

Re-evaluation Counseling Tools

News and Goods: Each person in a group says what is going well—in their personal life, in the projects they are working on, and so on. News and Goods at the beginning of a group interaction pull people's attention away from upsets, discouragement, and other preoccupations that make it difficult for them to think about the topic at hand and help them feel connected to each other.

Appreciations: Everyone appreciates another person in a go-round in the group. No one is left out. Appreciations help people realize that others know they have something positive to contribute to the group's efforts. They help people participate more fully in discussions. Collective work goes better when people feel included, and appreciations are one way to ensure that they do.

It is easier for people to make changes, create new ideas, and correct mistakes when they are pleased with themselves, and people are pleased with them. Self-appreciation and appreciating each other help establish this inclusive environment.

Speaking order: In this format people from oppressed groups speak first, before members of groups that play oppressor roles speak. This makes possible meaningful communication between people in oppressed groups and people assigned by society to oppressor roles.

Sessions: Two (or sometimes three) people taking turns listening to each other without interruption. (Sessions can be as short as a few minutes each or as long as the two people agree upon.) Each person gets an equal amount of time. The first person talks about whatever they want to talk about. The listener just pays attention. They don't interrupt to give advice or comment or tell how they feel. After the agreed-upon time, the talker becomes the listener, and the one who listened first talks about anything they want to talk about.

Sessions can make discussions more effective. They give people a chance to process and absorb new information and to find and formulate their thoughts. They drain off emotions that can interfere with people's ability to think together and discuss controversial matters respectfully.

Think-and-listens: Three to six people take equal turns speaking their thoughts without response or comment from the others in the group. Those not talking listen with alert, aware, and interested attention. Listeners do not indicate agreement or disagreement with what is said and do not refer to what was said. This allows people to think creatively without having to worry about criticism or arguments.

Support groups: Three to eight people take equal turns listening to one another and encouraging each other to talk openly. Participants are encouraged to release (discharge) any emotional distress that comes up (see box below). The group can be based on a specific constituency (for example, African-heritage people, women, young people) or on issues (climate change, educational change, and so on). A support group can also consist of a diverse collection of people.

Discussion format: (1) There is a facilitator. (2) People discuss the topic rather than the personalities or characteristics of the people in the discussion. (3) No one speaks twice until everyone has spoken once (no matter how much patience or encouragement it takes for people who do not speak up easily to participate). (4) No one speaks four times before everyone has spoken twice. Everyone is heard—especially those who don't tend to speak up. If time is an issue or some people dominate, each speaking turn can be timed.

Panels: People from an oppressed group communicate about the reality of their life experiences to people who are conditioned to take on an oppressor role. On a panel, in front of a meeting, they share details about their lives. One useful set of questions is (1) What is very positive about being a member of the group that you belong to? (2) What has been hard about being a member of the group that you belong to? (3) What do you wish people understood about your life as a member of this group? (4) What do you wish people would never do or say again to you or any other member of your group?

Re-evaluation Counseling is a process whereby people of all ages and backgrounds can learn how to exchange effective help with each other in order to free themselves from the effects of past hurtful experiences. The theory assumes that everyone is born with tremendous intellectual potential, natural enthusiasm for life, and caring, but that these qualities have become blocked and obscured as the result of accumulated distress experiences, which begin early in our lives.

Any young person would recover from such distress spontaneously by use of the natural process of emotional discharge (crying, trembling, raging, laughing, and so on). This process is usually interfered with by well-meaning people who erroneously equate the emotional discharge (the healing of the hurt) with the hurt itself.

When adequate emotional discharge can take place, the person is freed from the behavior and feeling left by the hurt. Then their basic loving, cooperative, intelligent, and enthusiastic nature can operate more effectively in looking out for their own interests and the interests of others, and they are more capable of acting successfully against injustice.

The Work of Sustaining All Life and United to End Racism

It is possible to limit the effects of human-caused climate change and restore the environment—and some big changes are needed if this is to happen. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism** believe the environmental crisis cannot be resolved without ending racism, genocide toward Indigenous peoples, classism, sexism, and other oppressions. The impact of environmental destruction and climate change falls most heavily on people targeted by these particular oppressions. Making the changes needed will require a massive movement, spanning the globe, of people of every background fighting the effects of both climate change and racism.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we believe that the barriers to building a sufficiently large and powerful movement include (1) longstanding divisions (usually caused by oppression, and especially racism and classism) between nations and between groups of people within nations, (2) widespread feelings of discouragement and powerlessness among the populations of all countries, (3) denial of or failure to engage with the environmental crisis, and (4) difficulties in effectively addressing the connections between the environmental crisis and the failures of capitalism. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* work to address these issues and others.

The role of oppression

Our societies are based on exploitation and oppression demanding growth and profit with little regard for the effects on people, other life forms, or the Earth. Oppressions (such as racism, classism, sexism, and the oppression of young people) inflict tremendous injustices, limit access to resources, and damage the lives of billions of people. Once targeted by oppression, we are pulled to act out on others the hurts that we have experienced. Much of the emotional damage done to humans is the result of this passing on of hurt. Though humans are vulnerable to acting out oppression, oppressive behavior is not inherent, but arises only when a human has been hurt emotionally. Oppressive societies manipulate this vulnerability to establish and maintain economic exploitation.

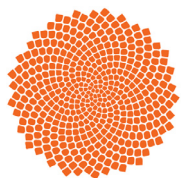
The importance of healing personal damage

The emotional harm done to us in our societies by oppression interferes with our ability to think clearly and sets groups of people against each other. This makes it difficult for us to think about and respond effectively to the environmental crisis. People would not cooperate with a society that exploits people and damages the environment if they had not first been hurt.

Healing from the hurts that help to hold oppression in place and lead to other damaging behavior is not quick or easy work. Many of us resist it or we may have survived by numbing ourselves to the damage we carry and by assuming that we will never be free of it.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we have learned that it is possible to free ourselves from these hurts. We can heal from hurtful experiences if someone listens to us attentively and allows and encourages us to release the grief, fear, and other painful emotions. This happens by means of our natural healing processes—talking, crying, trembling, expressing anger, and laughing. By releasing distressed feelings in a supportive network, we can stay united, hopeful, thoughtful, joyful, and committed. This in turn strengthens us in building our movements to stop the effects of climate change and racism.

* *Sustaining All Life* (SAL) is an international grassroots organization working to end climate change within the context of ending all divisions among people. *United to End Racism* (UER) is a group of people of all ages and backgrounds, in many different countries, who are dedicated to eliminating racism in the world and supporting the efforts of all other groups with this goal. UER and SAL are projects of and use the tools of Re-evaluation Counseling. Re-evaluation Counseling (RC) is a well-defined theory and practice that helps people of all ages and backgrounds exchange effective help with each other in order to free themselves from the emotional scars of oppression and other hurts. By taking turns listening to each other and encouraging emotional release, people can heal old hurts and become better able to think, to speak out, and to organize and lead others in building a world in which human beings and other life forms are valued and the environment is restored and preserved.



Sustaining All Life

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