

Celebration and Mourning Group Practice

Conscious Communication Greater Madison Wisconsin

Preparation/materials needed: People can read this handout ahead of time. When it comes time to share needs guesses, the facilitator asks the listeners to share guesses, either by writing down a needs guess on a piece of paper and holding it up to the camera for computer screen display, or by typing it in the chat. It can be powerful when the needs guesses are offered in silence.

The source of the opening reading and activity is from *The Ongo Book: Everyday Nonviolence* by Catherine Cadden and Jessie Wiens. A few changes were made for clarity and to adapt the material for our online NVC meeting format.

Opening reading:

The practices of mindfulness and Nonviolent Communication enable us to understand every thought and every feeling as a present moment of celebration or mourning. This understanding can free us from the tendency to judge our thoughts as being negative, or something that keeps us from being present. Instead, we may consider thoughts as the mind's way to celebrate or mourn — they are like the mind's tears of gratitude and regret.

For example, when we criticize ourselves for a choice we made, that criticism can be seen as an expression of mourning. We are mourning the needs that weren't fulfilled in the moment of making that choice. We can hear the criticism as a kind of weeping, rather than an assault. Similarly, when the mind is anxiously thinking about the future and we are trying to avoid repeating a past experience, we can recognize that these thoughts are a form of tears about what happened in the past. Or, if the mind is excited making future plans (to re-create a pleasurable experience), we can see that as a wave of fulfillment coming over us, celebrating the needs that were touched by a past experience.

When we see this clearly, it becomes easier to live in the present moment and enjoy what we are experiencing. We can acknowledge the sentiment that is being expressed by our thoughts, feel that flavor of celebration or mourning in our bodies, and rest into the understanding of the needs that are being celebrated or mourned.

Activity in Small Groups: Celebration and Mourning Circles (Adapted from *The Onqo Book* and adjusted for online meeting format)

Invite people to have pen/paper handy to write down a needs guess so it is visible to the speaker. Or they can type a needs guess in the chat.

Facilitator reads the following guidance to the entire group before breaking into smaller groups:

The practice of coming together in community to share mourning and celebration is one of our oldest human traditions. We come together to welcome, hear, and appreciate what each of us feels, with the understanding that this sharing in itself has deep value. Grief and joy are not problems to be fixed or burdens to be carried — they are natural expressions of being alive and being human. Celebration and Mourning Circles are rememberings of who we are and affirmations of our humanity. They strengthen communities and the commitment to wisdom and compassion.

The activity in smaller groups will split into two rounds. In the First Round, each person will share something related to grief/ mourning. After everyone who wants to participate has shared their mourning, The Second Round will consist of sharing celebrations.

Participants have freedom and choice; they can pass if they choose.

A) We will begin with sharings related to Mourning.

When you are the speaker/sharer: Each of us is invited to speak to a mourning in our hearts. This could be something touched during the opening reading, something present in your life right now, or perhaps connected to humanity's mourning on the planet or for the planet. Mourning can be related to the loss of someone or something we loved, but it can also be related to everyday interactions where we may have felt disappointed, sad, confused, etc. You are invited to share at your own comfort level. Just let your mourning speak however it needs to, through words, tears, and breath.

When you are the listener/receiver: As we listen to each other, consider that each person's expression is also our collective voice speaking. Engage your sense of curiosity and presence and breathe through any impulse to try to change someone's natural expression of mourning. This is an opportunity to place our trust in the empathic space that's been created and notice our own resistance or fears around expressions of grief and despair.

When the speaker is finished sharing their mourning, we will silently offer a needs guess on paper or in the chat. Though we may want to offer multiple needs guesses, let's limit the number of needs guesses to one or two per listener so as not to overwhelm the person who shared.

The person who shared will take three full breaths to read the guesses, and then indicate that they are complete with receiving the offered needs guesses. We will then go on to the next person to continue our shares related to mourning.

B) Once everyone who wanted to share in the small group has shared their Mourning, we then will move on to Celebration, keeping in mind the following.

Each of us is invited to speak to any celebration in our hearts — perhaps something that touched us today, an experience that brings us joy, or an unexpected synchronicity or moment of grace. You are invited to be present to what is in your heart and your body as you speak when you consider this question: What within me that is cause for celebration wants to be shared?

When the person is finished sharing their celebration, we will silently offer a needs guess on paper or in the chat. Though we may want to offer multiple guesses, let's limit the number of needs guesses to one or two per listener so as not to overwhelm the person who shared.

The person who shared will take three full breaths to read the guesses, and then indicate when they are complete with receiving the offered needs guesses. We will then go on to the next person's celebration.

Check if anyone is unclear about the practice and needs to hear the instructions again.

Once everyone is clear, assess whether breakout rooms are needed or if the practice can be done in one group. At one gathering, a group of six people was able to do both rounds of mourning and celebration in about 45 minutes.

If there are more people, here is some guidance that may be helpful. Use the breakout room feature to divide into groups of three or four. Suggest someone keep time in each group. Here's an example of how to divide up the time for sharing while meeting needs for mutuality, inclusion, and consideration.

- If there is approx. 45 min for the activity, then let's say the activity takes up 40 minutes with a five-minute cushion.
- If there are four people in a group, they will do **Round 1 of Mourning** with each person sharing about four minutes, followed by about one minute to receive needs guesses. That equals about 20 minutes total for one round of mourning for four people.

- After each person who wanted to share mourning has done so, **Round 2 is Celebrations.** For four people, allow each person about four minutes to share, followed by one minute to receive needs guesses. That equals about 20 minutes total for one round of celebration for four people.
- Total is 40 minutes.
- If there is time left over in the small group, you can discuss the effect of the practice within your small group. Then we come back to larger group.
- Times can be adjusted based on the number of people in the group.

Return to large group for Harvest:

Invite anyone who feels moved to share something that touched them or that they discovered from today's practice with the group.

Ending poem/song

Oh Grief, Oh Joy!

by Debbie Nargi-Brown

Oh Grief, Oh Joy!
 Held in the very rhythm of my beating heart
 Oh Grief, Oh Joy!
 May you come together so I don't fall apart

Breathe in, breathe out
 Gather your strength
 Breathe in, breathe out
 Remove all doubt

You are held (x3)
 Surrounded, grounded (by Love)* *By Love is added at the end of the song*

Dig down into your roots
 That's where it all begins
 Reach up into the stars
 Embrace all that you are

Listen to this song at: <https://thebirdsings.com/ohgrief-ohjoy/>

Debbie's website: <https://www.debbienargi-brown.com/>