

Introduction and instructions for small groups

The following instructions are to be issued or reiterated by the facilitator at the beginning of each time of sharing.

Everyone has a story. This is a unique opportunity to tell your story, as deeply and completely as you wish, to receptive, sympathetic and understanding listeners. It is intended that each participant will leave the retreat feeling that they have been heard and appreciated.

Objects of significance. Storytellers are to be encouraged to use non-verbal means of communication, artefacts made during their time for reflection or other objects of personal significance to express themselves. Every effort is to be valued. Originality and creativity are to be affirmed.

Interruptions. Provided that the storyteller remains the focus of attention, appropriate comments of affirmation or questions of clarification may be permitted.

A safe place. Storytellers must be confident that what they say will not be repeated without their knowledge or consent. Group members are to agree that what is said to the group in trust will not be repeated elsewhere. However, the facilitator cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. There are limits to the confidentiality that the facilitator can promise. The facilitator may have a responsibility to follow-up information relating to someone planning to hurt themselves or someone else or the abuse of a child. It is up to the facilitator to pursue any concern about what has been said.

'Better if we chat about that later.' The facilitator may need to stop a person talking if they begin to share something inappropriate, expose themselves unwisely or if they exceed their share of the time available.

Listening and praying. When each story has finished a respectful silence is observed. Another group member might then be invited to offer a prayer of appreciation, intercession or blessing. This is NOT a time for counseling or offering advice. Be alert to the tendency of some to preach, give advice or exhort while praying.

The facilitator is to share their story last of all. But don't get left out altogether! When necessary, the facilitator may lead with a story to model self-exposure and built trust.

Close with prayer. The facilitator closes each small group gathering with prayer.