/ask for what you need?
 - d. Is this group able to work at that level for you? Now? Perhaps in the future?

- e. If this group is unable to give you the space/support you need - are you able to confront any 'unconscious' denial on their part? Are you able to make this issue conscious within group and work towards a supportive and safe place?
 - f. How' much effort are you willing to make? Sometimes a group just doesn't want to go that 'particular direction'. What are your options?
2. Reflect on your personal issues of denial - Share. What was your need/want at the time? Now? Has your attitude/feeling changed?
 - a. Your 'own' personal issue
 - b. Within your family
 - c. In other circumstances, eg friends, organizations etc.
 3. 12 Step groups have a saying - "We're as sick as our secrets" - What do you think?

Notes for Meeting 5-3

1. Denial can be extremely difficult to deal with - there is a very definite 'timeliness' factor ie a right time to deal with an issue - for instance I may not be able to confront my own inner issue until I've grown in awareness about it as an issue eg 'sure my dad left home when I was two and has never called or spoken to me since, but I guess he had his reasons...' - there is a very real emotional wound suffered by a child when the father is absent, but who knows when the right time will come to deal with the pain long since buried. A man may come to group not knowing why - but as time progresses he comes to realise what his issues are and starts to work with them ie why does he distance and isolate himself emotionally from other

men?

2. One thing a group can do is to invite, even encourage - but never force - a man to look at an issue. We set up a safe space just so we can support each other to do that. Each man knows his own limits and may step up to the brink before crossing - but he should never be pushed. We empower each other by supporting and encouraging and recognising limitations as OK. This lets a man know' his self-choices are ok and are supported; he feels valued, listened-to and not judged as inadequate or failing (eg to meet someone else's standard). This is healthy group behaviour that creates warm relationships that open to new' possibilities of 'mutuality'. The reverse - judging, forcing etc - are invasive unhealthy group behaviours that will further wound and isolate men in mistrust of each other.
3. Finally, if the group goes into denial on an issue, perhaps all you can do is to bring it up and speak about as *your* issue until such time as they are willing to own their part of it, perhaps by saying (at your invitation) what their feelings are on the subject - then they may start to look a little closer... Reflect/give feedback on their energy - ask what it's about for them? If we 'go into our caves' you may have to light a camp fire and say: "Hey, come on out over here where it's warm". But you may have to tend the fire alone for a while.

Meeting 5-4

Focus: Resolving Conflict

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Resolving Conflict

"The simplest definition of conflict is: I want something, you want something else'. In any relationship, or group activity that continues over time there is bound to be conflict at some point; this is unavoidable".

"Conflict is not bad or something to be avoided or denied or hidden from. Conflict is simply the process whereby we as individuals express our wants, and engage in discussion as a group to meet those wants as fairly as possible."

"We recognise that conflict may be a scary place to be because of past experiences of being hurt during a conflict - or because of fears of losing the relationship (abandonment) . We also recognise the need to create and use healthy conflict resolution guidelines that assist us in solving our conflicts in a

non-abusive way."

Conflict Resolution Guidelines

- for discussion

1. **Turning down the heat**

For a resolution to be possible, we must take the heat out of the issue, ie we must step back from postures of accusing/blaming/judging. There needs to be a cooling-off period, or emotional time-out, especially if the conflict has gotten very heated.

How:

- I. Tell the guys to take a few minutes of deep breathing
- II. Ask them to notice what they are feeling - especially physical sensations
- III. Ask them if they have any energy they need to release; and find an appropriate, non-abusive/shaming/intimidating way to do it
- the group will need to guard/ensure appropriate actions throughout this whole process, and stop any abusive actions immediately.
- IV. When energy has been released, and things are settling down again, repeat ii) above (Cycle through i, ii and iii as necessary)
- V. Ask them if they are ready to move on - but be ready to cycle back to release energy as needed.

2. Owning what you want

As 'cleanly' as possible, the men involved in the conflict state what they want as it pertains to their needs - WITHOUT REFERRING TO THE 'OTHER' MAN. (ie not what the other man did/said, or should do/say - this will just bog us down)

eg

"I want a group where I _____"

"I want a rule that says _____"

"I want a process where it is ok
to _____"

"I want to be able to _____"

This is crucial - it's at this point we untangle our egos, take the personalities out of it and begin to explore the issue underneath; and do the work of owning, identifying and revealing our underlying needs. Again the group will need to guard this process and even assist a man in 'cleaning' up his wants, so that he owns them totally.

IF A MAN IS UNABLE/UNWILLING TO OWN 'HIS STUFF' AT THIS
TIME THE ISSUE MAY NOT BE RESOLVABLE AT THIS TIME

3. **Working towards clarity**

At this point we may begin to have a sense of clarity over what the issue is. The issue may even be resolved (see note 2). Perhaps one other man in the group is acting as arbitrator, with assistance from others as they 'see' what is happening and can add to group process.

- But - beware someone (unconsciously?) diverting, taking focus away from this specific issue -try to keep the energy focussed on the issue at hand.

4. **Owning what you said and did and your intent**

Having said what we want, now we have an opportunity to explore what was said/done by who, and what reactions/feelings came up. This can be helpful to clear up misunderstandings, and what was actually 'intended' by a certain statement or action.

Each man should reflect on his honest intentions, and work to remember and own what he said/did. Each man should focus on perhaps one or two points that are most meaningful, reflecting back:

- eg "When you said_____, I felt_____, and it seemed to me that_____. Is that what you intended?"
- or "Did you actually say_____?
What was your intention?"
- or "Did you realise how your words/action might be taken?"

- or "When you did/said _____, do you realise you broke our agreement on _____?"
- or "I am having a hard time understanding why _____. Can you explain it to me?"

5. **Owning your Feelings**

If we are stuck in anger, blame or resentment, we probably haven't completed our work in 2 and 4 above. It's only as we see each man honestly taking ownership, acknowledging inappropriate behaviours and making amends/apologies that we can honour his integrity and once again move into a place of trust. However, taking ownership may take time, and in fact some men may never reach that level of maturity.

In the meantime we have our feelings to deal with. We may be feeling put-upon, put-down and unsafe in a place where men are unwilling to take ownership. We may not trust a man for that very reason. Ultimately *your* feelings are *yours* - meaning nobody makes you feel anyway you don't agree to feel - (the opposite is to be continually in 'victim mode'). You can choose to let go of any issue any time you want to, it's your work, and nobody else's.

Ideally, men have satisfactorily taken ownership, and we can process and work with what came up for us/what we felt/are feeling in an 'ordinary' (non-conflict) environment, for this issue the same as we might for any other issue originating outside group.

6. **Owning the Solution**

- ie being a part of defining and creating where you want to be.

Ideas/solutions/compromises may have already occurred, or can be brainstormed at this point. The conflict may naturally lead into a 'rules debate' - a further refinement of group process that attempts to more satisfactorily deal with wants/needs in group (whether feelings issues have been dealt with/completed or not - this may only happen after the 'refinement' process).

Notes for Meeting 5-4

1. Many conflicts will be resolved simply by men taking ownership, because, as outlined below -
 - a. They were 'projections' - one man projecting his stuff onto another man and trying to get him to own it/carry it for him. When he's asked to state/own his want, as it pertains to him, he may have difficulty, and he/others may realise he was 'projecting', ie inappropriately asking another man to be or do or say something.
 - b. They were 'ego constructions' - some personal reaction/resistance/judgement of what another man was saying, who was then inappropriately confronted. Again when we are required to own our want/need we may find it has nothing to do with the other man, and the issue dissolves.

2. The focus here is not on scoring points, but on taking ownership - is each man able to acknowledge and own what he said/did? Can he do the inner work of looking for what was motivating him and exploring/explaining his intent? - and recognising appropriateness?

This can be an uncomfortable place to be, confronted by what you said and what your intent was, it does take maturity and courage to accept

ownership and not 'hide', if this doesn't happen we may get bogged down and go around in circles with increasing resentment and moving further away from a resolution - the group that can step in here and require men to take ownership will fare better than the group that lets two men 'duke it out'.

Meeting 5-5

Focus: When it all craps out...

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: When it all craps out...

We've probably arrived at this point as the result of a conflict - opposing it all ideas being held by (usually) two men in the group. Either man may be feeling hurt or not heard. Each may be deeply invested in their individual point of view may have defended it energetically and be unwilling to 'move' consider/allow another perspective. Sometimes shaming or otherwise abusive things get said in the heat of the moment - we dig our trenches and say to ourselves: 'I'm not letting him get away with this...'

Sometimes an opposing idea may be so 'wrong' from our point of view that we will not even consider it, and refuse to negotiate.

Sometimes another man's attitude will be so 'perverse' (as I

judge it), as to be ludicrous - and yet why don't the others in the group see it that way? This can be particularly confusing... We look around for others to confront this attitude - yet I alone may be the only one ready to do 'this work' - ie of exploring this issue. Am I ready to take on this task - persuading the whole group?

In the heat of the moment even logical/rational thought processes may go out the window - men may flip flop - aggressively supporting one idea, and then the seemingly direct opposite in the next breath! Weird...- but it happens.

So what is really going on? Well you've reached a place of 'High Tension' -it's like standing on high voltage electricity cables - if you touch each other, sparks will fly and you may get an explosion. Two high tension cables can peacefully coexist side by side, but if they reach across - watch out! But in the group we are in the business of 'reaching across' - so what do we do?

Someone has to recognise and say:

"You guys are like high tension cables right now, one positive. one negative highly charged. But electricity is good and beneficial to mankind, electricity won't work without positive AND negative, we need both of you, and both of you are ok, even though you may not be able to see that right now. Positive electric current has no concept or understanding of negative electric current, and vice versa. All we have to do is turn down the voltage a little: are you ready to do that?"

Exercises

1. Are you really ready to 'turn down the voltage'? - ie let go of the issue, for now, and step back to another place?

2. If not - why not? This is the biggie - if you've been 'hurt', you may not want to reveal this to group and make yourself more vulnerable. This is understandable - and this is why we dig our 'defensive' trenches. Being 'wounded', feeling pain, wishing to avoid pain - these cause us to fight and be defensive.
3. What will it take for you to be ready? What do you need to ask for to take care of yourself? (There is no paradox here - in a group context we take care of ourselves via group process - ie we are fully involved as individuals in setting up a group process that supports us).
 - a. from yourself?
 - b. from him?
 - c. from the group?
4. Is he ready to turn down the voltage?
What's his issue?
What is he asking for?
5. What is being demanded?
Is it reasonable - according to established group process/agreements?
6. What roles are other group members playing?
Where are they 'at' - what's going on for them?
Are they willing to say? - or not want to be involved?
Why? Do they see it as their issue?
7. Are there any 'ultimatums'? From whom?
Why? Are they fair? - reasonable?
8. Have we moved to a new place - ie someone's unwritten rules being applied unilaterally - without discussion/agreement?
Is this a reasonable group process?

Is the group confronting this? If not, why not?

9. In stepping down the voltage, is the group willing to go back to basics?
 - o ie re-commit to using agreed to guidelines/rules? Or is someone holding out for 'own way'?
 - o or agreeing in words but not actions ie being inconsistent...unfair? on purpose?

(It may be a long process, but how else can we proceed except by agreements? - our agreements attempt to define healthy non-abusive interactions - they are the beginning and the end of what is possible for any group).

10. Are we able to visualise the end of this conflict? What does that look like?
11. Has trust been lost? Has someone broken their word?
Has someone been hurt? - How? How can trust be restored?
Will an amends/apology help to heal the wound?
Is an apology appropriate? - forthcoming? - sincere? - believable? - or just a set-up?
12. What is the basis of our continuance as a group?
Did we start with good-will? Do we still have it?
Or ill-will/resentment?
How do we now proceed with any reasonable chance for 'progress' as a group?

Notes for Meeting 5-5

The above exercises are designed to explore the possibility of reconciliation. However we must also recognise that sometimes this will not be possible. Being vulnerable is an unpleasant place to be, especially in company of someone we don't trust, someone that may have 'hurt' us already. Even if we do have the courage to confront an issue, and possibly even the whole group, it can take an enormous amount of physical and emotional energy to do this work, and over time we may get worn down, in attempting

to create a 'healthy' group process that the other men in the group may not want to move to. And yet the alternative may be something that we choose not to have to live with.

Ultimately we each define and create a minimum acceptable standard of 'group process', without which we are compromising our group experience, and presumably not getting our needs met. So we may go in with good intentions looking for a good group experience, but we must also recognise this may not happen, and need to walk away, at least, hopefully, understanding what it was all about.

Introduction to Level 6

Stuckness

At some point in the life of a group it may get into a place of 'stuckness'. It will seem as if there is no energy in the meeting, it sucks energy out of you rather than giving energy, and it may end-up seeming like a chore to attend at all. Some obvious questions to ask are:

- Have we really done it all? - what has been missed or skipped over? - What could use a second look?
- What is different for me now? - as opposed to last month, or six months ago? What's changed?
- What do I *really* want? To stay and pursue this? Or am I being called in another direction? - Is that where my energy is going? Maybe I'm ready to leave but can't make the decision?
- What did you not say a few months ago when you could have? Why? Can you say it now?
- What ideas were not followed a few months ago by the group? Why? Is now the right time?
- Is the group in denial or avoiding? What is the underlying issue? Am I willing to confront it? (We're rowing for shore but the undertow is taking us another direction...can we use its energy?) Do I have the energy to initiate and lead that work with my ideas? Are we all waiting for each other?
- Maybe we don't gel as a group any more - we're pushing against each other

and neutralising the energy?

- Maybe our rules work too well, we've learned it all and know how to avoid 'projecting'?; or maybe they're not working at all and there's an unspoken code in place that is being enforced by the big man on the team...? Who's going to say something...?

It will probably entail digging a little deeper into the dark unconscious, but that is where all the juicy stuff is! Personally there's always been more than enough issues for me to work on, and create with other men... Stuckness could be about having done all your work at a particular level - things have been hashed and rehashed until there's no energy there any more. Just as initially things began to roll by individual men taking the risk to reveal what was happening for them at this level, a further risk is required to take it to the next level, and go a little deeper. Of course it will get scary there too, that's probably why we were stuck 'outside the door'. And if it's scary, then some one may react and start projecting, being uncomfortable with the feelings that come up for him and try to 'give' them to someone else...and our work of conflict and taking ownership starts all over again. But this time with some extra energy, because the stakes just got a little higher, as we get closer and closer to our core personalities, issues and belief systems.

So, who will be first through the door...? (See [Level 7](#) for more information)

The next few meetings describe some of the things you could do to confront your stuckness.

Level - 6 Meetings

6-1 [Group Review](#)

6-2 [Group Facilitation & Workshops](#)

6-3 [Sitting in the Silence](#)

Meeting 6-1

Focus: Group Review

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Group Review

"In this meeting we will be taking a historical perspective of the group and events in the group, to glean any insights available, with the hope that some clues to stuckness might become apparent and also to look for ideas for new directions and energy."

Exercises

1. How long has the group been going? How long have the current members been coming? Any gaps in their attendance? What was that about?
2. Ask each member to describe what their experience of group has been, in

general terms.

3. Is there a consensus of opinion? Explore any differences - what are they about?
4. How many men have left the group in its lifetime?
 - a. For each man that left, consider what benefits he got from group?
 - b. For each man, consider why they left; did they tell you? If not - speculate. If they didn't tell you why they left, consider why they chose not to tell you.
 - c. Are you carrying a judgement of him or the circumstances of his departure?
 - d. How did you feel when he left? How does this relate to c) above?
5. Did any man leave with the support of the group ie to pursue other interests?
 - a. How did that support manifest itself?
 - b. Was there any attempt made to keep in touch? Why? Why not?
6. If a man left without group support
 - a. What was that about?
 - b. Was there any resistance/resentment on behalf of the group?
 - c. Do you have any new perspectives on your role in that process?
7. For men that left as the result of conflict:-

- a. Was that conflict eventually resolved? How? Who participated? Why? Who resisted? Why? Who played no/little role? Why?
 - b. Did that man 'cause' the conflict, or was he the 'victim'? Discuss. Have things changed in the group as a result? Was he trying to change them?
 - c. Who initiated the conflict (ie by confronting an issue - beginning a discussion...)
 - d. What happened to group energy afterwards? Was anyone blamed? Who? - by who? What was that about?
 - e. Are there any lingering resentments towards that man? Who is able to own that?
 - f. If you were to meet that man socially (by surprise), how would you feel?
8. What have been the best things for you about group? The worst? High points? Low points?
 9. What have you tried to change in group process? Were you successful? Did your ideas work out for you? For others in the group? If not successful, who stopped you? Why? Is it still an issue?
 10. What did you/do you think needs changing but haven't tackled it yet? Will you? If not, why not?
 11. Have you considered leaving? Why? Why did you stay? Are you considering leaving? Why? Why would you stay?
 12. Where do you see the group in 1 month - 3 months - 6 months - 1 year?
 13. What new things could the group do to support/satisfy/encourage you?

Will you 'fight' for them?

Meeting 6-2

Group Facilitation & Workshops

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Group Facilitation & Workshops

"Sometimes stuckness can be about digging in to your trenches and defending your own position, doggedly refusing to capitulate to another man's point of view; why - that would mean losing! When two men get into that place each is refusing to accept the other man's 'authority' -ie his power to determine how things should be done. Sometimes groups can form opposing armies, each knowing that theirs is the best way, and the other way is wrong."

"In situations like this, one option to consider is to invite a facilitator in, to observe and advise on your process - preferably someone with some experience of men's work and who is able to be impartial and judge objectively. Hopefully he will find a win- win solution acceptable to both sides; it may not be what either side wanted exactly, but something that

both sides can live with but were unable to negotiate independently. Of course an experienced facilitator could be helpful in other ways too, making suggestions and even setting up a tailor made program for your group."

"Another option to consider is the opportunity to take a workshop together as a group, focusing on an area of difficulty for your group, or perhaps just general interest. It could be a chance to ask questions and get an outside perspective on an issue, with everyone being able to debate it independently. For instance many family services type organisations offer inexpensive programs on 'communicating', 'conflict resolution', 'assertiveness' etc any one of which could be beneficial to group process. Perhaps you could even invite a presenter in to give you a private program -custom built for you."

Exercises

1. Is this an option we want to try?
Could it settle an issue quicker than I/he wants it settled?
2. Are there other things we want to try first?
What are they? When would we do them?
How do we decide if they've worked - and this option isn't required?
3. Who could we call? (Local men's organization; counsellors etc)
Who will call? What are we asking for exactly?
Is this the facilitators field of expertise?
Do they have a track record? Any literature?
Do we want to speak to more than one?
4. What programs are available locally?
Are they appropriate for our needs?

What is our goal in taking this program?

Is it realistic? What does the presenter think?

5. Is this a last resort for anyone in the group?
Are they fed-up with how things are and only willing to stay if there is a change?
6. Is there any resistance to this option?
Why? (Do they want outcome if program doesn't happen?)
7. How much do we want to spend?
When is a good time?...etc
8. Afterwards; did it work? - move you into a new space? - give new skills? - being applied?/resisted?

Meeting 6-3

Focus: Sitting in the Silence

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Sitting in the Silence

"When we come to group we may think we have to speak. We may even try to impress or look good via what we have to say. We may feel uncomfortable during check-in or at other times if things are quiet for too long. However it doesn't have to be that way..."

"For this meeting, assuming that check-in items are fully explored and released, and no other issues are distracting us, we will attempt to sit in the space of silence, and notice what happens. The demand on each of us will also be to draw on our courage and find our truth, and say what is really going on for us, right now, in the moment"

Exercises

1. The leader for the meeting introduces the topic above and then times a one minute silence.
2. At the end of the minute, the floor is open for men to share what they noticed within themselves, and what came up for them. Focus on
 - a. The thoughts that came up - were there any judgements?
What were they? Would you call them distractions?
Why? What were you trying to focus on?
Were you calm? - or anxious?
Did your mind go off on a tangent?
What was that about?
Is it significant? - for you, or this meeting?
Did your mind settle anywhere? - Where?
 - b. How did you feel?
 - Comfortable?
 - Weird? - What is weird about - for you - describe it
 - c. Were there any specific feelings/sensations in your body that you noticed?
 - d. What was the most important thing that came out of that exercise for you?
3. If the men have a hard time responding - sit with that for a while and notice group energy -where is it going/what's happening to it? Reflect on that, invite comment.
4. When it seems right, repeat exercise 2, but this time direct the men to-
"Notice specifically the thoughts/feelings that come up for you - reflect on them"

This time go for 2 minutes of silence.

Then explore what came up as in 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d above.

5. Repeat the exercise, this time for 3 minutes of silence - then exploring what comes up. Invite the men to get into 'that issue' whatever it is, whether personal, or group discussion. When energy wanes again, repeat the exercise, adding one minute to the period of silence.
6. If the men are having a hard time sharing ie noticing and revealing what's happening for them, direct them to:

"Notice especially what you are holding onto, or resisting - then share that -whatever it is, possibly frustration or resentment, a judgement about this exercise...".

Then repeat, adding one more minute of silence!

7. At this point some men will get into their feelings - and may begin to push out some energy with it - invite them to do that - let them know it's ok to really get into it. After all this is just a silly exercise! Let them move that energy and see where it takes them, where they end up. Is there something underneath all that energy? What is it? What are they seeing, now that it is really silent, and they are in a place where their self-expression is ok, valued and encouraged? What are they confronting?

Then repeat, adding one more minute to the period of silence.

8. A man may begin to 'divert' with a topic that is not 'inner directed' - ask - what is that about for him - is it a diversion? - what is he really feeling/experiencing? Why is he diverting? Does he want attention/focus of the group for that issue really? Invite him to reflect for a minute - is there something else underneath? Maybe he's trying to get a 'head' discussion going and avoid being in/expressing his true feelings.

Repeat etc.

9. After a few rounds it may be obvious that one or two men have said little and could use some respectful encouragement from the group; ask what their hesitancy is about - or what is going on for them, right now, in the

moment. As they begin to speak, the gates might open...

Remind them that there is no judgement of what they have to say whatever is happening for them is real for them and is ok - whatever! - and is theirs to explore in this space.

Repeat etc.

10. Other men might be 'finding things' to cover up something deeper inside; reflect back to those that have shared the most to consider that fact and whether there is something else there for them. Then repeat, adding one more minute to the period of silence; and explore.

11. Invite the men to take a risk, if there was one issue/wound that they could bring to group to be 'healed', what would it be, what would they ask for? For some men it may spring to mind immediately, for others invite them to:

"Let your intuition speak to you in the silence - and invite that feeling in -and softly walk into the release of that burden".

Then repeat, adding one more minute to the period of silence; and explore.

Notes for Meeting 6-3

The opportunity in this meeting is to explore quiet, and end up not having such a judgement of that space, and possibly even begin to respect it. Many, many of us use busy-ness and talk to override our feelings and fail to notice the moment, and even intentionally avoid the moment in that way. Group is a place to learn to notice the moment. We may also learn that we don't necessarily have to 'bring' anything to group; if we sit in the quiet, in our safe space, things/issues will begin to emerge - precisely because the space is available.

Introduction to Level 7

Taking A Dive

Throughout this handbook we've talked about ideas such as - taking ownership - speaking your truth -taking back your projections - respecting another man's process and so on. If your group has been working with these ideas, then it is probably experiencing the best of what a men's group can be, although it may not feel that way! Why? - because we're going into an unknown place, resurrecting parts of ourselves that have been cut off perhaps for many years; we don't know what it is going to look like when it comes out - and that sure scares me when I do it! , and it may scare you too.

A normal part of the 'socialisation' process is to 'fit in' with what's going on around us, ie conforming to others expectations. Except that to do this we have to hide ourselves away, our real selves, what we're really thinking or feeling. There will be pressures on us to conform from our parents, teachers, peer group; there will be rewards if we do, and punishments when we don't. Over the years we may have a realisation that we are wearing a social mask of acceptability, but gradually that mask can become more and more uncomfortable as we realise that there is an inner life that isn't being expressed authentically in the outside world.

'Taking a dive' is about taking off that mask and 'diving into' our authentic inner selves - going deeper and deeper into what is really going on for us, and finding the courage to express that.

Throughout the journey that this group has taken, it too has learned a 'set of behaviours' - and undergone its own socialisation process, in order to do its work. Sometimes part of 'stuckness' (see [Level 6](#)) is about the reluctance to take off that mask. That is the mask of wanting to fit in, not upset the apple-cart, and be accepted as one of the guys. 'Taking a dive' is also about taking off that mask too.

It may well be that guys have been doing this inner work, diving into their 'stuff' in the moment, and taking off those masks. In the next few meetings we'll explore what that looks like and how it can be further supported. If we can reach a place of comfortably working at that level, men will be creating a new authenticity in their lives that just has to be experienced to be believed.

Note:

Previously we've talked about making our cooking pot (rules & guidelines) strong enough to hold our ingredients/energy. This is the level where its strength will be tested the most. It may crack under the heat and we may have to go (a long way) back to fix it. That's part of the process too... Taking off the mask

IS NOT ABOUT GOING BACK TO PROJECTING, DUMPING, JUDGING OR BLAMING; ie we're still aiming to 'speak our truth' as it pertains to us, not what we think is going on for another man. We're still out to respect another mans process - especially here as he reveals his deepest darkest cut off parts - we should not dump, judge, blame him at his most vulnerable. On the other hand he shouldn't be doing that to any other man either! There still needs to be a group requirement/follow-up process of 'taking ownership'; ie what I'm expressing is about me, and if I have judged/projected etc I should own it and take that back.

The above note is written from the point of view of protecting group process; the one exception, at this level, to taking ownership, is if a man has to get into all of the energy OF HIS OWN INNER ISSUE ie it doesn't pertain to anyone else in group, and just let fly with all the stuff buried there, without owning it in the moment, just so as to be able to move it. This may give him a sense of 'release' and only later on may he want to come back and consider ownership. This is something the group may want to support as a man is ready to do his release work and asks for that opportunity.

Level - 7 Meetings

7-1 [Conforming](#)

7-2 [The Prince and the King](#)

7-3 [Taking a dive](#)

Meeting 7-1

Focus: Conforming

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Conforming

"In this meeting we will take the opportunity to explore issues around 'conforming' - how we've done it, why we've done it, what the results were; and also what happened when we did our own thing and went our own way."

Exercises

1. How difficult is it to be aware of the conforming process?
How subtle is it?
 - a. Do you spit in the street?

- b. What about other personal habits... farting?... picking your nose?... others?
 - c. What kind of reaction do these actions usually get?
Do you care? Why?
 - d. What habits did you have as a kid that you've stopped doing?
Why?
 - e. How do you decide what to wear in the morning?
What factors help you decide?
 - f. When you meet someone what's usually their first question?
What does this imply about expectations regarding behaviour in our culture?
 - g. What about other cultures - and their expectations? eg Hippies vs Eastern cultures?
 - h. Examine your own 'cultural' expectations, and reactions - eg regarding
 - I. People on welfare
 - II. Drunks/addicts/pan-handlers in the street
 - III. Your own social obligations vs. your rights
2. Reflect on past authority figures in your life: ep parents - teachers - bosses -
- a. To what extent did they expect you to conform to their standards?
 - b. How appreciative of your individuality were they? How did you feel about that?

- c. How did they enforce their standards/rules? Harshly? - With understanding? What was it about for them - speculate? How did you feel about it?
 - d. Did you conform voluntarily? Why? Did you resist? Why?
 - e. Has their influence on you had a lasting impact on your life? How? Do you resent that? Are you working consciously with these learned behaviours?
 - f. Do you question authority?
 - g. How do you react to policemen? Policewomen? Any difference? Why?
3. Reflect on the rules by which you live your life - Are they self-determined or the cultural standards?
- a. Within your intimate relationships
 - b. In your work environment
 - c. In your family
 - d. In your friendships

Are you likely to question something you think is wrong that the rest of the group goes along with?

4. To what extent are you conforming to rules within your men's group.
- a. To the openly discussed and agreed to rules?
Why? Why not?
 - b. To unspoken 'codes of conduct', not discussed but perhaps just

assumed? Are you comfortable with

I. How it is?

II. Your actions?

5. What parts of you do you think have been repressed by this 'conforming' process-voluntarily or not?
6. Describe a situation when you didn't conform to an expected standard -
Why? How did/do you feel?
Were there any repercussions - resentments etc?
7. Is conformity a necessary social process?
When can it become unhealthy?

Meeting 7-2

Focus: The Prince and the King

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: The Prince and the King

"Once upon a time a young couple had a baby boy together. But this particular boy was a prince, because his mother and father were the King the King and Queen of the land where they lived. Now his parents didn't believe in sheltering the boy, but showed him all of the Kingdom, its good side and its bad side, all the while loving the prince as much as each of them knew how."

"Of course there were rules, and things that had to be done, sometimes things that the prince didn't want to to, but somehow they muddled through it all, until one day the prince realised that living in the castle just didn't seem very real to him, compared to the excitement and busyness of the villages, with all their wonderful strange folk, and the adventure that beckoned from within and beyond the great forest he could

just barely see on the horizon through his window."

"So he went to his parents and said that it was time for him to leave, to explore the wonders outside on his own, to find out who he really was. His parents knew this day would come, so they smiled at him, and were pleased at his determination, and were able to support him in this too, not speaking of their own doubts and fears, because they knew the time was right for him."

"A few days later the prince left the castle before anyone was awake, without fanfare and ordinarily dressed, carrying a little food and some money to buy more along the way. He had his own doubts and fears of course, but he was not deterred, his mind was made up - NOW was the right time. And he headed straight for the great forest, because its vastness had always caught his imagination, and besides the villages could wait, he'd been there before; and he knew the castle would always be there if he was in need."

"And so began a long string of adventures that the prince experienced, all the while growing in wisdom, understanding and compassion as he saw what was really going on in the land, and as he found a place in himself that could relate to and share this truth. Sometimes along the way he was in danger, and was almost overwhelmed by threatening forces too many times than he cared to remember - but somehow he always managed to find a safe place to recover his wits, energy and spirit. Occasionally he made it back to the castle, but with longer and longer gaps, but still the King and Queen bade him to do what he needed to do, and he was soon off again."

"Then one day the prince sat down and began to think. He'd seen so many things in his travels, and it seemed as if there were some things that needed changing, that could be improved. And he decided he was going to do something about it: 'after all I am the prince!'; he said to himself."

"But what he didn't realise was at that very moment of his decision, because of that decision, he became King. After all, how else do you think Kings are made? You can't force them, they have to want to be King. And, what he didn't know was at that very moment his father, the King, had died in the castle. He'd had a long illness and would so very much have liked to have seen his son again, but it was not to be."

"The King began to walk back to the castle, all the while making a plan and figuring out what needed to be done first. And his steps had a new purpose to them, and it felt good, and he only much later began to realise how much each and every single step he'd made had been guided and helped by the love and support and acceptance of the King and Queen."

Exercises

1. What does this story bring up for you? What feelings? What thoughts?
2. Did your parents have the same attitudes as the King and Queen in this story?
 - a. Were they able to accept/support you unconditionally?
 - b. What did their support look like? What was missing?
 - c. Did they manipulate you to get their own (unmet?) needs met?
 - d. What would you like to be able to ask from your parents now?
 - e. Is it something you can give yourself? Is it something you get in group?
3. What are your feelings about the prince?

- a. Is he naive? - selfish? - disloyal? - uncaring? Other? Why?
4. Is this story too ideal to be true in real life? Explain.
- a. Could it be true for someone? Your son?
What challenges does the King (father) face?
 - b. What changes would you like to make for you/your son?
 - c. What are your fears and doubts about your son?
Does this affect your relationship?
 - d. What were the real limitations and issues you experienced/are experiencing
 - I. With your father?
 - II. With your son?What did you want? What do you want?
What is motivating you?
5. Describe the feel of your (parents) castle.
Was/is it a good place to visit? Why?
6. When you set out on your adventure, were you/did you feel pushed? Or supported?
7. What does the village represent for you? Or the forest?
- a. Are there adventures still waiting there for you?
 - b. What do you think you need before you will start your adventure?
 - c. If you've had adventures already - what are they? - what did they

mean for you?

Did you make any 'decisions'? Did you change anything?

How were you supported?

8. Have you tried to get that love/acceptance/support in your intimate relationships?
 - a. Was/is it appropriate?
Was/is your partner able to meet your needs?
Were/are they doing the same to you?
What limitation is/was there?
 - b. To what extent do you manipulate to get those needs met?
9. If those needs are important, and we can't/didn't get them from our parents or partners, where else can we appropriately get those needs met?
10. If the group wants to be supportive in that way, what needs to change/be improved?
11. Have you decided to be 'King'? - what is your first task?
Do you know any other Kings?

Meeting 7-3

Focus: Taking a Dive

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Taking a Dive

"There are numerous other metaphors for this behaviour - 'leaving the castle', 'going through the doorway' to the next level and so on. When it happens it's usually spontaneous and dynamic! It may be apparent to some that we've reached a new level, as one man shares some profound issue - others may not notice or go into shock or divert or 'caretake' to fix the problem etc"

"There may be a sense of increased tension (that may provoke the reactions mentioned above) or it may just feel 'weird' or unusual. Whatever, it is just not normal stuff - it's something new and different and usually highly charged."

"The group that can identify and recognise the significance of what is being shared will be better placed to allow and

support this process, and prevent any diverting or projecting by other men who may be unable to own their own stuff in the moment."

Exercises

1. Reflect on parts of yourself that somehow have been cut off from you - perhaps something you want to be able to do or be but 'don't know how'?
2. What aspects of yourself have you consciously buried?
(See [Meeting 7-1 Conforming](#))
 - a. Why? Have you been shamed?
 - b. Is group ready to hear you and support you?
Are you ready?
 - c. What do you need to ask for to explore this issue?
 - d. What does it feel like to anticipate going into that place?
 - e. What do you think will be the benefit?
 - f. Can you ask to schedule a time to do that work?
3. What kind of personalities have your partners had?
 - a. Compared to your own?
 - b. Did/do you complement each other? Did/do you clash?
 - c. What traits did/does your partner have that you would like?
Were these cut off? Are you developing them now?

4. Do you have any personal issues that you have not shared with group?
Why?
5. Are there any group issues that have come up during group that you have not confronted but did not agree with what happened?
Why didn't you confront them? Are you ready to now?
6. What do you see group as being able to do for you in this process of self-revealing? Is the group a safe place to do this?
Are you working towards this?
7. Can you acknowledge a risk that someone took in group to work at this level?
 - a. Were they supported? Was their process stopped?
How? Why?
 - b. Is it timely to go back and re-address this issue, with new awareness?
8. Do you see yourself as needing to do work at this level?
When do you think you'll be ready?
Will these men be able to support you?
How much confidence do you have in them? Why?
9. Describe what your 'whole' personality would look like, after recovering all repressed aspects.

Introduction to Level 8

Renewed Commitment

Everyone, sooner or later, considers leaving the group, for any number of reasons; and eventually we all move on to new challenges carrying hopefully not only memories but also lessons learned and new insights into ourselves and things/people around us. (See [Meeting 3-7 Leaving the group.](#))

But what if it isn't time to leave? What if you have the sense of wanting to stay, but not much clarity around it? Perhaps there are difficulties that you can't actually pin-point, or an unresolved conflict that the group can't deal with at its current level of development? (See [Level 6 - Stuckness](#)).

Maybe it's the way that things are currently being done that is preventing things from being resolved? So the group has to work a little harder to refine its process? - Is it willing to go deeper? Cover old ground? Are you? This can be tremendously frustrating; and in the moment, it may seem as if 'someone' is holding onto an unworkable position - and they may never change their attitude...

So any self-renewal may come up against a brick wall if the group isn't willing to go that way... What can you do? Your work at this point is to understand your motivations (honestly!) and own them. What for you is 'wrong' with the situation? Why? Are you projecting? Consider what the possible outcomes are from going along with it. Where could it work? Break down? What do you see as healthy/appropriate or unhealthy/inappropriate? Why? What is it you want? Why? What are its outcomes? Strive for as much clarity as you can in this way.

Having achieved some level of clarity, consider what is the simplest point for you to present as your argument, perhaps the issue or concept upon which your whole idea rests, perhaps the starting point for you to be able to do/continue your men's work. This is your point of renewal - this is what you must hold to consciously in any group

process - in the whirlpool of issues and ideas and conflicts - this is what sustains you and others may only gradually over time be able to understand this perspective.

This may take courage, to confront and change an 'unhealthy' process - it may take a lot of energy, both emotional and physical - to come back week after week to work for and fight for your issue/ideas - and you may not succeed - but at least you may tell yourself you tried - even if we eventually walk away recognising our inability to work together in a way that satisfies us all.

Level - 8 - Meetings

8-1 [Renewal and Self-Resolution](#)

8-2 [Trying to figure it out](#)

Meeting 8-1

Focus: Renewal and Self-Resolution

The basic structure of this meeting is the same as [Meeting 1.1](#) - refer back for more information.

Some issues may have come up during check-in that the group may wish to spend more time on rather than moving straight into the 'focus'; or perhaps some issue is still to be dealt with from the previous week. When it is appropriate the leader moves the group into the main focus for this meeting.

5) The Big Bit in the middle - the leader announces the focus of the meeting

Focus: Renewal and Self-Resolution

"Sometimes in the heat of group process we forget that that very process only happens because each of us as individuals is doing our own independent work and willing to bring that stuff and energy to group. If everyone came to group expecting someone else to do all the work and come up with ideas, it would probably be a very dull group."

"Group will provide insights and experiences unobtainable outside, but its spark can only be the spark that each one of us provide. This is not a leader -less group, it is a leader-full group; each of us is encouraged and invited to provide leadership, to take full ownership, offer ideas and stay connected."

"Renewal is about looking over that part of the road already

travelled, putting it into perspective, seeing the big picture and looking ahead: Where did I start? - Where am I now? - Where do I hope to get to? -What has worked for me? - What hasn't? Highs? Lows? What do I want to bring to group if I carry on? - What is it about if I leave? What have I gotten out of it or learned? - What have I given?"

"Self-Resolution is about looking back and trying to understand things in a broad context - sometimes with the wisdom that only hindsight can give us -what particular episodes or events mean - what was my part in creating that? - what ownership can I honestly take back now, away from the heat of 'battle'? what lesson is there for me now? And having come to some kind of understanding, am I able to finally lay it to rest? Or what energy still remains?; what is unresolved?; what will still sting me? Is it possible to share this new perspective? (it may not be...) Am I ready once more to step forward with these men?"

Exercises

1. What were your original desires/hopes/expectations around group?
2. Have these been achieved? How?
 - a. Through your own efforts?
 - b. Because of someone else's work or initiative?
Whose? - Share this thought.
3. What were your disappointments around group?
 - a. What caused them?

- b. What efforts can you make to prevent further disappointments?
Do you want to?
Or is it someone else's job?

- 4. Since you've been in group, describe how your feelings have changed
 - a. Towards group

 - b. Towards yourself

 - c. Towards others around you - eg family, friends, colleagues...

- 5. How has 'support' manifested in your life, since you've been in a 'support' group?

- 6. Reflect back on times when you considered leaving the group - what was that about?
 - a. A group issue? Which one? Any new perspectives on that?

 - b. A personal issue? Which one? Any new perspectives on that?

 - c. The untimely combination of a & b above?
What made you stay? What has been your experience since?
How were issues resolved?

- 7. Do you have any sense of 'When it's the right time to go, I'll know'?

- 8. What would cause you to leave group?

- 9. What keeps you involved in group?

- 10. What needs to be done to keep group a 'happening place' for you?

- a. What do you want more of?
 - b. What do you want less of?
 - c. What new things do you want to try?
 - d. What rules need to change?
11. Can you suggest a 'Statement of Renewed Commitment'? What would that look like for you?
- a. Is this something that the whole group wants to participate in?
 - b. If there is resistance, what is that about?
Unfinished business?
 - c. Do you need to go back 2 or 3 steps before you can 'finish the business'?
 - d. If someone doesn't want to go back a few steps/re-commit, what are they holding onto?
Why? Is their issue being avoided?

Notes for Meeting 8-1

With long-term involvement in any project, there will be fluctuations in energy levels for everyone participating. It would be unreasonable to assume everyone will be 'up' all the time. So individuals will go through the 'blahs' and have less to contribute, at these times if others can pull in the slack and let that man be where he needs to be things should go ok.

It may happen that 1 or 2 men provide a lot of the driving energy in a group, but they may tire out over time, or not be able to make a few meetings; at times like these the other men in the group are called to leadership - one philosophy is that there are no

accidents, we can choose to be victims of circumstance if we wish, or see these situations as opportunities to explore a new way of doing things.

Sometimes groups will collectively experience low energy; maybe there are some underlying issues that are sapping the energy out of everyone because they 'can't' be resolved or because they're not even being talked about. Someone has to confront the issue - then the energy - and the heat - may begin to rise! Sometimes we may not even see the issue to be able to confront it - sometimes it's being hidden ie one man wants it that way, and the group may have tacitly agreed to go along with it, with the unfortunate consequence of it sucking the energy out of the group later on. It's a bit like a dysfunctional family hiding an addiction, everyone suffers the consequences but it can't be openly discussed because its a 'shameful' family secret. Watch out when you bring it up! - you may get dumped on. Those secrets shelter a lot of pain and fear. The alternative? Losing some/all of the group if its unwilling/unable to tackle the issue -men get tired of 'unhealthy' process and being 'wounded'

When a group successfully negotiates a conflict
a couple of things can happen -

- I. We're pleasantly surprised at our success and it builds confidence and group cohesion
- II. It's been a bitter struggle, each may be holding onto resentments at having to (reluctantly) compromise their position.

After item ii) above, it may help to dissipate resentments if the group undergoes a 'renewal process', and look at the big picture. It also offers the opportunity to further explore hows and whys of the group, and may lead naturally into a 'rules debate' - a further refinement of group process.

Meeting 8-2

Focus: Trying to Figure it out

This meeting is provided as one way for you to come to an understanding of 'where you are at', or perhaps a specific issue in your group.

Answer the following questions as fully as possible on a piece of paper (to jog your memory, to share, to refer back to at a later date...).

1. Describe what you are feeling.
 - a. Are there any sensations in your body? - describe them.

2. How do you feel about the way you are feeling? - ie are you confused? - are you pissed off/angry about the fact that you are sad? - or feeling hurt/wounded?
 - a. Which is the most important of those feelings? Why?
 - b. Is one a cover-'up' for the other, that you might be trying to avoid?
 - c. Are you 'allowing' one but not the other? Why? (Perhaps a 'defensive' posture to deal with vulnerability?)
 - d. Does your group 'support' some feelings but not others? Do you? (This does happen! In some groups - families - individuals)
 - e. Are you able to acknowledge and validate both feelings?

3. How can you work with those feelings in the group?
 - a. Can you ask for support?
 - b. Will you get it?

4. What action are those feelings telling you to take?
 - a. Which action appeals to you the most?
 - b. Which action torments you? ie something you feel you should do but are unable to/ or is inappropriate? Is there another way of 'fulfilling' it that is appropriate?
 - c. Which action are you avoiding/resisting? Why?
 - d. Are you ready to 'let go' or are you holding onto something? Why?

5. Imagine taking those actions - (in turn)
 - a. What do you think would be the result?
For you? For the group?
 - b. Is that what you want?
 - c. Is someone 'pushing' you?
Is that result what they want?

6. Can you visualise a positive outcome for those actions?
 - a. How could you achieve that? Is the group ready to 'allow' it? ie
can you create appropriate methods (non-abusive) to work
through it?

7. If those actions are inevitably abusive
 - a. Do you need to take a time out from group till you've worked
through your issue? Can the group support you in that? Will they
shame you?
 - b. Is there someone else you can talk to regarding your
issues/feelings? Who? When? - Are you ready to ask?
When will you be ready? Are you 'happy' where you're at?

If you're not ready to move, are you holding onto shame/anger
/blame/resentment? - If you've been hurt, how can you take care
of you?

8. What other options do you have?
 - a. Are they what you want?
- If not, what is it you do want?
- How can you create what you want?

- b. Do you feel as though you are being pushed in one direction or another?
 - c. What are you resisting? Why? What happens if you go with it?
 - d. Is the group conscious of what it is creating? Ask them?
9. How can you re-establish working relationships/trust with the men in your group?
- a. Is that what they want?
(perhaps some unspoken dysfunctional rules are being applied and need to be confronted).
 - b. Where do you start? What, for you, has broken down in group?
How far back do you need to go to establish functional/healthy processes?
Are you/they ready to go back to that place?
 - c. Can you visualise what will overcome an issue?
 - d. How much energy will it take? Do you have enough?
Have you been down that road before with these men?
Do their actions say they are not ready to be in that place? - If so, again, what do you need to do to take care of you?
10. Is the group listening/responding to you?
What is going on for them? How do they see you/what you want?
Ask. (Sometimes we want completely different things, and cannot reasonably accommodate everyone)
11. Sometimes the time, the energy, the circumstances are 'right' to let go and move on; sometimes we even create an 'unsolvable' issue (unconsciously) to help us make that decision, because it can be a difficult one to make - after all, much has been invested over time, and many good things have been

experienced.

- a. How much ownership can I take in this issue? Did I, in fact, create it?
- b. How much reasonably belongs to other men?
- c. Is it time to renew and recommit to group and work on together?
- d. Or is it time to let go and move on? And let those men remaining have their experience together? Are there other things calling me that need my time/energy?
- e. Am I able to let group know of what I'm taking ownership for, as I move on?

Appendices

The appendix contains selections that could not comfortably fit into the structure of the rest of the Handbook.

Appendix 1 - [Taking Care of Yourself](#) - Examining attitudes and behaviours

Appendix 2 - [Why is Men's Work about Non-Judgement?...](#) - Examining attitudes/results of 'judgement'

Appendix 3 - [Poetry](#) - Shared experiences and the language of emotion

Appendix 1

Focus: Taking Care of Yourself

Everyone should know, and apply, the first law of the universe. "What's that?", I hear you say, don't you know it? It's very simple:

Universal Law #1

Take Good Care of Yourself!

Unfortunately dysfunction/abuse is endemic in our society, and at its core it is disrespectful of the 'beingness' of the individual, who suffers not only the immediate trauma and disturbing feelings, but also a deeper wound to their soul, and they may become cut off from, and begin to devalue, their inner self. As a result of the abuse, it's an unpleasant place to go because hurt comes up for us that as children we have no place to go to heal. But as adults we have a new opportunity to take care of ourselves, and even to go back and heal the broken places. The hardest step may be the first, but contains the realization that "yes, I am worth it!"; and the ideas below are strong foundations upon which you can restructure your life, and find new friends.

Heart

Acknowledge your own feelings - it is ok to have feelings! - it's ok to ask for help!

If your feelings are overwhelming - [pick up the phone and talk](#) - have a few #'s on hand to call. (The local crisis line is a good place to start - its usually 24

hour, in Vancouver 604 872 3311) Even if your feelings are unpleasant; name them, ask yourself what they are about - wait for an answer -what is the felt-sense in your body? Are your feelings telling you to act in some way?

Find a safe non-shaming place to share your feelings - on a regular basis!

ie a men's group, 12-step group (Co-Dependents Anon., ACOA, AA etc), a sympathetic therapist/counsellor - it's important to have somewhere to go to talk issues through; it's a mistake to make our partners our support group, for if we lose our partner, we've just lost our support group as well

Start to define your boundaries - be aware of and respect other peoples boundaries

some things people may say or do to us are hurtful/disrespectful /inappropriate - rehearse how you might stop that inappropriate behaviour respectfully. Study communication skills. The ultimate boundary' is distance - can you walk away, and let go, if they won't listen to you?

Tell yourself you're worth it - no matter what! (he or she or they might think...)

give yourself the gift of being good to yourself - time spent in Nature (woods, beaches etc) restores us

It's ok to cry and grieve your losses - find the time and a safe place to do that

that's how we heal! - or else we stay stuck in that wound

Body

Give yourself enough sleep! Enough rest; enough exercise - enough play!

Ask your body what it needs - learn to listen for its answer - if you ask, it will answer!

Eat when you're hungry - stop when you're full!

What came first, clocks or stomachs? Cooking for yourself is a healing, simple method of self-care

Find a support group for any addictions - and work the program

Remember to be gentle on yourself - call your 'phone buddy' when it gets tough

Mind

What do you need to learn (ideas/theories/philosophies) to take care of yourself? - go look for it.

Why/when did you stop? Did you give that job to someone else? Put your 'study' into your schedule.

Does it have to be a certain way - for you?

Whose plan is that? Is it yours really? - or one you just adopted? What's your plan?

Try the 'art of surrender' - and let go of 'how it looks' or the 'way it's supposed to be'.

Don't fight what you can't change. Let others be who they are, even if it's not what you want, or did they agree to join your program? - sometimes pain happens and no-one is 'wrong', we just want different things...

Soul

The spark of divinity is within you - according to some religions/philosophies

Are you willing to be responsible for how you feel/act - and thereby empower yourself? Are you responsible for what you create? - or you're a victim & that's someone else's responsibility? Self-care is self-love and feeds and nourishes the soul

Spirit

Does the still small voice of spirit still speak to you?

Renewal and healing brings us back to our centre, wherein lives compassion and spirit & our true self

The Challenge of Men's Lives

It's very easy for us to get disconnected from ourselves, our lives are so busy, we're running around taking care of so many things and others, that we sometimes (most of the time?) forget to take care of ourselves. We can get so caught up in 'fixing' things, 'making it right', doing it the way it's 'supposed to be done' - and sometimes we measure our self-worth and identity by these doings/accomplishments - so that when we get to extreme circumstances eg loss of job/career, or loss of relationship/marriage, home/family - that we feel deeply betrayed, our lives have 'become worthless', or even not worth living. It's from this scenario that men sometimes make choices with tragic consequences ie the use of violence, or even suicide, in a maladaptive response to the overwhelming feelings they're experiencing.

But how do we get to this place? Why are the feelings so overwhelming? And what are healthier responses to these circumstances/feelings?

Well, part of a man's experience, part of how he's been raised, arguably, is to repress his feelings - in order to 'take care of business'. This actually works, for a while, and we get rewarded for our accomplishments, by our families, partners, society - they appreciate and receive benefits from the service that men provide, and continue to reward us. And so the process supports itself - ask yourself: does the job you do fulfil and satisfy you in an inner sense? If not, why do you do it? Obviously, for the material and other benefits it provides; we need to eat, sleep somewhere, 'earn' affection/intimacy - get these basic needs met. And implicit in this 'social contract' is the promise that along the way we will receive the reward/validation of partner, family, home, and status (as a contributing member of society, vs a failure or a derelict or bum or welfare leech - the stigma of the unemployed). And in fact we use our material luxuries to 'prove' to others and ourselves just how great we're doing - of course needing more and better things to keep the image/idea alive, potentially becoming more and more disconnected from our inner selves, if we don't take the time

to focus on and work with these inner issues.

The above scenario works for many people; they're willing to sacrifice their deeper, less immediate inner selves to have all those things, and conform to these most immediate and obvious social standards. Some others aren't really happy about it, but there are few models or mentors for alternative behaviour/lifestyles, so they go along with it, hoping it will work out. Others eg 'suffering' artists, religious recluses, are willing to forego the conventional luxuries, in the pursuit of self-expression, and to enjoy that inner life. In a psychological sense, some individuals have such a strong inner motivation, that they are compelled to break with social conventions and break free of limiting norms and values, defining their own limits for themselves. Some individuals create for themselves (consciously or unconsciously) a self-reality that is so alien from the norm that we call them 'crazy', and by normal standards may be deemed unable to be responsible for themselves.

We all live somewhere along this continuum of behaviours, from utterly conventional to crazily different - why then do some seemingly 'normal'/conventional people 'go crazy' and eg a man killing 9 members of his estranged wife's family? - or a mother drowning her 2 children? -or commit suicide? These tragic acts speak to an overwhelming inner compulsion/feeling that these individuals were unable to cope with. They were unable to ask for help to deal with their inner suffering. Why?

- **Perhaps, for their whole lives they have been denying and repressing their inner lives/feelings.**
- **Perhaps, to even contemplate asking for help is to risk an overwhelming upsurge of life-long denied emotion.**
- **Perhaps, to ask for help, in their minds, is to be a failure and to lose their whole rationale for the way they've lived their lives (impossible without a support structure/model?)**
- **Perhaps, using the warped logic of extreme emotional disturbance, they are 'fixing' the problem, and continuing to 'take care of business' by taking these tragic actions, ie**

these actions somehow are 'normal' to them, fulfilling their social conditioning and self-expectation; any other action becoming 'abnormal', or not even possible to contemplate.

- **Perhaps, they are only able to see their problems as existing outside themselves, and that by affecting/attacking the outer circumstance, they hope it will take the feelings away.**
- **Perhaps, they are experiencing deep feelings of abandonment, loss, betrayal, aloneness, fear; these may become anger or rage, and may be turned inwards or projected outwards in violence.**

The opportunity exists for our society to be more pro-active in setting-up support systems for men. Many exist for women (unfortunately these too are often after-the-fact programs rather than preventative and often have insufficient funding themselves), few exist for men. I believe our society is beginning to see the need for these programs, to alleviate suffering, and ultimately to prevent tragedies, as a new model becomes known in our culture - of non-shaming support programs that acknowledge and validate men's inner life (shaming programs only support the status-quo and are counter-productive - if a man just hears more of 'what he's supposed to be', it's just more of what he's heard all his life -nothing's changed for him, and his health and 'beingness' is thus not supported). Of course this means that society confronts it's own values of 'what men are supposed to be', as opposed to who we really are; this will be a significant renewal of the social contract, and amounts to a sea-change. and perhaps this is why there has been so much inertia, unwillingness to 'see', we are basically re-inventing ourselves and our relationships - no small order - we indeed live in interesting times.

In the meantime, don't forget!:

Universal Law #1

Take Good Care of Yourself!

Appendix 2

Why is Men's Group Work About Non-Judgement And not about Advising, Changing, Fixing or Challenging Another Man?

I've attempted to break group behaviours down into clear and straightforward concepts - the Fundamental Principles - and as written they represent my idea of what a men's group could be. There are other types of groups, based on different principles eg 'encounter groups', '12 step groups' - which have their own Principles, Modalities and Outcomes. At any rate I feel it is beneficial for the group to try to understand that what we achieve in group (Outcome) is based entirely on 'How we treat each other', which again has it's own basis in the Principles we use and apply. Thus any 'group behaviour' can be analysed in this way - if someone suggests a certain type of 'behaviour' or approach, it would be helpful to consider what is the Principle behind this action, and what are the possible outcomes.

One area of obvious contention comes under Principle 2 - Non-judgement. The idea of 'challenge' is often discussed in groups and carries its own pitfalls for reasons outlined below:

1. We experience 'self-challenge' simply by attending and confronting our own issues.
2. It is appropriate for a man to say 'challenge me' or 'I need some advice' to ask for group input ie that man is asking for what he needs - Principle 6
3. It is not appropriate for a man who is telling his story to be arbitrarily challenged/advised by another man:
 - a. Maybe he just needs to be heard right now - and may experience

a challenge as invasive or even abusive - as he shares (and reveals himself) from a vulnerable deep place.

- b. Am I really listening? - Principle 3 - or considering how to formulate my challenge/advice? Some deep healing occurs simply when we listen to and witness another man. Perhaps my challenge is for myself, to really listen and appreciate what is being said?
 - c. Am I owning my stuff? - Principle 5 - Any reaction/feeling I have that occurs as I listen to another man belongs to me - I need to take ownership - and not try to 'fix' him, a common error, based on my own value system which amounts to a 'judgement.' Perhaps my challenge belongs to myself - why did this feeling come up for me, what is it about?
 - d. Am I Speaking my Truth? - Principle 4 - and allowing him to speak his truth as he sees it? In this modality we come to our own healing in our own time, as each of us is allowed to tell our stories without them being rejected, judged or ridiculed. This is a powerful experience, and may be the first/only time (in a men's group) that we have this opportunity - and is again a healing experience.
4. It is appropriate/respectful and non-invasive to ask a man if he would like some feedback etc- and his wishes in this regard being respected - he knows when he's ready - better than anyone else.
5. In general terms, any kind of 'judgement' carries the implication that that man is 'wrong' for having those ideas/feelings/wants. Outside of group this happens inevitably to all of us, and each of us necessarily makes these judgements in our daily lives. Arguably each culture sets up its 'norms' and expectations/values that governs our lives; again arguably in our culture men experience judgements that block our self-expression, lead to us stuffing our feelings and becoming disconnected from them, and also to becoming isolated from each other in any meaningful sense. In group its

about setting up a new 'system' of non-judgement to have a different emotional experience in our lives.

6. This really does determine how 'deep' a group can go in its journey; as men take risks to reveal their issues, they become vulnerable (this is how we 'do' relationship) - this can be scary/unusual/unexpected even shocking - sometimes a reaction comes out of unconscious mind and here the real work begins to own and validate my own reaction and work with what my reaction is about. Too often these reactions are 'dumped' or projected onto another man inappropriately, just at his moment of greatest vulnerability (out of fear - it can be hard to own your own reactions). If a man is judged or even shamed in this way this inevitably blocks 'deeper' group processing, and a group may find itself stuck at a superficial level of sharing without anyone wishing to take the risk of revealing himself and being shamed for it. Stuckness and conflict may occur around some men being ready to and wishing to go deeper, and others not being ready and blocking that process.

Generally then I feel the concept of challenge is a difficult one for a beginning men's group, with some pitfalls to be avoided. Perhaps the biggest challenge is the one each individual gives himself, and the biggest gift and support we can offer each other is acceptance and non-judgement.

The above notes are my understanding around the concept of 'challenge' and are presented for discussion. It is not expected that a group will instantly be able to apply these ideas, but that it is a process that they work at over time, to discuss and change, to come to a fuller understanding of how to be a 'support group'. I expect this discussion will be an ongoing one in the group and bring its own rewards.

Appendix 3

Poetry

Poetry is included in this edition to add to the richness of this material, and hopefully to add to the experience of the men undertaking men's group work using this handbook as a guide.

Poetic expression is of course very subjective, but for me is the 'language of emotion', where an idea, a mood, a feeling can be encapsulated in a few lines and so achieve an expression it might otherwise not have had. This for me is especially helpful when exploring issues from the past that I only now have an opportunity to work on and understand.

The themes chosen attempt to reflect 'relationship issues' and experiences, and more, some of the poems explore the mythic and spiritual dimensions of life, a place that I have come to through my men's work. Perhaps some men will have had similar experiences and perhaps some of these poems explore typical situations shared by many men, and may be profitably shared in a group setting.

If these words inspire or assist some men to connect to their feelings and 'language of emotion', whether through writing, or sharing, or reflecting - if so, then my purpose is achieved. Read on and enjoy.

Note that all the poems in this edition are written by the author. More poetry is available in a companion volume to the handbook - 'A Man's Journey - Poetry for Men and the Women who care about them'.

~ Poetry ~

Poetry you haven't written, is not poetry -
it's an invitation.

The poetry you write, is a beginning -
and more than this,

perhaps it is

ten thousand beginnings -

who can tell?

~ Never Written ~

A poem never written
is a grief with too many tears
uncried,
a joy with too much bliss
unfound,
a heart afraid to beat
in case someone might hear.

Are these feelings?
Are these thoughts?
Can you hold a pen?
So-
 why do you wait?

Be assured,
a simple pen
can hold the gulf of your soul,
even until the last ebb,
and I will meet you there on the shore
happy to see you chasing after it -
How we will laugh!

~ My Shoes ~

And the man said to him,
"what you need to do is...", or was it -
"what you should do is...", or was it -
"you know what your problem is...".

Then he said to the man -
"Thank you for your wisdom -
you seem to know a lot about me.
Tell me, what did I do yesterday?
What do you think I might do tomorrow?
Can you tell me about my mother,
or father? - or their parents - or their issues?
If you haven't walked in my shoes,
how can you really know about me,
and what I need to do for myself?"

"Maybe your advice is really meant
for someone else?
Perhaps it's meant for you?
May I return it to you?
Because right now, I just need you to listen;
and then I will listen as you speak,
because I'm sure you know yourself
a lot better than you know me.

~ My New Rules ~

My new rules

don't include giving myself away -
no one respects what is cheap
and easily replaced.

My new rules

don't include having to earn your love
because, sooner or later,
my pockets will be empty
and my heart too heavy.

My new rules

say it's ok to rest when tired,
and even to sleep in the middle of the day
if my body wisdom says so -
and everything else? - must wait.

My new rules

say it's ok to listen to the dark imaginings
of my unconscious mind - as it crosses
my dream threshold - to tell me my
timeless truth - now not forsaken.

My new rules

say it's ok for me to have all my feelings,
for they inform and fill out my life,
and tell me who I really am -
and they don't have to be suppressed
to go along with someone else's plan.

My new rules

say it's ok to repose in nature,
and enjoy its energy and beauty
as it touches my deepest self -
and I do not have to bend it to my will -
like some desert storm wind of hate.

My new rules
say it's ok to live for myself -
to let go of your expectations,
to be who I really am,
not a shadow man, like too many others,
who when you look in their hearts - you see
no distinction, or granularity, or colour,
just flat, dark, empty shadow space,
walked upon by too many others,
as though pushed over and told:
'Stay there and don't move until I tell you to!'
And they shrink and stay flat, through fear.

My new rules
say it's ok to say what's going on -
for me,
after all, there might just be someone
who may want to listen.

And I wonder
how many screechings and scrawkings
and complaints I will hear
from people whose ideas I've challenged
and confronted and trashed -
because their coddled wants and needs
have been forsaken by
my new rules.

~ Honour Your Tears ~

Honour your tears,
they come from a deep place -
a universal well -
an underground connection
that we all reach down into.

Do not hide your tears -
as much as you need to weep,
I need to see you weep,
to know that my depth
is no mistake.

Do not wipe your tears -
this feeling is as true as any other,
and perhaps the beginning of them all;
there is no shame braveheart,
stand, and be seen.

Do not fight your tears,
each of them is an already fallen warrior
that you knew well, like a brother;
Now he rides in glory, across your face.
Honour your tears.

~ Hold Me ~

Hold me, not with your arms,
that is too tight,
it repels me.

Hold me, not with your ego,
grasping and wanting, never satisfied,
that suffocates me.

Hold me, not with your eye,
it judges too harshly,
and disallows me.

Hold me, not with your body,
it swallows me,
and I disappear and lose myself.

Hold me, not with your mind,
for in its labyrinth
I become a minotaur.

Hold me, but with your heart,
and its simplicity,
and all else shall follow.

But you know that is not holding at all,
and so you cannot do it,
except by supreme act of will;
a gift most difficult to give,
but ever wanted.

~ Direction ~

Scarcely was I moving
before moving frightened me.

So then I stopped again,
and rediscovered the fear
that had originally told me to move.

Perhaps a new direction? -
I thought;
But no, that way lies fear too.

I have stood still long enough to know
that this place holds my death.

But ahead, and in which direction,
lies my deliverance?

'They' cannot tell me,
I have asked.

Some said they knew,
But they were wrong,
for me.

Some others, wiser,
said they could not say,
for me.

And they simply wished me well,
and good luck.

So I was left with myself,
and my wish to know,
and my fear.

And my fear came from inside,

so I had to look at that place,
and confront
what I had tried to move away from.

And my fear was a small child,
lost, alone and abandoned;
how easy it was to love him,
and help him,
now that I can see him.

I love to watch him play now,
and he lets me play too,
but he always picks the game.

One day he says, when I'm bigger,
we'll play one of your games,
but for now
see if you can catch me!

And somehow,
the direction we go together,
doesn't seem too important anymore,
after all, it's just a game,
and we're having fun.

~ Forget About You ~

There is no such thing as a broken heart;
I created all of who you were,
out of the longings of my imagination -

There is no such thing as a broken heart;
You just came along to fill the gap,
something I thought I was ready for -

There is no such thing as a broken heart;
It was my need, and I built you up
in my mind to be all that I wanted -

There is no such thing as a broken heart;
It was just coincidence that we met like that,
just a strange chance encounter, it means little -

There is no such thing as a broken heart;
Really, it doesn't matter that it was you,
it could have been anyone else -

There is no such thing as a broken heart;
This feeling is just a codependent weakness I have,
I'm only holding onto it for security -

There is no such thing as a broken heart;
You see, it won't be long 'till it's all under control,
because I know there's no such thing...

~ Circles ~

The circle of compassion
needs a starting point -

The circle of hope
is stumbled upon along the way -

The circle of love
is a friend who joins you
at your invitation -

The circle of vision
is renewed at every step -

The circle of fear
grows smaller and disappears -

The circle of enlightenment
expands and joins with all others
as you choose.

You are the center
and the universe moves with you,
as you move with it.

~ Love is ~

Love is a feather
that startles
then caresses
then eases
the hardest hard heart
into softer
compassionate
action.
All there is to do is - love.

~ Allow ~

Allow
me
to be lost -
just once.

Even if I mistakenly call it 'Love';
I do need to lose myself,
and I seem to have picked you.

You said 'OK' -
maybe you were losing yourself too -
falling through space
with a kundalini snake
 wrapped around our bodies,
it was blissful, and terrifying.
(She doesn't like 'No' - not that I
 could have ever said it...)

You woke up first,
and I'm still falling,
with none of the bliss,
and all of the terror;
and I realize I'm still lost,
and wait to hit bottom.

Will I
allow
myself
- and find a way -
to catch me
as I fall?

~ Enlightenment ~

Enlightenment

is an elephant, held at many places,

by many blind men;

but he is strong,

and she can carry all of us,

if we can hold on.

But if you let go,

don't fret,

another will be along any moment,

for this path is often used;

His steps already shake the ground -

Listen,

she trumpets her arrival excitedly

knowing that we wait for him.

~ Together Apart ~

In relationship,
do we really learn about togetherness? -
or separation? -
the truth of separateness,
of individuality,
of unmet desires and expectations,
of inadequacies and disappointments -
the brief joy of union,
the long grief of letting go?

In my choice to know you
I am confronted by our stark differences,
our uniqueness makes us real,
but will ever divide us;
What then is relationship? -
if not the wisdom of letting go?

~ Making Love ~

Making love
isn't
what two people
do
alone in a darkened room

it's what
one person
does privately in their heart

but then
it is not to be hidden away
but to be shared
at that place
where it is hardest to share at all

Else we reap the wild wind
of our fear and mistrust
if one of us at least
does not begin to make love.

~ Intimacy ~

Which version of intimacy
works for you?

Sex is ok -
but don't talk about it?

Feelings are ok -
mine, not yours?

What I want is ok -
not what you want?

Is it time to tango once more? -
in a minefield
littered with rotting concepts
we are unable to bury?

~ Truth ~

As the world shrinks
the new religion is the
re-merging of all religions,
back to the center
where you and I stand,
where we will discover
more than ourselves.

Truth is not absolute
except in the moment
before the next,
when it changes,
as you do,
except in your heart.

Therefore, know your heart

And a broken heart
is thus the cracking of time
through to eternity -
and the splitting of Truth,
through to a deeper truth,
in a tighter place
at the apex.

To love is to say 'yes' to that fall -
to love is to know the broken places -
knowing that you are what heals and binds them.

~ Scared ~

You are so beautiful,
that I don't want
to even touch you
or know you
in any way,
or even really fantasize about you
in-case
in-case it isn't true,
your beauty I mean;
what if underneath that
so so sublime veneer
there was even a hint of
some kind of ugliness -
I couldn't bear it
it would destroy me -
I need your beauty -
and nothing else -
I need to believe that beauty exists,
and maybe it's unfair to pick on you -
but your beauty is
the possibility of my beauty,
and I can't destroy that,
after all,
what if beauty were to reject me?

~ Here to Heal ~

The sins of the father
and the mother
are not really sins at all.

Of course they would want the best,
for themselves, their sons, daughters;
then - was it denied, or unattainable,
or an unknown thing?

We struggle, though circumstances,
fate itself,
may seem to deny us.

We try harder - and lay claim with our cries
to our human destiny;
"Ours is to suffer!"

Yet - nothing is denied,
and we are not meant to suffer.
I believe ours is to uncover the mystery
of the unknown.

To seek - discover - reveal - share - what?
Truth! Your truth - no one else's.
This is the fair wind in the storm of your life.

Be not content with anything less -
in its ignorance
only here have you failed.

I can forgive all else
- and I struggle to find compassion
for ignorance
- for it means you never even tried.

Was it not important to you?

On the scales of your life
what was as heavy as your Truth?

Yes,
I am afraid that I will forget;
this is my Truth.

~ Don't Know ~

If you don't know how to,
or even what to love,
and bless -
start with a pet, a cat or dog,
and pour out your love to it,
remembering first to respect its being,
and its wishes and needs and frivolities.

Love is all of these things - and you the lover;
and every time that being comes to you
it brings its joy and peace and serenity
and a teaching - Love.

It knows your inner spirit
and inherent worth
and slowly you will too.

This is all there is;
the beginning, the middle, and the end.

~ Eyes ~

Within the eyes of a child

shines the bright light of the future.

Is it not sad to see

a child whose eyes have been dimmed?

Give that child love.

Within the eyes of a man

we see now the light and the dark -

but does he?

Is it not sad to see

a man lost in the shadows,

swallowed in the dark that is -

hidden from a brighter unknown?

Encourage him.

Within the eyes of the old man

we see now many colours

and a deep cavernous yearning

- reflecting what might have been

- waves of regret...

Or perhaps a stillness

- and an ever present knowing

- deep and simple and patient

Holding?

Give him your time.

~ Remembering ~

I don't need to sell my soul
my ego has already leased it,
and thinks he owns it,
thinks he's in control.

And so he takes me to hell,
says he knows what's right,
and will fight for it,
will even kill for it.

Until I remember humility,
the sacredness of all things,
and their rights,
to existence, and acceptance.

And when I remember
I ask my ego to walk one step behind me,
- to put down his sword;
This feels like heaven.

And when I forget,
my ego steps in front of me without me seeing,
- and his sword is drawn and ready;
This feels like hell.

So each moment is simply one
of remembering
or forgetting. It starts with me
- not you or him or them -
always with me.

Love is a remembering.
Am I ready to remember? - It takes effort -
this too is easy to forget
- or avoid - or deny - or refuse...

~ There's Two Sides ~

I could stay in my room
and avoid all relationships, interactions;
or I could learn about love.

I could trust you, become vulnerable,
and maybe be hurt by you;
or I could learn about love.

I could fight and argue with you,
and try to get what I want;
or I could learn about love.

I could be jealous and grasping
and want you for all of myself;
or I could learn about love.

I could blame you and get angry with you
and even hurt you in many ways;
or I could learn about love.

I could condemn you, vilify you
and even destroy you in my resentment;
or I could learn about love.

I could do all of these things,
and more;
or I could learn about love.

And it seems to me, there's always two sides.

~ Bridges ~

This struggle, this pain,
we ask: "Why?";
and: "What is it for?".

In the moment of my fleeting purest insight
I know
 it is me seeing the limits
 of my thoughts and understanding.

And these turmoil's
 are the bridges to another place.

I can choose
 to stay on this side
 and spin
 in the vortex of my own confusion

or
 after I've had enough of nausea
 and other pain

I can walk across -
 even though it is a bridge shrouded in fog
 to nowhere - 'know I not where'.

This choice I make
 to face this fear
 to grow.

Now I must find others
 who can help to show me
 the way
 to myself.

~ All are Welcome ~

Do not think you have not been invited,
You have.

But there are things you must do,
obligations, requirements, duties,
and these things keep you from the celebration.

But tell me, who do you do these things for?
For your family? Yourself? - Your friends?
Is your gift freely given?
Or do you sacrifice yourself
 - and have resentments?
Is this how it must be?

What is your deeper wish? - Dare to wish it!
Freedom? And what would you do with freedom?
Would you not find your greater self there?
And would you not find
 even greater gifts in that place,
that you might return with and share?

Accept no limitations!
For your lesser self is no substitute for the
 depth and breadth of your possibilities.
This too love asks of us.
This too we must speak when asked,
for it is only through fear of our greatness that we
 manifest loving obligations to keep us small.
So - be great! - Be incredible!
 And share your totality!

~ Where you Stand ~

Do not think you do not know the way,
you have only forgotten.

At any point you only have to stay still long enough
to allow what was to catch up to you.

By standing still you say to the external world
'I will know you - in my stillness'.

These forms we see say there is only ever change,
but what of the unchanging heart?

This alone was, is, and will be;
hold to it - and the universe will come to you

- where you stand.

Last Word

There is a philosophy that says:

'only by holding onto the idea of separation can we experience separation'.

This of course asks us to raise our consciousness towards the idea and actuality and expression of our unity, the spiritual idea that we are all one in the universe, we are all connected. We all want and need and experience different things in our lives, ie we are 'different', but beyond that, there is something that draws and holds us together.

As I do my men's work, I am aware that part of my motivation is to have that experience of unity; and yet, of course, I am continually confronted by the 'appearance of separation', as issues arise, and the work I have to do to go beyond 'what that looks like' to see the reality beyond. Sometimes I fail, and I get caught up in appearances, and have the real human experience of holding onto those appearances, and holding onto those feelings that I choose to manifest, perhaps even blaming or judging another.

But at some point, when the time is right, I am able to remind myself that it is time to let go (of separation) and forgive, both myself and any other. And I remind myself that it is a journey, and I attempt to be open to the wisdom of the teachers around me. And the opportunity presents itself for a new beginning, a new start, as the universe, and unity, will forever wait for me to get there, as I am able.

In spending time with this handbook, I have necessarily been having to explore separation! - something that I am uncomfortable in doing. The hope, of course, is that by raising consciousness around separation - for each of us to be consciously in that uncomfortable place as the issue arises in our group process - and by maturely looking at what we need to create to move beyond it - will we be more able to experience unity,

by taming and bringing into the light its slippery darker half.

Whatever your experience of men's work has been, perhaps the final question should be:

'What am I holding onto?'

And consider that perhaps there is still more work to be done, when the time is right for you.

Felix Markevicius.