



# Facilitating Authentic Communication Groups

Integrating Process Work,  
DEI, NVC & IFS

Anisha Pandya & Martha Lasley  
Foreword by Roxy Manning

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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Here and Now Process Work .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Anchors to the Here and Now .....	14
Four Levels of Interaction .....	18
Pathways to Here and Now .....	25
<b>Chapter 2: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Relationships .....</b>	<b>33</b>
Principles of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Relationship .....	37
RISE—Four Steps for Exploring DEIR .....	37
Keeping It Real .....	40
Privilege Identity Exploration .....	43
Intersectionality .....	47
<b>Chapter 3: Nonviolent Communication .....</b>	<b>53</b>
NVC in Groups: Courage and Collective Liberation .....	56
Four Ways to Deepen Connection in Groups .....	59
Transforming Judgment .....	60
Leaning into Conflict .....	66
Perspectives that Shaped NVC .....	67
The Systemic Lens of NVC .....	73
<b>Chapter 4: Internal Family Systems .....</b>	<b>77</b>
Self Leadership and Befriending Parts .....	77
IFS in Authentic Communication Groups .....	82
IFS Compassion-Based Activism .....	88
Integrating IFS and NVC .....	91
How ACG Differs from Other Groups .....	93
<b>Chapter 5: Self-Connected Facilitation .....</b>	<b>97</b>
Cultivating Presence .....	100
When the Facilitator Gets Hijacked .....	101
Wisdom of the Body .....	104
Meeting and Matching Intensity .....	106
Confronting Unconscious Bias .....	109
Courage .....	113

<b>Chapter 6: Group Process .....</b>	<b>117</b>
Group Process Dynamics .....	120
Group-Level Observations.....	125
Engagement Patterns in a Group .....	126
Familiar Default Roles .....	128
When the Group Avoids the Task .....	130
<b>Chapter 7: Recognizing Patterns of Oppression.....</b>	<b>139</b>
Rank, Status, and Core Power .....	142
Disrupting Entitlement .....	148
Four Levels of Oppression .....	155
<b>Chapter 8: Transforming Patterns of Oppression.....</b>	<b>161</b>
Demystifying Oppression .....	164
Shifting the Domination Mindset .....	169
Repairing Harm from Microaggressions .....	170
<b>Chapter 9: From Separation to Connection .....</b>	<b>177</b>
Shifting from Jackal Zone to Giraffe Zone.....	177
Calling Out, Calling In, Calling Up .....	186
Transformational Feedback.....	188
<b>Chapter 10: Mapping Invisible Systems.....</b>	<b>195</b>
Regions of Leadership.....	197
Psychological Leadership and the Metaphor of the Crown.....	198
System Imago .....	200
Countering Unconscious Dynamics .....	205
Using Our Privilege to Become Better Allies.....	206
<b>Chapter 11: Expand Your Range of Interventions.....</b>	<b>215</b>
Smith-Cohen Intervention Cube .....	221
Culturally Attuned Interventions.....	226
When Interventions are Ignored or Undermined.....	230
<b>Chapter 12: Transference and Countertransference .....</b>	<b>237</b>
Transference .....	240
Transferential Relational Patterns.....	241
Countertransference .....	254
<b>Chapter 13: Facilitator Development and Care.....</b>	<b>257</b>
Self-Supervision Pyramid.....	260
Liberating our Ways of Being .....	266
Expanding Our Support System .....	268
Peer Supervision and Cliniquing.....	269
Embracing Authentic Facilitation .....	270

## Praise for Facilitating Authentic Communication Groups

This book is a great well of inspiration. I predict it will resource almost any trainer with clarity and encouragement. A real companion in your leadership.”

—Liv Larsson, *A Helping Hand. Mediation with NVC*

This is a work of love from two master facilitators who inspire us to learn. This book is a rich addition to expand awareness and move toward conscious, generative expressions of group identity and culture. Martha and Anisha elegantly weave together four streams of transformation that help us discover the best of our humanity. What excites me most is the application to group work—and how coaches, facilitators, and leaders can use this wisdom to create healthy, authentic communities.

—Vikram Bhatt, *Leadership that Works, India*

Anisha and Martha simplify the complex science and art of facilitation into practical, easy-to-follow steps. The ‘giraffe zone’ attracted me—where facilitators engage in sacred witnessing with compassion, assertion, vulnerability, and context sensitivity. A must-read for those who see group facilitation as sacred engagement.

—Sankarasubramanian Ramamoorthy, *T-Group Facilitation*

“Packed with tools sorely needed for grappling with the profound challenges and opportunities of our times, this book offers grounded, transformative practices for real connection.”

—Karl Steyaert, *Cultural Catalyst Network*

I’ve never come across a book that brings together all four of these powerful paradigms in one place! It offers a clear and insightful roadmap that gives me fresh understanding and clarity. I only wish I’d had this years ago when I first stepped into the role of an NVC Trainer. I’m genuinely excited for more people to discover and benefit from this unique resource!

—Marcia Christen, *CNVC Assessor*

During authentic communication sessions, something remarkable happens. Even when we begin with tension or disagreement, by the end there's a sense of joyful connection—because we touch something true together. I trust that if more people had opportunities to dialogue like this, we'd see less terrorism, fewer wars, reduced environmental problems, and more care and affection for each other.

—Katherine Singer, *Korean Center for Nonviolent Communication*

The book provides a framework to address diverse and even difficult issues like systemic oppression in groups. It helps facilitators navigate the sometimes tricky and treacherous ocean of group works—with clarity, compassion, and deep experience.”

—Dr. Wasundhara Joshi, *Indian Society for Applied Behavioural Sciences*

“This powerful, integrative approach to group facilitation skillfully weaves diverse modalities into a cohesive framework. The authors offer thought-provoking help to turn challenging situations around and provide immediate practical tools and deeper insights for facilitators at any level.”

—Johan Rinman, *Behavioral Scientist*

“An intimate guide for navigating the conflicts and polarization of our times. With compelling narratives and practical wisdom, this book equips facilitators to lead meaningful change.”

—Manish Srivastava, *Trading Armour for a Flower*

# Acknowledgments

We're grateful to all our teachers, colleagues, and group members who helped bring this book to life. A big round of applause for our fabulous editors, Ranji Ariaratnam, David Johnson, and Aishwarya Shah. Special high-fives go to the people who gave us invaluable feedback: Roxy Manning, Georgia Efremova, Kan Yan, Elan Shapiro, Brandon Wong, Giles Barrow, and Anne Rhodes. Who else deserves a shout-out? We have lots of gratitude for Marie Jacomet, for her beautiful illustrations, book cover and layout. Our proofreader, Nadia Abdul Ghafoor, brought care and clarity to every line.



## Foreword by Roxy Manning

Almost 20 years ago, I met Martha Lasley at my first intensive Nonviolent Communication training for people who wanted to share NVC in the world. I was fascinated by her. Who was this person who spoke up boldly and, to my still conforming, anxious, people-pleasing ears, quite brashly as she kept calling out power dynamics in the group? I remember being shocked! She was breaking all the norms I had internalized about how women were supposed to be in a group, how they were supposed to relate to the facilitators. And I was also freed by her modeling to risk speaking up myself, to move one iota closer to embodying the facilitator and group member I wanted to be. In the intervening years, we have become colleagues and dear friends – me inspired by her fierce leadership and capacity for authenticity, and her by my attempts to use NVC to engage with systemic inequities. I did not know 20 years ago that what I was witnessing was the seeds of the process Martha and Anisha outline in *Facilitating Authentic Communication Groups*.

Anisha Pandya and I met in 2022 when she continued to deepen her knowledge of social change and nonviolent action by attending one of my courses. It was clear how important the topic of using Nonviolent Communication to respond to systemic inequities mattered to her because that course was at 3 am India time! I've been surprised at the deep similarities I share with Anisha. It's not just that Anisha and I are both Brown women from the Global South, psychologists, parents, or people who are jazzed by integrating learning from a wide variety of fields. As you'll discover through reading this book, I recognize in her a kindred spirit—someone who has done the internal work necessary to leap out of the box in which society places Brown women like us. I feel solidarity as I witness her commitment to not just escape societal dictates but to reach back into all the confining boxes and lift others out. I value her goal of helping others see, through her work and her ways of moving through the world, that despite how unfamiliar and at times scary it might be, liberation is indeed possible.

It made complete sense to me when I learned that Anisha had been working extensively with Martha to develop, teach, and refine the powerful framework they present in this book, since Anisha's fierce authenticity, passion for learning, and unwavering support for people with less power and privilege matched what I knew of Martha.

In their work, Anisha and Martha weave Nonviolent Communication, Internal Family Systems, and a commitment to principles of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Here and Now process work into a framework that amplifies the power of each approach in the service of group transformation. Anisha and Martha's framework identifies and addresses the challenges groups face as they balance individual growth, relationship dynamics and systemic inequities. It provides a toolbox that can be used to both examine and dismantle the systems of disconnection that shape our world and that show up, often quite unconsciously, when humans come together in groups. This book empowers both facilitators and participants to employ vulnerability, courage, and presence in a fierce yet caring authenticity that enables us to rediscover the beauty of our shared humanity.

Anisha and Martha's Authentic Communication Group method aligns with my belief that authentic dialogue is at the heart of social transformation. Whether grappling with the discomfort of privilege, navigating conflict in the "here and now," or finding new ways to call each other into shared accountability, *Facilitating Authentic Communication Groups* offers both practical tools and inspiring vision. If you are a facilitator, this book will enable you to move beyond traditional, hierarchical techniques and lean into principles of relationship, equity, inclusion, and love. If you are a participant in these groups, this book will affirm that your presence matters and that you have a part to play in the collective work of social transformation.

*Facilitating Authentic Communication Groups* is a courageous offering, one that dares to imagine—and begins to create—a world where connection is the foundation of collective liberation. I invite you to engage with this book fully, to bring it into your work and your life, and to join the authors in building communities that reflect the best of what humanity can be.

Roxy Manning  
California, 2025

# Introduction

Welcome to the transformative world of Authentic Communication Groups (ACG).

During this time of reckoning, multiple intersecting crises, and the staggering injustices of oppressive systems, our collective nervous system is in distress. In the midst of all the upheaval, we created a different kind of space, where people could speak their truth, deepen connection, and move toward healing.

Authentic Communication Groups didn't come from a playbook. Our journey as business partners and co-authors began with a desire to support social change by integrating our favorite practices. We blended many modalities that we hold dear: Here-and-Now Process Work, Nonviolent Communication, Internal Family Systems, and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Relationships. We don't use them as techniques, but as an evolutionary path to consciousness that helps us stay present, grow, and support collective liberation.

We spent years writing this book. We quit. We started over. Why did we persist? Because we've seen what happens when folks drop their masks, speak from their gut, and stay in the room when things get real. We want to live in a world where we can be more courageous, loving, and honest. So we created spaces for grief, rage, heartache, laughter, and silence. That kind of connection changes everything.

In the spirit of Claude Steiner's emotional activism, our work is rooted in the emotional and relational side of liberation. Oppression isn't only in our courtrooms, policies, and headlines. It moves through our bodies, relationships, and nervous systems. So that's where we go. In small groups, as voices tremble and brave hearts open, trust deepens, and ripples outward. So we take risks. We hold space for shame, fear, and power plays that show up uninvited, and we meet all of it with love.

Our mission is to ignite bold conversations that support awareness, meaningful relationships and social change. We envision a future where transformative conversations disrupt injustice, and heal old wounds. Whether you facilitate groups, want to find your true voice, or long for more authentic re-

relationships, this book is for you. If you want connection, tenderness, and real transformation, come as you are. Bring your inner critics, your hunger for community, and your desire to change the world. We're right here alongside you.



We integrate these four pillars because each offers unique, compelling insights for facilitating transformation in groups, and collectively, they provide a holistic framework for deepening authenticity.

1. **Here-and-Now Process Work:** Anchoring in the present moment, the group explores dynamics as they unfold in real-time. This practice deepens awareness of emotions, power, and patterns, which transform relationships. Without this first pillar, groups can become overly analytical, missing the richness of what is alive in the moment.

2. **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Relationships (DEIR):** Acknowledging and addressing group inequities and unconscious biases that permeate our interactions is central to our purpose. Working in the relational field helps people lean into discomfort, transform group dynamics and co-create liberatory practices. As we explore how social forces influence communication and belonging, we can collectively dismantle barriers to inclusion.
3. **Nonviolent Communication (NVC)**<sup>1</sup>: Converting blame and judgment into compassion, we empathize and express feelings and needs honestly. We use a practical structure for navigating triggers, transforming conflict, and fostering understanding, essential for building bridges across differences.
4. **Internal Family Systems (IFS)**<sup>2</sup>: Cultivating Self-energy and deepening understanding of different parts within the psyche supports awareness. Through inner work, we navigate our own triggers and guide others through complex relationships with their parts. By offering empathy to each part, the inner system relaxes, which supports healing and connection.

The synergy of the four pillars supports facilitators to honor group work with courage and care and ultimately support profound personal and group transformation.

This book is for anyone passionate about facilitating meaningful relationships and creating a more connected, empathic, and equitable world. We began writing this book for people who facilitate authentic communication groups but expanded the scope to include anyone who facilitates conversations, including those at the dinner table. Whether you're a healer, activist, leader, therapist, or educator, this book offers tools and insights to help you navigate group dynamics, share power, and deepen authenticity. If you're interested in supporting courageous relationships and collective liberation, this book invites you to explore the nuances of interpersonal transformation and co-create a more just and inclusive world.

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1 Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 3rd ed. (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2015).

2 Richard C. Schwartz, *Internal Family Systems Therapy* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995).

In all our case studies, illustrations and examples, we condensed the dialogue and changed the names of participants to protect confidentiality, yet honor the essence of the many challenges we've encountered in groups. These groups reflect a wide range of diversity, with representatives from numerous nationalities, ages, ethnicities, abilities, genders, sexual orientations, religions, and political affiliations. Some participants are new to one or more of the four pillars, but others have a deep consciousness and long-term practice of integrating all four pillars.

### **The purpose of ACG is three-fold:**

1. **Deep dive into self:** Group space supports members to understand the functioning of their psyches, including their needs, feelings, beliefs and purpose. The group creates a nurturing space, enabling individuals to respond compassionately to all parts of themselves. By leaning into the safety of the group space, group members learn to find ease in their bodies and increasingly show up more fully in the group and in their lives.
2. **Exploration of the 'we' space:** The group learns to examine their relational schemas—their patterns of interaction and their attachment styles. They explore what it means to co-exist in the relational field and how to share power. The group serves as a human laboratory for experimenting with giving and receiving feedback, uncovering unconscious biases, engaging in difficult conversations, and trying out new behaviors even when they feel scared.
3. **Be the change:** Social change is at the heart of ACG work—we believe the group is a miniature model of what happens in society. Group members are encouraged to look at the hierarchy created in the room, examine whose leadership they are supporting and whose power they are unconsciously trying to sabotage. The facilitator and the group call out microaggressions and explore the impact. The facilitator sensitizes the group to power dynamics, consciously centers marginalized voices, challenges the domination mindset, and creates space for diversity to thrive.

The challenge in process groups is to let go of our narratives and learn to trust our experiences. As we expand our high dream—our most passionate, inspiring vision—we can discover how to share power that extends beyond the group into our families, organizations, and systems that shape our world.

As co-authors, we've had a lot of fun wrestling with divergent perspectives and have deep respect for each other's voice. Together, we balance relational depth and radical disruption, offering facilitators a rich set of tools and perspectives to navigate the wild, wonderful world of group dynamics.

Known for her unique insights, Anisha is driven by a passion for disrupting the white gaze, excitement about uncovering group dynamics in the co-creative relational field, and a bold approach to calling out behavioral patterns in groups. Her innovations in the field of Transactional Analysis combined with her curiosity about groups inspire her PhD research, *Intersectional Investigation of the Interconnectedness of Power and Intimacy in Groups*.

After decades of training coaches, Martha found her sweet spot in facilitating groups, where she doesn't shy away from raw emotions or messy interactions. Her vulnerability helps people navigate discomfort with compassion and curiosity. Martha creates the space for accessing Self-leadership, which supports participants to befriend, integrate and heal diverse parts of the psyche. She draws out the group's wisdom, infuses the relational process with love, and stirs up passion for collective liberation.

When we share personal or vulnerable stories, we write in the first person, I (Anisha) or I (Martha), so that you can differentiate our experiences. Instead of doing this every time we refer to "I", we only put our names at the beginning of the case study or example.

We jumpstart most chapters with a case study, then pull back the curtain, and invite you into the facilitator's world. From there we share concepts, theory, tools, and examples, weaving in insights that bring facilitation to life. We end most chapters by putting you in the hot seat, with a scenario and reflection questions for you, the reader, to apply chapter learnings and choose your intervention. From foundational concepts like here-and-now process work to advanced strategies for integrating social justice and psychological frameworks, each chapter provides multiple approaches to co-creating spaces for heart connection, shared power, learning, and behavioral change.



## CHAPTER 1

# Here and Now Process Work

### **Case Study: The Weight of Adaptation—Unseen Barriers to Group Participation**

Saira: I really enjoy this group, and yet I am not able to be myself fully. I have facilitated groups for years, but I struggle to find my voice in this group. I am still trying to figure out the norms, be in the present and adapt to the group. [A few people offered empathy and reassurance to Saira.]

Anisha: I am struck by your use of the word ‘adapt’, Saira. Apart from me, you are the only Brown person in this group. I wonder if there is a parallel process here. As a Brown Indian woman, I imagine you’ve had to adapt to white American culture. Are you trying to adapt to the white majority of this group too?

Rosa: I really understand what you are going through, Saira. My life felt like a living hell trying to adapt to my school culture. I am white, so I can’t jump on this race bandwagon, but I understand the pressure to adjust. [Although a part of me wanted to explore the phrase “race bandwagon” which struck me as dismissive and implied that discussing

race might be trendy, I (Anisha) chose to stay quiet and pay attention to the emerging group process.]

Joanna: I don't agree with your race theory, Anisha. As a Russian immigrant, I also had to adapt to American culture. The struggle to adjust to a new culture is not limited to people of color.

Tom: I have been an introvert all my life, and I also struggle to find my voice in certain groups. I can relate to you, Saira, and I don't think this has anything to do with race. I think race is your issue Anisha because Saira has never mentioned race.

Anisha: I am wondering what is happening in the group—the moment I spoke about race, three people suggested that race is not an issue. However, no one has checked with Saira about her experience. Could there be some collective resistance to examining how race is impacting our behavior?

Saira (teary-eyed): Anisha, my whole life is standing in front of me right now. I can make sense of my behavior. I was born in India and raised in America since I was four years old, and yet I have always felt like an outsider. Parts of me feel confused. I feel powerful when I facilitate groups so I don't know why I struggle so much in this group.

Anisha: I imagine that as a designated facilitator, you have positional rank which allows you to be powerful as a woman of color. However, without the authority that comes with the facilitator role, could there be some cultural injunction limiting your power? [Saira nodded in agreement.]

Joanna: Anisha, I am experiencing a strong resistance right now and I cannot connect. I think this group discounts my experience and struggle.

### **Choice Point: Reflection Questions**

1. How do you honor group resistance to exploring racial or cultural dynamics, and simultaneously take the group deeper into their resistance?
2. What strategies can you use to center Saira's experience without alienating others in the group?

3. How do you offer compassion for all group members while addressing privilege and systemic dynamics?

### **Facilitator's Intervention**

Anisha: I have lived my whole life in India so I cannot imagine what it was like for you as an immigrant in America, Joanna. My assumption is that your childhood was full of struggles and challenges, so I feel deep compassion for you. At the same time, I want to draw your attention to something that I have been tracking. Despite your troublesome past, I sense you have a high level of comfort in claiming space in this group. You easily initiate conversations, confront the group, speak for your needs, and receive compliments on your facilitation skills. Do you agree that you easily voice your concerns in this group? [Joanna seemed pensive, looked down, and said yes.] Would you be willing to look at the possibility that your social identity grants you certain privileges and power which people from other social identities don't get?

### **Rationale**

Notice what happened in this case study. The group was drawn into sharing their intrapersonal stories and was on the verge of competing for whose past was most painful. When the facilitator drew attention to what was happening in the moment, they dropped their stories about the past and learned from what was happening in the moment.

Anisha took the risk of inviting the group to lean into their discomfort and uncover the nuances of adaptation in the here and now. When the group denied the existence of racial dynamics, she didn't back off. She normalized the exploration of defensiveness and biases. Rather than intellectualizing the experience, she stayed present with the group's here-and-now dynamics, validating lived experiences and encouraging reflection on identity and systemic power. She held everyone with care and compassion, centering Saira's experience without shaming or dismissing others. Part of staying in the here and now is staying present with what's emerging in the moment, without trying to dismiss, move past, or fix the situation.

## Outcome

Joanna: This conversation is really meaningful to me. I am able to empathize and understand your situation, Saira. I was so stuck in my stories of my past trauma that I could not see the benefits of my privilege or understand your struggle in this group. I really want to contribute to creating an inclusive culture. Saira, would you be willing to share what I can do to support your participation in this group?

The energy shifted as the group witnessed and validated Saira's pain and desire for belonging. By drawing attention to power dynamics and systemic influences, Anisha created space for deeper learning and collective growth.

The group moved from defensiveness and individual storytelling toward collective reflection. By staying curious, the group fostered a deeper understanding of how identity shapes participation and began to embrace a culture of inclusion.

## What's powerful about the here and now?

The here and now takes us away from entrenched narratives and beliefs, and brings us into the present moment. The real-time relational experience serves as an eye-opener and a vehicle for transformation.

When I (Anisha) participated in an international process group, I got caught up in the narrative, "I'm a little Brown girl who needs to take a subservient position in order to be safe in an international group." Through therapy, I gained some insight into the origins of my 'not-good-enough' script, which came from internalizing my Dad's critical voice. While some group members offered me empathy as the only woman of color in the group, another person confronted me, saying, "What are you talking about, Anisha? I see you boldly confronting this group. I experience you as very powerful, and I draw a lot of inspiration from you. How long are you going to keep telling yourself these stories?" When I saw others nodding, I held the insight about my past at a distance and got an 'outsight' about my impact on others. That confrontation helped me find my courage, and the group held me accountable. As I integrated others' reality, I could see myself through their eyes and claim my power.

What seems most transformational about the here and now is accountability—the experience is a sacred invitation to integrate others' experience.

If we work on our intrapsychic process with a therapist, coach or other support person, we can deepen our relationship with our parts, which is very healing. We remain inside ourselves, and that is beautiful. A here-and-now process group acts as a springboard that keeps bringing us back to reality as we get feedback from multiple sources, which takes us to a new level of awareness and aliveness. The group becomes a mirror that shows us how our behavior impacts others. The magic of the here and now is that it gives people a corrective experience in real time, without using role play or becoming a proxy parent.

Jasmine described the power of the here and now when she recalled facilitating a group: I had an uneasy sensation in my chest when Mel described how her mother never liked her because she competed for her father's attention. I recognized that parts of me disliked Mel and secretly wanted her to leave the group. So I asked myself, "What's happening? Why am I feeling like Mel's mother? What did Mel do that led me to dislike her?" I discovered that my upset toward Mel was coming from my judgement that Mel was a seductress because she initiated conversations with men, complimented them, quickly soothed their anger, but didn't engage with the women. Staying in the here and now, I chose not to explore Mel's relationship with her mother. Instead I invited Mel into a dialogue, shared my observations, and encouraged her to explore our relationship dynamic and how her behavior impacted me. This opened the door for both of us to explore new ways of interacting with each other.

The beauty of the here and now comes from using our current experience to create a new reality by identifying and naming patterns that support transformation. In some modalities, if the group confronts a participant for "talking too much," the talker might explore their shame and lament feeling misunderstood. They may receive empathy, and they may create a more loving relationship with their parts. Can they also pay attention to the needs of others? Can they change their behavior?

As a medium for uncovering bias, the here and now can be a fantasy popper because the group questions your precious beliefs about yourself and bursts your comfortable self-image. For example, Jared says he's a feminist,

but in real-time, when the group looks at his behavior, people show him multiple ways he treats men and women differently. He pushes back, “What do you mean? I allowed Farrah to interrupt me just now!” The facilitator says, “Let’s unpack that word ‘allowed,’” and the light comes in. The facilitator picks up on word usage, not from a desire to be the watchdog, but on the contrary, to honor every single word said because it’s worthy of being unpacked. Nothing is coincidental in the here and now.

The group can co-create a culture of mutual, supportive feedback. Dropping the norms of politeness and inhibitions can be scary. When we trust the fundamental resilience of human beings, instead of treating each other as inherently fragile, we give each other honest feedback. Our first impulse might be to defend ourselves, “What? I’m not pretentious!” But if we sit with it for a moment, we might realize that this person is taking a risk to tell us their reaction, while the rest of the world judges us and gives up on us.

To address systemic issues, you can notice the subtle cues of bias or exclusion and give them a seat in the front row because they are opportunities to explore and practice more inclusive behaviors. For example, the facilitator said to Sean, “I love the fact that you fight and engage with me. But I notice you treat the rest of the women like damsels in distress. So, what’s going on here?”

Modeling vulnerability normalizes our humanness and supports the group in expressing emotions, admitting uncertainties, and deepening resilience. As you reflect on your facilitation choices, you can celebrate your successes and mourn the times your interventions didn’t have the impact you had hoped for. One day, I (Martha) noticed the group kept going to there and then, so I said wearily, “Today I don’t seem to have the resources to keep the group on task. I am tired.” To my surprise, my vulnerability helped the group take responsibility and become more facilitative.

Each of us has a survival instinct, which teaches us to trust our experience. In here-and-now groups, where we experience a different kind of family dynamic, our bodies can relax. Collectively we develop a different schema so that we can show up in the world in a more powerful, loving way. Shifting from politeness to brave conversations helps create a deeper kind of safety and sensitizes people to their impact.

As we delve into the foundations, processes, and transformative potential of here-and-now groups, the present moment becomes a powerful lens for exploring unresolved relational schemas, challenging maladaptive patterns, developing authentic connections and addressing inequities. By engaging with

the here and now, group members experience personal growth and co-create a dynamic space for mutual learning and shared power. Together, we'll uncover the theoretical underpinnings, liberatory practices, and real applications of facilitating here-and-now groups for profound individual and collective transformation.

We're inviting you on a wild journey, where you can take great pleasure in unpacking your own biases, learn to track the nuances of what's happening in the moment, and develop the courage to explore what budding facilitators tend to avoid. And the best part? Your own vulnerability and willingness to be raw with the group expand the group's capacity for transformation.

You'll learn to surface the invisible dynamics of privilege and cultural adaptation, without judgment or blame. Many people have allergic reactions to discussions about diversity, but you can discover how the here-and-now approach offers a powerful method for expanding self-awareness, building relational skills, and addressing systemic dynamics within a group. You can help the group shift the focus from storytelling about the past to a compelling, real-time exploration of unfolding relational patterns, emotions, and behaviors.

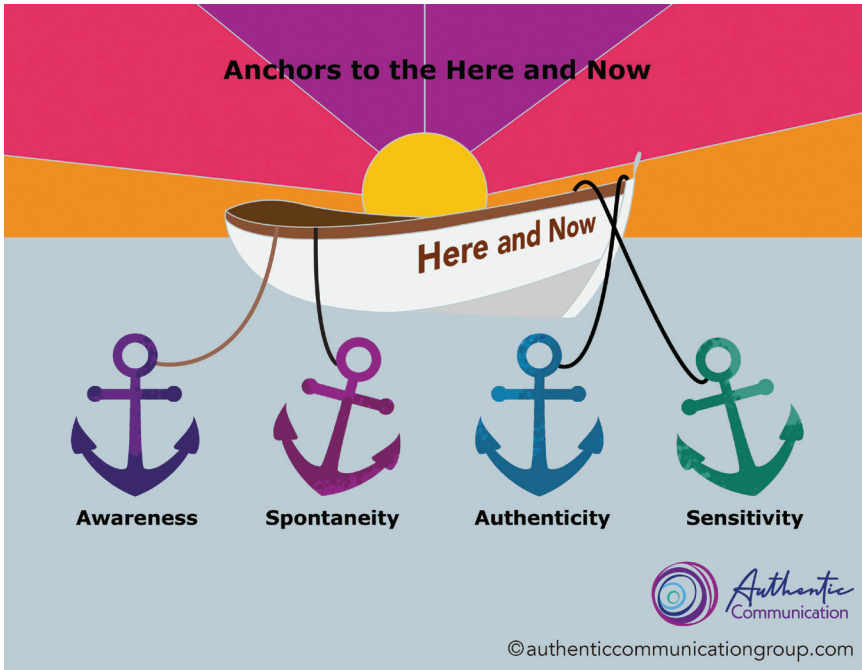
At its core, a here-and-now group functions as a relational microcosm because the way people interact in the group often mirrors the way they interact in their workplace, family, and community. Beyond personal growth, here-and-now groups are well suited to explore systemic issues such as racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression. Unconscious implicit biases inevitably shape how people interact. As the power dynamics surface, the group has the opportunity to examine and dismantle imbalances in real time.

Similarly, the group learns to support members of marginalized groups (including themselves) to claim their space, voice their experience, and be witnessed in their truth. This process can empower people to name the dynamics of exclusion or bias and challenge the group to engage more equitably. In this way, the group serves as a living laboratory for practicing inclusion, equity, and accountability.

Facilitating here-and-now groups goes beyond individual self-awareness to engage with collective growth. A culture of shared feedback helps participants become more attuned to their behaviors and group dynamics. This awareness fosters a sense of shared responsibility and equips people to carry their learning into their lives and communities.

## Anchors to the Here and Now

*“The here and now is all we have, and if we play it right,  
it’s all we’ll need.”—Ann Richards*



**Awareness:** When we separate ourselves from our experience and slow down, we can enter a space of meta-cognition to reflect on our transient state of mind and identify dysfunctional patterns. Observations and curiosity are core practices that help us shift from mindless engagement to nuanced awareness. As we explore the present moment, we can deepen into the here and now by asking questions such as: What is happening between group members? What dynamics are emerging? Who speaks most often? Who holds the center of power? Who does the group follow? Who does the group ignore?

When Sandor started talking about the upcoming election, a few members joined him in the discussion. Others started texting on their phones, while a few kept quiet. The group energy was becoming flat, so the facilitator shared that she saw some members becoming disengaged. Then, she asked the group, “I am wondering what engine is driving our individual behaviors? Are we willing to pause and examine why we are doing what we are doing?” Quinn admitted he wanted to be seen as an “intellectual” by the group. George said that he really liked Sandor and was going along with the discussion. Others shared that they were silent because they feared creating tension. This simple question from the facilitator enabled the group to come into the here and now.

**Authenticity:** When our inner experience and outer expression are congruent with our values and beliefs, we are in alignment. Transparency and vulnerability act as catalysts to bring us into authenticity in the here and now. Real conversations deepen awareness, connection, learning, and growth. How we show up in relationships, without hiding behind a facade, supports genuine interactions that nurture trust and mutual understanding.

Transparency doesn't mean blurting out judgments without caring about the impact. Instead, it calls for aligning thoughts, feelings, and actions. When we perceive an incongruence between what one is saying vs. doing, calling them out or judging them as liars and hypocrites only induces shame and shuts down the conversation. What if we can see them as someone struggling to find their voice? How can we elicit curiosity in people about why they do what they do? How do we support people in creating a balance between high dare (brave truth-telling) and high care (relational nurturing)? The beauty of group space is that we can cultivate both bold risk-taking and deep empathy, creating opportunities for exciting interactions and a sense of belonging for all.

In the early stages of a group, two people appreciated Maria, a seasoned psychotherapist, for her insights and observations. In response, Maria just smiled. After some time, tears started flowing. She shared, “I am finding it difficult to receive the group's appreciation as I struggle with imposter syndrome. I constantly worry that people will find out that I am some kind of fraud, so I try to impress you all. I am so afraid of your eventual disdain for me that I resist letting anything you say affect me. Her honesty struck a chord with the group. Adam shared that he had perceived Maria as confident and successful, never imagining

she had doubts. Tahir confessed that he felt jealous of Maria, and her vulnerable sharing opened his heart. Inspired by Maria's authenticity, others began sharing their own insecurities and fears. This exchange deepened their mutual understanding and connection, creating a supportive environment for the group to expand their authenticity.

**Spontaneity:** The collective unconscious norms for appropriate behavior can make group life dull and mechanical. Acting as a conduit, spontaneity helps the group shift from “what’s expected” to “what’s happening now” by releasing rigid scripts and embracing flexibility. The uninhibited nature of spontaneity creates space for playfulness, creativity, and aliveness in the group. Nurturance, permissive body language, and the facilitator’s non-threatening demeanor can support people in bringing a full range of human experiences and feelings into the group.

When Anna joined an existing group as a new participant, she sensed resistance from the others. She saw group members being warm toward each other but not engaging with her beyond the transactional level. In one session, when group members talked about Cristiano Ronaldo, the famous football player, Anna spontaneously renamed herself on Zoom as Cristiano Ronaldo and imitated his expressions. When one of the group members expressed confusion, Anna cheekily said, “It appears to me that the group really likes Ronaldo. I also want to be liked by you all. I thought if I changed my name to his name, you would probably give me some attention.” The group burst out laughing and expressed endearment toward her playfulness. Josie shared her regret about being cold and wondered aloud about her resistance to Anna.

Without filtering herself, Julia suddenly said, “I just realized I’ve been avoiding looking at you this whole time, Ronaldo (addressing Anna). It’s not just fear. It’s this deep dread that if I look into your eyes, I’ll see you judging me. Or worse, you’ll see something in me I don’t want you to see. Have you noticed that I’m terrified of you, or is this all in my imagination?” The group was pulled into the raw tension of the moment.

**Sensitivity:** Picking up on subtle changes in emotions, posture, and facial micromovements can enhance the here-and-now experience of the group. Cutting through the noise and tuning into the quiet undercurrents

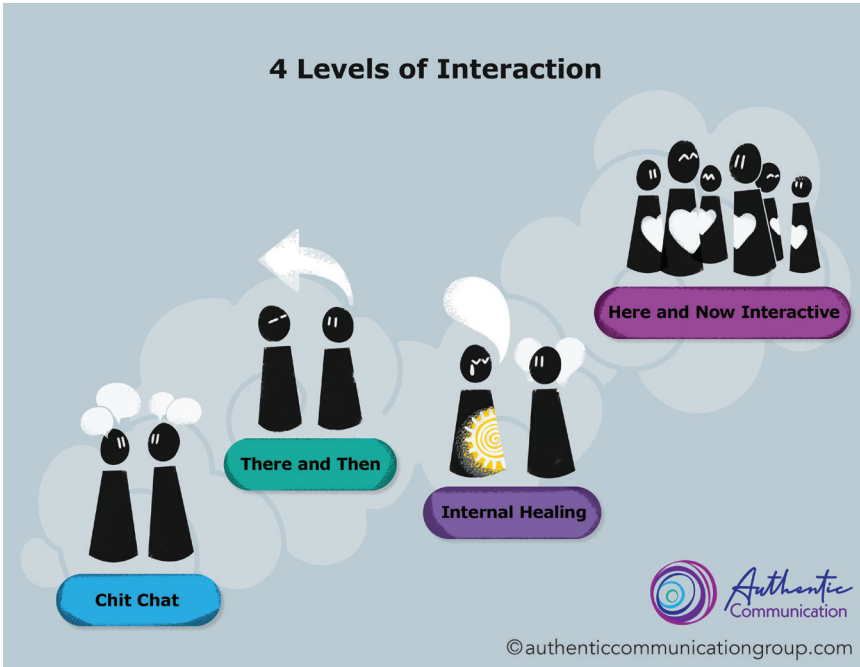
of the group can reveal more than words alone. Sensitivity allows us to listen empathically, understand each other's feelings, and respond with kindness. When people drift into the past or future, sensitivity can bring them back, anchoring them firmly in the here and now. It creates a sense of safety and security in the present moment, making it easier for everyone to stay engaged and focused on what's happening right here, right now.

Offering his hypothesis about what was happening in the group, James suddenly paused, his expression tightening as he struggled to find the right words. Others moved on without paying any heed to what was going on for James. Sensing his frustration, Val, the facilitator, stepped in and said, "James, it seems like you are having an intuitive bodily sense about what's happening in the group, and yet you are struggling to share it. Are you missing the group's curiosity and patience?" Feeling understood, supported, and relaxed, James explained his thoughts more clearly. Val's sensitivity and empathic intervention helped James articulate his ideas and encouraged the group to be more patient and attentive, enhancing overall group cohesion.

In navigating the here and now, being aware, spontaneous, authentic, and sensitive is like having a compass showing us where to go, helping us stay present, and making our connections more meaningful. Each moment becomes a reflection of who we truly are, shaping our presence in real time.

## Four Levels of Interaction

Our focus in an Authentic Communication Group is to interact in the relational field in the present moment, which is a level four interaction. Let's look at all four levels of interaction, starting with level one.



### Level 1: Chit Chat

The group often starts here, sharing light banter about the weather, what they saw on the news, or where they went on vacation. There is nothing wrong with level one or any other level. Levels are not inherently good or bad. Often, chit-chat serves as an ice-breaker, warming up the group and readying them to go deeper into the next level. Occasionally, when the group goes too deep too fast, someone finds that unsafe and “takes flight” back to level one with a joke or a story.

Lani joined the room while having her dinner. Shawn said, “OMG! What are you eating? It looks so yummy.” Lani responded, “I tried cooking an Indian meal for myself today. I am having saag paneer, dal

makhani with laccha paratha.” Marissa said, “Woah, that sounds exotic. I love Indian food, but I just don’t know how to make it. I hear it takes forever to cook an Indian meal.” Lani responded, “You bet! I spent two hours in the kitchen.” George commented, “That is the reason that the most luxurious meal I have made myself in the past six months is a pesto sandwich that takes less than five minutes to make.” The group continued to discuss their favorite cuisine until the facilitator asked if they were hungry for something special to happen in the group.

## **Level 2: There and Then**

When the group gets into storytelling or talking about people not in the session, they are typically in the “then and there.” They are not gossiping but sharing personal information or details about their past or relationships and the impact. The group is still not in the zone of here and now, but the conversation is more meaningful than at level one. There may be some vulnerability, sharing, and mutual support.

At this level, judgments, interpretations, suggestions, or reassurance flourish. The group might passionately discuss current affairs or hot topics instead of talking about themselves. This level also includes intellectual interaction, where they dive deeper and engage their minds. The group spends time sharing ideas, opinions, and knowledge or discussing books and movies.

Xian Yu said, “White culture of the global north is all about hoarding resources as if they’re getting ready for the apocalypse, but the hoarding itself is killing the planet. Jaya said, “Yeah, it’s like they’re on the Titanic, stuffing gold in their pockets even though they are more likely to drown.” The group became more somber as Luca brought the conversation closer to home, “Our whole city flooded, and my mother lost her home and all her possessions. It was devastating but humbling because my family survived.”

## **Level 3: Internal Healing**

Here, someone works on themselves while others witness, catch them energetically, and empathize. As someone does the inner work of developing a relationship with parts of their psyche, the rest of the group takes on the role of facilitator, acting as one. When someone recognizes they are projecting

judgment onto others, they take a U-turn to unpack their psyche, understand their reactivity, and really listen to the parts of themselves that have been crying out for acknowledgment and healing. Sometimes, this process includes honoring the positive intention of protective parts, witnessing and reparenting wounded parts, and replacing outdated scripts.

The group can help an individual restore a relationship between their highest selves and their parts. As they reflect on their experiences, they discover insights about their motivations and behaviors. Group intimacy deepens as people reveal their challenges, take risks, and show up vulnerably.

Sarah turned up late for the session, looking anxious. When Ajay asked if she was okay, Sarah teared up and shared, “I am feeling overwhelmed with fear because I have to speak at a large conference. I’m terrified that I will be humiliated.” The group encouraged her to dialogue with her terrified part, and she discovered it was only trying to protect her from shame. She recalled being in a school play, stumbling off the stage and enduring months of ridicule. The group supported her to reparent her wounded child, and she updated the terrified part that she is no longer 5 years old and has become a powerful adult. By befriending her parts, she felt lighter and ready to speak from a place of power in the group and at the conference. The group held her tenderly, listened deeply and offered empathy.

#### **Level 4: Here and Now Interaction**

Here, people drop their masks, look beyond their internal processes, and engage deeply in the relational field by daring to look at each other and allowing themselves to be impacted by others. The group space becomes a learning lab where people experiment with different behaviors and engage in authentic dialogue. They take the risk of giving and receiving honest feedback.

At this level, group members go beyond projecting their painful past and the disowned aspects of themselves on others. Instead, they look at how they are co-creating the messy dynamics and take mutual responsibility for whatever is emerging in the group.

Level 4 is like being out in the wild, interacting with nature’s beauty and disasters, which is very different from watching the Discovery Channel. All our senses are engaged as we take in the energy and allow ourselves to feel deeply. Here, we experience the sensual qualities of interaction, lean into intimacy, and shake up our perspectives.

Shyla asked if Mickey was fat-shaming her. Mickey insisted he was concerned about her health and suggested she might be more alert by eating fewer carbs and going to the gym. Outraged, Olivia pointed out that unsolicited health advice was the epitome of fat-shaming. Mickey internalized a lot of shame as a fat child and admitted that he secretly held judgments about heavy people being lazy. Shyla expressed her anger and frustration, revealing her struggle with PCOD<sup>3</sup>, and asserted that no amount of exercise, diet, or medication had helped.

The facilitator questioned Mickey's intention in offering advice right after the group had praised Shyla's contributions. In a previous session, the group had expressed their appreciation toward Shyla for her brilliant input and contagious enthusiasm for learning. Mickey confessed he might be jealous of the attention Shyla received and recognized that there were better ways for him to get noticed. The group got into exploring how patriarchy<sup>4</sup> was playing out in the room and how women's intelligence is often sabotaged in the group and the world.

### Three Types of Level 4 Interactions

The work becomes even more nuanced by three dimensions of level four interactions: interpersonal, group, and systemic interactions.

**Interpersonal Interaction:** This stage delves into the dynamics between two people. They talk about their relationship, how they affect each other, and what they mean to each other. The give and take, the push and pull, and the dance of connection lead to shared understanding.

When Ryan got back from the washroom, Toni expressed frustration, noting that Ryan left, checked his phone, or turned off his camera whenever she spoke. Why? Ryan didn't realize he was doing these things, but after looking inside, he realized he felt tense and restless when Toni spoke, perceiving her as critical of the group. Gathering his courage, he said, "I am unwilling to bear the brunt of your dissat-

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3 Polycystic Ovarian Disease.

4 Naming patriarchy is not for the purpose of blaming men; it's to unlock deeper freedom for all. Patriarchy is a system that prioritizes male leadership, perspectives, and authority while expecting other genders to nurture, accommodate, and support. It can shape group dynamics, unless we intentionally disrupt old patterns.

isfaction and want you to take responsibility for your own feelings and needs.” Toni, feeling embarrassed, acknowledging she’d received similar feedback, asked Ryan for help in changing her behavior.

**Group Interaction:** Stepping back, the facilitator views the group as a whole. How are the members working together? What roles are they playing? What is the group’s energy, the collective mood, and how does each member contribute to the larger picture?

When an online process group was deciding the date for an in-person meeting, two members raised their voices and started arguing, some expressed fear, and the others went quiet. The facilitator intervened by asking the group to slow down and become aware of the emerging behavioral patterns. Ava expressed her frustration and said, “Whenever conflict arises in our group, we either escalate into heated arguments or we relieve the tension with a joke and avoid addressing it directly. I am fed up with this pattern.” The group agreed with Ava’s observation and reflected on their individual behavior. They recognized some unconscious fear of difficult conversations and explored how they could create more safety in the group. They asked for the facilitator’s guidance in creating more intimacy. The facilitator smiled and held silence while the group explored ways to become closer.

**Systemic Interaction:** Zooming out even more, the group examines the systems and structures that shape their interactions. They explore the bigger forces at play—culture, society, and institutions—and consider how these larger frameworks influence their behavior and relationships.

Maya and John often clashed while others took sides. As the group explored the conflict, they explored their cultural and gender differences. From a collectivist culture, Maya wanted harmony and group consensus, while John, socialized in an individualistic culture, valued assertiveness and personal achievement.

The way this played out, Maya sought input from others and avoided confrontation, aiming for consensus and avoiding conflict. John expressed his opinions confidently, sometimes interrupting Maya and mocking her pleasant style. The friction increased when Maya said she felt overshadowed by John’s assertiveness and perceived it as aggres-

sive, and John called Maya's approach hesitant, weak, and passive. Marc wondered if the systemic and historical tendency of the West dominating the East was playing out in the room. With support from the facilitator, they renegotiated boundaries and learned to value cultural differences.

Understanding the dimensions of all levels of interactions allows the facilitator to guide the group toward more meaningful connections. Moving from light-hearted small talk to deep engagement in the here and now takes courage. The group itself can attune to the energy and readiness of their peers and can become less dependent on the facilitator by initiating level four interactions themselves.

### **Initiating Level 4 Interactions**

In Authentic Communication Groups, while the facilitator takes primary responsibility for guiding the group, the participants also facilitate and can initiate Level 4 interactions in hundreds of ways. Here are just a few ways participants have deepened interactions:

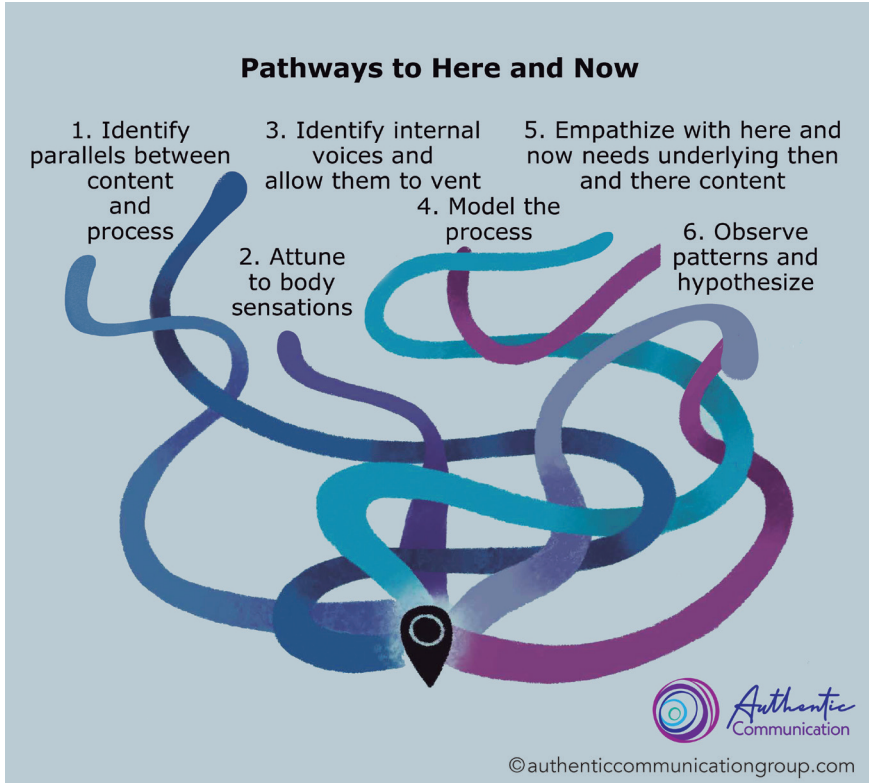
- Ask for feedback. "I would like feedback from the group about how you all feel toward me. I'm taking a risk because I want to build more heart connection."
- Offer your reaction. "I noticed some skepticism when you said you would rather not share your pain. My body is telling me that maybe you do want to be heard if only you could trust us."
- Share vulnerably. "You said you're a surrogate sex worker, and a part of me wants to Google that, but another part wants to admit that I don't know what that means. I'm embarrassed and afraid you might reject me because I'm not part of your world."
- Reach out to someone. "My attention is with you because you look agitated but haven't spoken."
- Ask for consent to share feedback. "I have some observations and some feedback that might strengthen your relationships. Would you like to hear it?"
- Share something you've been withholding. "I'm attracted to you, and it's probably because I have a young part that felt soothed just now when you listened to me with deep attentiveness."

- Talk about what's happening in the moment. "I feel exhausted when you two repeat yourselves. I want to empathize, but I also wonder if we can create space for others to respond or share what's happening for them."
- Reveal yourself. "A part of me is angry that you never speak unless we ask you to. And then you say, 'What do you want to know?' I would like some parity, some shared responsibility of who does the work in the group."
- Uncover conflicted parts. "As a Brown woman, one part of me wants to slap you for saying I'm exotic. I have another part, which is trying to find some compassion for you. On top of that, I'm judging myself for taking care of you when I'm hurt. My internal drama triangle is working overtime."
- Apply metaphors. "The group seems to be waking each other up with bold statements, but I received your energy as a gust of wind that knocked me over and scared me. Can you tell me where your energy is coming from?"
- Discuss authority issues. "My heart is beating fast. I have an angry part that is furious with the facilitator for interrupting me, and I ask the group to help me find my voice. My anger stirs up memories of being silenced by authority figures in the past."
- Offer hypotheses about power dynamics. "I hypothesize that one sub-group of people feels entitled to speak and expects their voices to be welcome, while the other sub-group does not. Four people seem to take space easily, and the other four hold back, ask permission before they speak, or wait to be invited."
- Notice patterns in group behaviors and norms. "I see most of the men speak confidently, but many women make profound statements and then shrink. I feel deeply sad about this pattern because it seems connected to thousands of years of conditioning."

We've examined how conversations range from light exchanges to deep, meaningful connections. Each level of interaction serves a purpose, shaping the group's journey toward genuine understanding and connection. As people engage more authentically, they open up a space where vulnerability and empathy pave the way for transformational relationships.

## Pathways to Here and Now

*“There is a conversation in the room that only these people at this moment can have. Find it.” —adrienne maree brown*



Facilitators face many diversions on the pathway to the here and now, but there are many ways to keep the group on course. As a facilitator, it can be a challenging experience to help the group slow down, detach from the content, and focus on the intrapsychic, interpersonal, and group-level processes operating in the here and now.

The following six pathways support the transition of the group into the here and now:

1. **Identify parallels between content and process:** Sometimes, a person abruptly tells a story from back home, and the group feels jarred by the out-of-context sharing. In such moments, it might be worthwhile to ask the member how the story is being played out in the room or what is happening in the present that is taking them back to their story or memory.

After Natalie joined the group, Deborah, who was active, suddenly became quiet. When asked about the reason for her silence, she said she had nothing to contribute. When an intense conflict erupted in the group, Deborah cried as she remembered spending her childhood in her sister's shadow. She reported that though she was a sincere, obedient, and helpful child, her charming sister took all the attention. She stated that she was pretty much invisible to her mother and, as a result, she felt very resentful toward her sister. She continued crying, and the group reached out to her with empathy.

At some point, Anisha, the facilitator, asked her gently if anybody in the group reminded her of her sister or her mother. She paused for a moment and cried more. She gathered herself and said, "Natalie reminds me of my sister. She's such a charmer and has this amazing gift of gab. And you, Anisha, remind me of my mother. You conveniently forgot me after Natalie entered the group. I feel jealous of Natalie and am very angry with you, Anisha."

2. **Attune to body sensations:** The body is often the entryway for emotions. When people cannot connect with themselves and others, it can be helpful to encourage them to slow down, notice the sensations in their body, stay with those sensations, and then express what emerges.

Rex often initiated conversations in the group by sharing about his week, sometimes for more than 20 minutes. Some members would interrupt him by sharing their feelings of being overwhelmed or irritated; others would request that he be brief and come in the here and now, while others would quietly sit on their agitation. In the next session, when he started to do the same thing, Martha said she was interested

in knowing what was going on for him and if he was willing to slow down a bit. When he agreed, she encouraged him to close his eyes and notice his body sensations. He reported feeling constriction in his chest and a restless energy running through his body. She asked him to stay with those sensations. In a bit, he described feeling anxiety each time he entered the group. After exploring further, he realized he was driven by the fear that the group didn't like him. He relaxed as the group received his fear.

- 3. Identify internal voices and allow them to vent:** In many groups, the emphasis on expressing feelings can feel like excessive pressure on individuals to reveal themselves, which can become an unconscious way of excluding left-brain thinkers. As facilitators, instead of colluding in this exclusion process, we can encourage diversity by inviting people to show up in ways that feel comfortable and authentic to them.

It was the third day of the group, and Devon continued to be quiet. People tried to invite him into the group by asking him to share his feelings. Each time Devon said, I don't know, he would elicit frustration in the group.

At one point, Anisha told Devon that even though he was quiet, she experienced him being present and keenly observing. She then asked if any thoughts were running through his mind. He immediately explained that he had plenty of thoughts, all inappropriate. The group started laughing, and the facilitator asked if he would be willing to share his thoughts.

Devon: I'm thinking, what is going on? Is this group for real? What is the need for so much vulnerability? These people are really emotionally immature.

Anisha: I wonder if there is something fundamentally scary about people expressing emotions.

Devon (paused): It reminds me of my childhood and my home environment. My mom was a very emotional woman, and she was hyper-reactive. I never knew what would upset her. I hated her emotionality, as I always had to be overly cautious about what I said.

Anisha: It seems you really value your freedom and spontaneity. Do you worry that you have to be overly cautious and walk on eggshells in this group too?

Moments later, Devon had an emotional release and shared how afraid and unsafe he had felt in the group.

4. **Model the process:** Individual learning styles vary. Some people learn by observing others. Instead of asking them to be in the here and now or insisting that they express their feelings or give feedback to others, it helps to walk the talk and show them how to engage in the here and now.

During a heated disagreement in the group, Elaine started telling a story about her work colleague. Some rolled their eyes, frustrated, as they often saw Elaine go on tangents and change the flow. Elaine had been given feedback about her tendency to go off-topic several times, but her behavior did not change. At that moment, Anisha asked if she was open to hearing about her impact. When Elaine signaled to proceed, she said, “When I heard you sharing about your work colleague, parts of me felt helpless, as I have been really wanting to support your participation in this group. Despite repeated feedback, you continue to change the topic when there is tension. At the same time, other parts of me felt deep compassion for you because I imagine you feel helpless when you see tension, and maybe you are doing your best to reduce the tension.” Elaine looked down, so Anisha asked, “Am I getting you, Elaine? Would you be willing to help me understand you?”

Elaine nodded and reported feeling shame because many people had told her that she tends to hijack conversations and make it all about herself. She also expressed confusion over her pattern. She described a compulsive urge to change the topic because she was afraid that this group would fall apart if they continued to fight like that, and this group was her only source of connection.

5. **Empathize with here-and-now needs underlying then-and-there content:** Sometimes, people enter the group by sharing a back-home story or talking about things that seem irrelevant to the here and now. Curiosity about participants can help us identify their underlying reasons for sharing and why they chose this particular moment.

Iain would randomly start talking about his struggles with his wife regardless of what was going on in the group, despite repeated reminders from the group that this is not a therapy or support group. Once, Anisha interrupted, asking if he was willing to pause. After a while, she said, “I have often heard you talk about your struggle with your wife. I imagine that you feel very lonely and desperate, and I wonder if this group is a promise of some kind of support that you are longing for?”

Iain closed his eyes and said, “This group represents the family and friends I never had. I admire each person in this group. I wish I could pack you all in my bag and take you home. But since I can’t take you all home, I bring my marriage here with the hope that your love will help me save my dying marriage.”

6. **Observe patterns and hypothesize:** In process work, how, when, and why things are said or done are far more important than what is being said or done. The facilitator keeps tabs on *how* members show up in the room. Is there a particular time when members go into then and there? How and why do members go into then and there? What are they trying to avoid?

I (Martha) said, “In this group, the men and women tend to share the airtime equally. However, I observe a difference in the content. When the men in this group speak, they usually speak about themselves. When the women speak, they usually empathize, appreciate, or care for someone else. I hypothesize that this is a systemic behavior because women are socialized to center others, not ourselves. When women continuously attune to others’ needs, we are not as aware of our own.” The group was silent for some time.

Gil said, “I don’t think this has anything to do with gender, and I am irritated with you, Martha.”

Suzanne came in and said, “I can see her point. Even right now, I am tempted to jump in and assuage you, Gil, and I’m finding it really difficult to pay attention to my own needs at this moment.” The facilitator’s observations prompted both Gil and Suzanne to confront their own tendencies around self-expression, revealing underlying issues related to gender roles, self-perception, and the discomfort of prioritizing one’s own needs. On further exploration, Suzanne recognized that she was afraid to center herself because she might be considered selfish. She

feared going deeper because she might meet parts she doesn't like. Gil explored his resistance to looking through the lens of gender and asked the group to acknowledge his gender fluidity.

Exploring immediate experiences and interpersonal interactions can deepen self-understanding and solidify group cohesion. Let's look at some tailored questions for refocusing the group in the here and now.

### **Sample Questions to Bring the Group Back to Here and Now**

"How are you feeling as you talk about your father?"

"You seem bored by your story as if you've told it to yourself many times. What's important to you?"

"Can you check in to see if this is really what you want to share, or if you have something else unspoken?"

"You have said that you don't have a sense of belonging in your family. Is there a parallel process here in this group?"

"It sounds like your message is meant for Janelle. Would you like to speak directly to her?"

"Does anyone want to ask for feedback or offer feedback?"

"What is the silence about?"

"It sounds like something is shifting in you as you tell your story. Do you want to check to see if people are getting you?"

"Is anyone avoiding important work you want to do?"

"It's near the end of the session. After you leave, what will you regret not having said today?"

Using all the pathways to the here and now and sample questions you might ask, read the following scenario and consider what you'd do as the facilitator.

### **You're in the Hot Seat: Imagine You Are the Facilitator Shifting to the Here and Now**

Angela: I recognize that sometimes the process just starts, and sometimes after an hour, we have not heard from all the members. So can we just have a basic check-in procedure? [The group agreed to her request, but in the subsequent sessions, they went back to their pattern of a few members taking over the session while others remained in the

background. George reminded them of check-ins by calling it ‘Angela’s procedure,’ but actually, George was implementing the procedure. So the facilitator asked if the group was following Angela’s suggestion or George’s, as he was the one carrying out this procedure. Both George and Angela seemed a little deflated.]

Luiz: Do we have to analyze every transaction? Can’t we just relate to each other in the here and now?

Myra: Go ahead. [silence]

George: I’d like some feedback on how people in the group feel toward me.

Myra: I like the idea of giving each other feedback, but I’d prefer not to start with you, George, since we seem to center you a lot.

George: So are you volunteering, Myra?

Myra: No!

Kirsten: This is all getting too intense for me. How about we go in a circle and share one thing we like to do in our spare time?

### **Choice Point: Reflection Questions**

As the facilitator, you have many options.

1. Which of the 4 anchors could you use to invite the group into the here and now—spontaneity, sensitivity, awareness or authenticity?
2. How can you move the group to level four interactions?
3. Which of the six pathways to the here and now would serve the group now?

This chapter explored many ways to engage in the here and now. As we help people navigate the four anchors, the four levels of interaction, and the six pathways to the here and now, we can nurture self-directed learning and support the emergence of collective wisdom. We can create opportunities for deeper interactions at personal, interpersonal, and group levels to build authentic relationships by grounding ourselves in the here and now. In the next chapter, we’ll explore the complexities of exploring Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Relationships. We will face the challenges of dismantling the barriers that prevent all members from fully participating so that we enrich our collective experience.



Anisha Pandya



Martha Lasley

Facilitating Authentic Communication Groups takes you into the belly of transformation—where real conversations ignite healing, deepen connection, and challenge the status quo. This book equips facilitators to navigate group dynamics with courage, compassion, and authenticity. Whether you're surfacing hard truths, untangling power dynamics, or nurturing collective liberation, you'll have the tools move beyond dialogue into vulnerable, embodied relationships.

“A treasure trove of hard-to-find skills and understanding about emotional and systemic pitfalls that takes competent group facilitators and gives them wings.” —Sarah Peyton, *Your Resonant Self*

“A facilitation gold mine—deeply grounded in compassion, wisdom, and practicality. Even after 25 years of leading groups, I found fresh insights on synergy, creativity, and real-world application. This book is like having a personal coach whispering encouragement in my ear.”

—Kathleen McFerran, *Calling In the Dawn*

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