

# TOUCHSTONES

## Practices that keep a circle safe

### Parker Palmer

- ***Be present as fully as possible.*** Be here with your doubts, fears and failings as well as your convictions, joys and successes, your listening as well as your speaking.
- ***Give and receive welcome.*** People learn best in hospitable spaces. In this circle we support each other's learning by giving and receiving hospitality.
- ***What is offered in the circle is by invitation, not demand.*** This is not a "share or die" event! During this retreat, do whatever your soul calls for, and know that you do it with our support. Your soul knows your needs better than we do.
- ***Speak your truth in ways that respect other people's truth.*** Our views of reality may differ, but speaking one's truth in a circle of trust does not mean interpreting, correcting or debating what others say. Speak from your centre to the centre of the circle, using "I" statements, trusting people to do their own sifting and winnowing.
- ***No fixing, saving, advising or correcting each other.*** This is one of the hardest guidelines for those of us in the "helping professions." But it is vital to welcoming the soul, to making space for the inner teacher.
- ***Learn to respond to others with honest, open questions*** instead of counsel, corrections, etc. With such questions, we help "hear each other into deeper speech."
- ***When the going gets rough, turn to wonder.*** If you feel judgmental, or defensive, ask yourself, "I wonder what brought her to this belief?" "I wonder what he's feeling right now?" "I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?" Set aside judgment to listen to others—and to yourself—more deeply.
- ***Attend to your own inner teacher.*** We learn from others, of course. But as we explore poems, stories, questions and silence in a circle of trust, we have a special opportunity to learn from within. So pay close attention to your own reactions and responses, to your most important teacher.
- ***Trust and learn from the silence.*** Silence is a gift in our noisy world, and a way of knowing in itself. Treat silence as a member of the group. After someone has spoken, take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words.
- ***Observe deep confidentiality.*** Nothing said in a circle of trust will ever be repeated to other people.
- ***Know that it's possible*** to leave the circle with whatever it was that you needed when you arrived, and that the seeds planted here can keep growing in the days ahead.

While these touchstones define how we relate to each other in a circle of trust, they can also be adapted to define how you work together in your organization, community or network with integrity and trust — inviting the best of each person to show up and contribute.

