

About Peer Practice:

Cultivating Mindfulness and Nonviolence through Peer Practice

Taking part in a Peer Practice program will help you to cultivate nonviolent practices in ways that are unique and meaningful to your life and thus contribute to a nonviolent future for all. We do this in a variety of ways such as increasing our opportunities for practice and articulating our personal learning goals or “learning edge”. The main requirements to take part in this program are a familiarity with Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and a willingness to commit to approximately twelve hours of practice each month.

WHO WILL ENJOY THESE PROGRAMS

- Would you like to be able to communicate with clarity and consideration in challenging situations?
- Do you find the time between NVC practices too long to integrate your learning?
- Do you learn through a combination of listening and speaking and doing?
- Do you think you would practice more consistently and effectively if you were working regularly with a partner or in a small group of committed people?

If you answered “yes” to these questions then this 14-week program may be for you.

*“Peer Practice”
simply means practicing with our peers.*

OUTLINE OF A PEER PRACTICE PROGRAM

Using the three modalities of NVC, mindfulness, and restorative practices, each participant will gain deeper insight about his or her personal process of learning and creating new habits. Participants will also deepen their ability to create spaciousness for inner work and to maintain empathic connection with others.

Core Activities

Each 14-week program focuses on a particular overall subject which is reflected in the title of the Peer Practice program, for example: “Self-empathy”, “Mindful Communication”, or “Dialog and the Vernacular” are titles from recent programs. Each month in turn focuses on a particular element of the subject, and follows the same weekly pattern of activities by focusing on awareness, skills, working together in a circle, and harvesting the learning. Core Activities include the following:

Weekly Message Each week you will receive a weekly email message describing ways to address the monthly topics. The message will include 1) the Daily Reflection Practice, and 2) the Weekly Conversation to do with another participant.

Daily Reflection The purpose of a Daily Reflection is to provide a daily reminder of the topic and of our intention to integrate the skills more deeply.

Weekly Conversation The purpose of the Weekly Conversation is to provide a forum to practice listening empathically and speaking authentically with different people, as well as to practice specific elements related to the monthly topic.

Monthly Circle The purpose of the Monthly Circle is to come together to share honestly, compassionately and inclusively our stories, on relevant topics, knowing that the circle process will allow us to share in the wisdom of the group.

Journal Participants are encouraged to keep a journal throughout the program. This could be a written or audio journal. The purpose of a journal is to provide continuity and personal responsibility, as well as offer clarity about our inner processes. A journal also helps us to harvest our learning.

Support Call The purpose the Support Call is to provide the participant with any needed support throughout the program. An Intake Conversation happens before the start of the program, and Support Calls carry on monthly, ending with a Closing Call. These calls include whatever the participant wishes to talk about, or have questions about. For example, you may wish to share any difficulties or celebrations you've experienced; you may have a request for feedback or for empathy; you may wish to reiterate your learning goal or learning edge; or you may wish to give feedback about the program.

Fourteen Week Schedule

The first week of each program addresses "Beginnings" - this is a week to become familiar with the program and with other participants. The next three four-week cycles addresses one element or topic of the program title, and repeats in the following way:

Week 1 - We focus on our "awareness" of the specific topic

Week 2 - We focus on "skills" related to the specific topic

Week 3 - We come together in a "circle" to access the wisdom of the group in relation to the topic

Week 4 - We "harvest" our learning in relation to the topic

After two additional four-week cycles the final week addresses "Endings" in which we do a complete harvesting of all our learning and decide how each of us wants to carry our work forward.

Practical Requirements

- **Technical** – The technical requirements for the program are: phone; internet; and Skype. If these fall outside your present comfort zone, I am very willing to find ways to help you become familiar with each of these technical requirements.
- **Time** – The program averages 2-4 hours a week. For example 10 – 20 minutes / day reflection; 60 minutes / week weekly conversation with practice partner; 2 hour tele-circle each month (the tele- circle substitutes practice with a partner one week in the month); and 30 minute Monthly Support Call; comes to approximately four hours each week or sixteen hours per month.
- **Materials** - The principal materials include the weekly email message and your journal. If you are not comfortable with only having electronic copies, you may find it useful to have a binder to hold the emails. Participants also receive approximately six handouts during the program, in addition to a resource list if you are interested in exploring further any of the topics that come up during the course of the program.

REQUESTED CONTRIBUTIONS:

Sliding scale of \$75 - 200, or €60-150, for each program.

The amount I request for this program is the amount I estimate will make my work sustainable. I recognize we all have different levels of income and I am very willing to take time to come to an agreement with anyone who wishes to contribute less, or more, than the requested amount.

To apply to a program or to ask any questions,
please email Judith at
judith.lardner@gmail.com

ABOUT THE FACILITATOR

In 2000 I received a BA in Transpersonal Psychology from Burlington College Vermont, and in 2008 I received an MA in Liberal Studies from Empire State College. Both of these degrees were independent studies and my experience with independent study inspires much of my peer practice work. I am a certified Circle facilitator trainer, as well as a certified trainer with the Center for Nonviolent Communication (www.cnvc.org). Over the years I have attended many inspiring workshops, but I was not always able to fully integrate what I had learned. I recognized how much I needed to practice in my own personal way in order to explore further, often in a playful way, and to integrate the new learning. A Peer Practice program values learning from experts just as much it values learning from our own "inner teacher" as well as learning from "the wisdom of the group".

The Peer Practice model has the capacity to hold many ideas that will contribute to consistent and engaging practice. It is my hope that as individuals take part in the programs and enjoy co-facilitating programs, that they will go on to initiate other groups, and thus this method of peer practice will spread in an organic way. I can see the practice being used in any situation where people have been introduced to a new skill set and need a follow up strategy to integrate the skill set. Together we have shared numerous Peer Practice programs since the first program in 2011.

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"Many people like to read books about different spiritual traditions or to perform rituals but don't want to practice their teachings very much. The teachings can transform us no matter what religion or spiritual tradition we belong to, if we are only willing to practice."

Thich Nhat Hanh

KEY CONCEPTS

You may enjoy reading more about the key concepts, as well as as underlying concepts, that contribute to the Peer Practice program model:

Circles

In the peer practice model, circles provide a safe structure within which we are invited to share our stories, knowing that all our voices will be heard in our time together. To quote author and circle keeper Kay Pranis, *"A circle is a versatile restorative practice that can be used proactively, to develop relationships and build community or reactively, to respond to wrongdoing, conflicts and problems. Circles give people an opportunity to speak and listen to one another in an atmosphere of safety, decorum and equality."*

Choice

When I was developing the Peer Practice program an unexpected form of support came from reading the book about gaming called, *"Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World,"* by Jane Mc Gonigal. In this, she states that *"games make us happy because they are hard work that we choose for ourselves, and it turns out that nothing makes us happier than good, hard work"*. It is my hope that the activities that people choose in a Peer Practice program bring a similar kind of satisfaction.

Facilitators

Each program may have a single facilitator or two co-facilitators. The facilitator's role is to create safety, clarity and an invitation to practice. Specifically the facilitators compose the monthly topics, the weekly messages, and the monthly circle outline. And, similar to many kinds of circle facilitators, the facilitators often takes part in all the daily, weekly, and monthly activities along with the participants.

Feedback

The purpose of Feedback throughout the programs is to bring clarity and information about our present moment experience, and also to have awareness of our learning edge, and to have the information we need in order to move forward with purpose and meaning. Feedback comes in many forms, e.g. we regularly give ourselves feedback in the form of self-empathy, and we can request feedback in the form of reflection or empathy from our peers.

Guidelines

The guidelines express what all the participants are willing to agree to, in order to maintain a structure to do the practices. Each program starts with a generic set of guidelines and we edit these as meets our needs for safety and engagement in the practice. We use consensus (the actions that everyone agrees to) to create and edit our guidelines.

Harvesting

We value the time we give to reviewing and harvesting our work as a way to bring insight and integration to our practice. We give the fourth week of each month to harvesting the work of the previous three weeks.

Intention

Articulating my "intention" makes a commitment to my values. Stating the how, why, and when of my intention invites my actions to align with my values. Sometimes we use the term "learning edge" as a way to appreciate the changing nature of our work and focus. (see "Learning Edge" below)

Interdependence

Interdependence refers to that particular combination of control and support that is the core of restorative practices. It is not always an easy balance to find, and often brings up useful topics for practice. For example, participants often find scheduling their weekly practices an unexpected challenge, and sometimes this becomes a useful real-life topic for practice. When we see scheduling in the context of interdependence, i.e. it supports my practice as well as your practice, it can bring about a shift in our perception about how we grow and interact with our peer practitioners. Often it is through interdependence that we receive the necessary feedback to notice the shift and movement of our learning edges.

Learning Edge

Learning Edge is very similar to the term learning goal. While the latter term has a more fixed quality, Learning Edge implies growth and change, and invites our frequent attention and awareness, as well as regular appreciation for our work and effort. Sometimes, the term "Learning Edge is used interchangeably with "intention".

Mindful Conversations

We value all our interactions as an opportunity for practice. We try to be mindful of our way of showing up and being present with ourselves and with others. Mindfulness practice reminds us to stop, to breathe, and to notice; and the basic Nonviolent Communication (NVC) model gives us a structure to check in with ourselves by articulating our present moment feelings and needs. Take these two practices together, and we are more likely to find a way to connect in a meaningful way with ourselves and with others.

Play

We believe that if people are not having some fun in the program, then something's not working. This is not to say that all the work is light and breezy, often it can be very challenging and surprising. One of the questions I regularly ask myself is, where does it feel playful to address my learning edge? Where does it feel like it might be some fun? This is one of the ways we invite play to provide a balance between being focused and being open.

Practice

In the words of Thich Nhat Hanh, *"many people like to read books about different spiritual traditions or to perform rituals but don't want to practice their teachings very much. The teachings can transform us no matter what religion or spiritual tradition we belong to, if we are only willing to practice."* We believe that the greatest challenge to practicing is finding frequent occasions to do so without alienating our family, friends, and colleagues. Too many people have had the experience of using this new language of the heart only to be met with confusion and hostility. This program provides the space for regular and safe practice with our peers, so that we can become comfortable and skillful when communicating with our family, friends, and colleagues.

Purpose

The general purpose of a peer practice program is to provide an engaging and interdependent structure to support personal growth and social change. Participants are regularly reminded to articulate his or her purpose in the form of his or her learning edge.

Relationship

Peer practice values relationship as much as individuality. Active, flexible, and safe relationships promote motivation and playfulness, and thus we are more likely to stay engaged with the practice. The relationships we

develop with each other, create the capacity to address the overlapping stage of a formal learning along with integrating the skills into our personal lives.

Restorative

In restorative practices we aim to do things “with” rather than “to” or “for” people. Circles are a great example of a restorative practice. Much of the Peer Practice program is influenced by the philosophy of restorative practices. To read more information about restorative practices please go to the [International Institute for Restorative Practices](#)

Safety

Peer practice, similar to restorative practices, assumes people are willing to contribute to a safe place for practice. While we are aware that most consistent learning happens within an atmosphere of inclusivity and safety, we also recognize that any kind of meaningful change rarely feels safe or comfortable. Therefore we like to keep our awareness on everyone’s need for safety while we go through the process of growth and change.

Structure

Cultivating nonviolence happens when we develop a process or a structure within which to practice. Most restorative practices have a structure that has been formed out of consensus. It is our hope that everyone who completes the program will be able to create their own personal structure in which to continue to develop and deepen their skills of nonviolence.

Voluntary

Participants are regularly reminded to check in with their willingness and ability to respond to the different activities, and to tune in to the voluntary or habitual nature of their actions. In this way we practice choicefulness by articulating our met and unmet needs, and by making clear requests of ourselves and of others.

Witnessing

In the context of Peer Practice, witnessing refers to the quality of how we show up with our practice partner, in a circle, and even how we show up to read an email message. We practice showing up for others with presence, openness, acceptance, and empathy.