

Authentic Relational Communication (ARC) Group Agreements

There is a difference between group rules and group norms. You adhere to group rules. You intend to follow group norms with the understanding that this may not always be possible, so you do your best. Below the phrase “I agree to” is used for group rules and “I intend to” is used for group norms.

Confidentiality

I agree to keep confidential any personal information that anyone shares in group, and I will be especially careful not to identify other group members by name or share details that would allow someone outside the group to identify who I am talking about.

Creating safety and courage

Authentic Relational Communication (ARC) groups can be emotionally challenging and I am ultimately responsible for my own feelings and sense of safety. ARC groups can be therapeutic, but they are not therapy. Witnesses play an important role in the group.

I intend to own my experience. My experience is not caused by someone else. I will not blame others for my experience. I intend to notice the energetic subtlety of owning my experience. As I share an emotion, if my attention is on myself then I am most likely owning my experience. If I witness an interaction that seems unsafe, I will share my felt experience.

I intend to practice some basic safety guidelines:

- Practice self-care.
- Enforce my own boundaries.
- State my needs.
- Do what I need to take care of myself.
- Notice my impact on others.
- I can express my truth while also considering the group field.
- Honor experimental behavior as people “try things out” rather than insist on “getting it right.”
- Support participation by choice.

No group member is ever required to answer any question, or reveal anything.



Levels 3 and 4

We make a clear distinction between interactive work (which is also call Level 4 work) and Level 3 work.

Level 4 means being aware of a part that is activated in the moment and speaking for that part, or talking to another group member about my feelings toward them or about my relationship with

them, or talking to the group about how I feel in the group. The primary focus of the group is on Level 4 work.

I intend to focus on Level 4 work whenever possible by speaking for any part that is activated.

Level 3 means sharing my psychological issues, what is happening in my life, painful or traumatic memories from childhood, and things in my life that involve vulnerability or shame. Level 3 work can also add value to the group.

When engaging in Level 3 work, I intend to focus on being emotionally open and vulnerable rather than just talking about my issues intellectually. In Level 3, the other group members tend to respond with support, understanding, and appreciation, which can be very healing.

Initiating interactive work

I intend to take responsibility for initiating interactive work in the group. This means bringing up how I feel toward another group member, toward the group as a whole, or toward the facilitator.

If something happens in the group to trigger me, I will attempt to bring this up with that person (or the group) as soon as possible after I become aware of my part's reaction. If I am unable to do this at the time, I will bring it up when I am aware of it and can manage to take some group time to talk about it.

In addition, before each group I intend to contemplate how I feel toward each group member and what relationship I have with each, so I can come to the group prepared to bring up one of these feelings in the group.



Supporting people in conflict

When two people are in a conflict, I intend to support both of them rather than taking sides. If I am triggered by one of the people, I will wait until their work is over and some time has passed to bring up my feelings. If one member is receiving feedback from another member, I will refrain from ganging up or piling on.

Talking about an absent member

I agree to avoid talking about a group member who is absent. If there is a powerful reason to talk about my feelings about that person during that session, I intend to focus on my own feelings and not the other person's issues, and when that person returns, I agree to tell them what I shared with the group about them.

Leaving the group

If I am thinking about leaving the group, I agree to talk to the group about it before making a final decision. This way I can have help in exploring possible unconscious reasons for leaving, in case I am avoiding something that the group could help me understand.

I agree to give the group at least two weeks notice of my intention to leave the group after I have made a firm decision. I agree to use my last meeting to process any feelings and needs that arise from my leaving the group.

Most people develop close relationships in ARC groups, so when someone leaves, we create space for processing and saying goodbye. Valuable work often happens during the transition process. This is also a time to review what people have contributed to the group and what they have gained. During the transition process I will respect the decision of the person wishing to leave.

Outside relationships

There is no rule against people in the group developing relationships with each other outside of the group. In fact, sometimes this adds considerably to what people get from the group. However, if I develop an outside relationship with someone from the group, if anything happens that needs to be processed, I agree to work on it in the group. My intention is to not collude or avoid dealing with issues that arise between me and another group member.

I have read the group agreements and will uphold them as best I can. If there is something in the group agreements that are not working for me, I will bring it up and request a change.