



Facilitator's Guide

TIPS ON HOW TO FORM
A HEARTFIRE PROJECT GROUP

WHY TO HAVE A HF GROUP?

At Heartfire Project we have worked hard to create a book that feels interactive. The journal aims to support you and encourage you to keep going and not feel alone in this daunting process. But at the end of the day, it is just a book. A static, physical object that can't read your facial expressions or wipe away a tear when you finally allow yourself to feel old pain or disappointments. People do that. Relationships are the real world implications of this meaningful work. In life we constantly navigate the balance between being responsible for the quality of our life and the deep value of the quality of our relationships. Working with the journal in a group is a wonderful expression of the balance. The power of listening and being heard by like-minded people is unparalleled. While alone we can hide from ourselves. Even if our intention is to be honest with ourselves, it is oftentimes more powerful and penetrating to hear our selves speak it. Further affirming what we know.

Another important benefit of working in a group is simply accountability. This kind of self inquiry can really be hard. It can be easy to put it off if there is even a small part of you that is resistant. That is completely natural. Having someone hold your hand and cheerlead for you can make the difference. Some people respond well to the challenge of completing tasks at the behest of others rather than themselves. It can really matter on the level of motivation if someone wants you to do what you say you want to do for yourself. It's loving and benevolent prodding in service of your highest good.

The intimacy of sharing our story and process bonds people to each other very quickly. As facilitators and friends we need to do a lot less than we think sometimes. Giving people the space to share is magic. Absolute magic. It's the best of humanity in action. You can trust that those in your community that agree to join a group like this, want to be understood by themselves and others. Often the differences we might see on the surface fall away as soon as honesty is revealed. Sharing allows us to enjoy both the new and different perspectives of others along with the infinitely vaster similarities. Sharing allows us to practice compassion and patience for the lives of others which directly correlates to how we do this for ourselves. Creating a group based on sharing at this level can deepen the work in the journal exponentially. It's a good idea.

Practical Tips for Leading a HF Group:

- **You don't have the answers:** Release any anxiety you might be experiencing about how to help others in this process. The main tenant of the Heartfire Project is that one has to seek their own answers. This is always true ultimately. Discussion, perspectives and opinions help others to know what they think about things, but you are *never* responsible to figure things out for another.
- **Trust the Process:** You can always take a deep breath and have faith that things are as they should be *no matter what*. Pain, difficulty, anger, etc. are all part of life and this intimate work can stir up many complex, layered feelings. Allow things to flow. Check in, find *your* center and remember to trust. It can feel uncomfortable at times and can be a cue as to a place within *yourself* that needs attention.
- **The Quality of Your Presence:** Regardless of whether you are acting as “leader” or just part of the group your *intention* is the invisible factor that determines your openness to what is happening inside yourself and how you are with others. It is mostly an unconscious place inside until you wake it up and direct it. This is really important. In some ways, it is how you really are. You can smile on the outside while seething on the inside. You can experience your pain and also know it is part of the process. Congruent or incongruent. Does your outer reflect your inner? We are united in the big picture, and on an esoteric level we understand more than what our intellect admits, and this means that if our hearts are open others can fit. If we judge ourselves harshly it can create a defensiveness within and make it difficult to be vulnerable. There is no right or wrong in matters of the heart and soul, but know that simply showing trust and love can give the people you are with a sense of safety and compassion that allows them to go beyond what has felt scary in the past. We are that powerful.
- **The Use of Language:** Something basic to the art of facilitating is how we use language. Simple tweaks to your vernacular can create safety with an individual or group. Practice not projecting your ideas on others in a way that may discount their perspective. Starting with “I” instead of “You should...” allows your sense to be only yours, an offering instead of a directive. After all, how can you really know what another really needs. Stay curious. Ask questions. Don't assume. It's an open way of being and dovetails with the fact that you don't have to have the answers for another. What a relief! Many books have been filled on effective communication if you want to know more. Being mindful about how what you say might land with someone trying to be open and vulnerable is a great practice for the purpose of this group and in other relationships in your life.
- **Clear Ground Rules:** When forming a group, it is very important to lay solid ground rules for the emotional security and safety of everyone involved. Find out what people need to feel safe to open up about personal issues. Confidentiality is usually number one. Talk about promptness and not commandeering the sharing time. Also, depending on the feeling of the group, creating a sense of sacred space can be addressed. It often naturally occurs as this work touches deep, sometimes previously unexamined layers of one's life and that is a special thing to share with another. Acknowledging this specialness can begin to give permission for others to relax into it, and feel safe to be honest and vulnerable here. It is a necessary ingredient for illuminating inner truth.

• **Not Knowing What to Do Next:** In facilitating a group of this nature one may feel responsible for the pace or content of the unfolding process. Wanting to provide something valuable for the participants in your group is natural. Of course! This is a genuine motivation for bringing people together in this way. There is a fine line between being a facilitator and feeling the burden for what happens. For the benefit of yourself and the group remember this gathering has a life of its own independent of any individuals single contribution. That is truly the beauty of working in a group. There is expansiveness and holding of space that allows those in the group to have an experience beyond that of being alone. Trust the process and know that good intentions and faith in peoples' ability to do their own work and find answers are key ingredients to offer a group setting in a healthy way.

• **Stopping in an Unfinished Place:** Another tenet of not being responsible for the group dynamic is being able to allow for a lack of closure at times. Whether it be time constraints, some one else's turn, or simply a stuck place, it helps to be able to honor the feeling of things being unfinished as part of the process even if it's uncomfortable for you or another. Sometimes answers come later. Trust the unfolding of cosmic timing.

• **You are Not a Professional:** Give yourself a break and know what your role is. You are not here to fix anyone. This is an enduring part of the Heartfire approach. Everything we offer at Heartfire Project is based on the idea that individuals have to choose and find their way on their own. No one can possibly know what another's needs really are. One must be encouraged, listened to, validated and supported in finding their own way and being honored for know what their truth is. You are simply a place. Your open heart and good intentions provide sacred and warm space to be real. There is no need for anyone to have to know anything beforehand. Once again, trusting the process, yourself and others is all that is needed to create a compassionate, permissive environment for growth and connection.

• **Understanding “perspectives”:** A powerful, natural by-product of engaging in this process in a group is the wealth of perspectives. We all bring our own way of being and seeing to anything we do. Our personal life can actually become hindered by stubborn perspectives that keep us looking one way trying to find a different answer. Very often another's perspective can show us something we couldn't see from our current vantage point. Allow for that here, encourage it. If we can refrain from advise giving and simply offer our perspective, oftentimes another can find value in our experience without feeling invalidated for the place they currently are. Another way to use perspectives in a positive way in to encourage someone who is stuck to reach for a new perspective for herself.

• **Being a Channel:** As a facilitator, you can see yourself as a channel, conduit, a connector. Like the hostess role in any gathering, you offer a framework and goodwill for allowing people to come together. Who you are sets the tone of how things will unfold. Consciously choose to be open and unfettered. Give yourself permission to trust that who you are and your good intention are enough and perfect for what needs to happen in the group that has been drawn to you.

• **Lighten Up!:** Most of us know that inner work can be heavy, We are pushed to face things that have previously gone unexamined due to real or anticipated pain or discomfort. When it comes to matters of the heart and soul there is often a sense of seriousness or reverence that can be appropriate, and yet bringing a lightness in can really breathe new life into musty, cloistered places that have seemed to need protecting. Most of us are ultimately motivated to do this work because we are looking for that lightness, the relief of standing on solid ground and modeling that during the process can help people keep going. If it feels good to be in your group, no matter difficult the personal work is they will keep coming back, which means they will keep doing the work because they feel held and understood, which is the reason for doing this work in a group in the first place.

• **Knowing How to Not Take on Another's 'Stuff':** In validation of the sacred nature of the experience of digging deep within, it is helpful to remember that in your compassion and openhandedness not to become so involved with the work of other's as to allow it to affect you adversely. Empathy is often an experience associated with 'being there' for others, with 'holding space' for the unfolding of another's process. This can be rewarding to witness, or heart wrenching to be taken into confidence of the difficult plight of those in your group. In order to have the endurance to keep being open to others, one must establish inner boundaries about what is healthy for you to let 'in' yourself. Practicing a "clearing" of the intense stories or energies of others that may become lodged inside of you as you become closer to the group members can provide the fluidness you need to not become too intertwined in the pain or drama of another, setting you up for potential burn-out. Once again, as your heart swells with empathy, and compassion remember to 'Trust the Process.' Have faith in the individuals ability to grow and learn and become strong in the face of life's challenges.

• **A Place to Keep Learning About You:** Ultimately everything we do in life is connected. And facilitating anyone in anything can be a place to learn about ourselves. As much as you are wanting to provide something for the members of this group, you are also having your own meaningful experience in doing that. It's part of *your* Heartfire Project. It's the doing. If your buttons are getting pushed in any capacity know there is valuable information in that for *you*. Be transparent. Just tell your group when something comes up that doesn't feel right or feels really right. Chances are that your presence will set the tone for the integrity of the group, and if you are honest and vulnerable and fallible, others will feel it is okay for them to go that deep too.

WHAT A GIFT YOU ARE GIVING YOURSELF AND OTHERS. COMING TOGETHER FOR THE
PURPOSE OF BECOMING MORE TRUE, MORE LOVED, MORE PRESENT, MORE AWAKE.

REAL CHANGE. THANK YOU FOR YOUR OFFERING.



Nuts and Bolts:

When?

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Where?

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Will you charge? How much?

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Will you serve refreshments?

Is that all your responsibility? Can others help you?

Preparing or paying for what you are providing?

•

How often will you meet?

How much will you try to accomplish each gathering?

Will there be “homework”?

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How many people do you want in your group?

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Can people join in as you go,

or do want a commitment?

For how long?



