

Kind Community Meeting Guide

Community-Led Meetings

Community-led meetings can be coordinated by anyone. All that is needed is a group of people with a shared intention of kindness, a space to gather, and a meeting format. A community-led meeting is created by everyone in the room. Throughout the meeting, participants help ensure that everyone who benefits to share has an opportunity to do so.

Meeting Length

How long a meeting lasts depends on how many people are attending the meeting and what their needs are. For groups of five or less, a 90-minute meeting with no time limits on sharing often gives enough space for everyone to speak without feeling rushed. For groups of six or more, timing shares can ensure that everyone who benefits to share can do so. Groups can divide their meeting time by the number of participants to get a sense how much time people can take sharing and receiving feedback. People may choose to decline feedback and use their allotted time sharing only.

Timekeeping

For larger groups, we recommend that someone in the meeting volunteers as timekeeper, using a timer to track time. This is an example of how people could time a meeting. Every group of people has their own needs, and yours may look different than this:

Time	Activity
5 minutes	People arrive and find their seat
10 minutes	Volunteers read the meeting format out loud
5 minutes	Brief introductions and check-ins

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55 minutes	Timed shares
15 minutes	Open discussion
5 minutes	Closing check-outs, announcements, and clean-up

If there's a lull in sharing, participants can choose to begin an open discussion, suggest topics, or offer additional sharing prompts. Open discussion can be skipped if more time is needed for everyone to have adequate time to share.

Ways to Participate

There is no expectation that participation looks the same for everyone. This format supports each person's needs and capacities. People who are nonspeaking are valued members of the meeting. If invited to share, anyone is welcome to say "pass" or decline without explanation. Some people use a nickname or chosen name to maintain privacy.

How the Meeting Runs

1. Before the Meeting Starts (5 minutes)

Allow 5 minutes for people to arrive and settle into the space.

2. Volunteers read the Meeting Format (10 minutes)

Meetings begin by volunteers reading the meeting format out loud. The meeting format helps guide the meeting with the intention of kindness. Volunteers can pass reading to the next volunteer to pick up where they left off at any time.

3. Check-Ins (30 seconds to 1 minute each)

People are invited to briefly introduce themselves and share how they are arriving to meeting.

4. Open Sharing (60 minutes)

People take turns sharing as they feel ready. Everyone helps create balanced participation by listening respectfully and being mindful of time so everyone who benefits to share has an opportunity to do so.

5. Check-Outs (5 minutes)

People are invited to share any final thoughts, takeaways, or intentions if they wish. Volunteers can share announcements about the next meeting time and location and formally close the meeting.

Giving and Getting Feedback

Feedback is a chance to offer supportive words with care for what another person needs. Kind feedback isn't about having the perfect response—it's about wanting to understand and helping their need get noticed.

Feedback Starts with Consent

Feedback starts with consent. Each person decides if they are open to feedback and gets to choose what kind. People are encouraged to communicate what kind of feedback might be helpful, and what kind is not. With practice over time, it will become easier to know what's helpful and preferences will become easier to express. Some people just want to be listened to without feedback. Others might want:

- Reflection: *"Here's what I heard you say..."*
- An emotional response: *"Hearing that affected me in this way..."*
- Encouragement
- Others sharing their similar experience, so they know they're not alone
- Help thinking through a problem
- Curious questions that help find the unmet need

- Practical help, if they ask for it

If someone doesn't want feedback, the kindest thing we can do is not give any.

Feedback Is Not the Same as Advice

Instead of telling someone what they're feeling, why something happened, or what they should do, we first try to understand their experience. Explaining, problem-solving, and advice can be useful when asked for, but they're not the same thing as feedback.

Even well-meaning advice can end up replacing someone's experience with our own. For example, if someone tells us they just got a cancer diagnosis, launching straight into an explanation of how chemo works gives them information, but it doesn't necessarily make them feel connected to or understood. Before offering knowledge, we can ask:

"I am wondering what would actually be most helpful for you right now?"

Guardrails for Kind Feedback

When we're giving feedback, we try to:

- Respond to what they shared, instead of turning the conversation toward ourselves.
- Acknowledge their experience as valid.
- Stay curious instead of assuming.
- Only help them think through options if they ask us to.
- Clarify what the need is before we offer any ideas.
- Respect their right to make their own choices.

Sometimes the best thing we can offer someone is just our willingness to listen. Before responding, we can ask ourselves:

1. Did I actually understand?

2. Do they even want feedback?
3. What kind of feedback are they asking for?
4. Can I honestly offer that right now?
5. Will this actually help meet their need or mine?

Kind Community Meeting Format

On the next page is the Kind Community Meeting Format. Copies are passed around at the beginning of meetings, and volunteers take turns reading aloud. This document guides the whole meeting. Add snacks, coffee, and tea, and you're good to go. Comfy pillows help, too!

Kind Community Meeting Format

Opening the Meeting

Call for Volunteers

Is anyone available to volunteer today for the reading “About Sharing” after the relational agreements? Pause to identify a volunteer!

Is anyone available to volunteer today as timekeeper? The timekeeper times shares and reads the “Check-Out Prompts” 10 minutes before the meeting ends. Pause to identify a volunteer!

Relational Agreements for Kind Meetings

Intention of Kindness

The most important thing that we do together is accept each other’s reality with the intention of kindness. Our relational agreements work like guardrails. They let us benefit from being together without unintentionally hurting each other. If anyone forgets or has trouble following an agreement, anyone can kindly ask that it be read out loud again. Anyone who engages in violent, sexual, threatening, or similarly harmful behavior toward others will be asked to leave.

Community-Led

Meetings themselves are community-led. Volunteers make meetings possible. A volunteer arrives early to unlock the door. A timekeeper helps keep track of time. Nobody is the boss and nobody is in charge. We agree to treat each other as equals. Together, we make the meeting happen by sharing. Laughter and tears are welcome. It is okay to have and acknowledge all feelings. It is okay to express anger at situations, but not toward each other in meetings.

Privacy

In order to be vulnerable, the environment must be made safe enough to do so. This is why we assume privacy by default. We agree to not share personal details about anyone without their permission, and to refrain from posting about members on social media.

Respecting Different Needs

We agree to respect all of our needs and limitations without requiring proof or explanation for why people may have them. Many disabilities are invisible. We agree to hold this reality together with care and do our best to support each other where we can.

Harm

Some of us may be dealing with harm, abuse, neglect, violence, or exploitation in our lives; as effects from the past and/or ongoing experiences. We agree not to assume anything about someone's life, or about how someone is doing.

Vulnerable Shares

We agree on making this space kind enough and safe enough to just be direct about our lives. Some people may be struggling with suicidal thoughts, self-injury urges, dangerous situations, or carrying something very heavy alone—sometimes without any way to let others know. When someone shares bravely about difficult circumstances, it's okay to not know what to say. Sometimes offering support just looks like being with somebody and acknowledging their pain.

Friendship and Hurting Each Other by Accident

Making mistakes is simply part of being human. When conflict arises, it is often due to a misunderstanding. We agree to treat mistakes as mistakes, without treating anyone like something is wrong with them for making one. We know that we might accidentally hurt each other, and we support both protecting ourselves and accepting that accidents happen.

About Sharing

Feedback

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Check-In Prompt

We will now go around the room and do a brief 30-second check in. We can share how we are arriving to the meeting today. Feel free to pass. After going around the room once, we will go around one more time to see if those who passed would like to check in. I will either begin my check-in or pass to the person to my right. *"I am [name]. I am arriving to the meeting..."*

Sharing Prompts

We will now read the sharing prompts, and the floor will be open for people to share: What's at the top of your head and heart? How can we be helpful for you today? Is there anything that feels lost, invisible, or hard to hold alone that might be easier with support from others? Are there any needs that kind community can help you meet?

Check-Out Prompts (for the timekeeper!)

What was the effect like for you of being together today? What is one kind action you wish to practice internally or externally after leaving the meeting?

Announcements

Does anyone have any announcements about upcoming community-building events, requests for help, or volunteer opportunities? Anyone is welcome to share a need or bring attention to help requested in the group text message thread. Please share information about others only with their permission.

Clean-Up Checklist

Return chairs to their places, put away snacks, and wash or return dishes as needed. Check the floor for crumbs and clean up any that you find. Turn lights off, collect food you placed in the refrigerator and make sure its doors are closed. Set the alarm and lock the door. For safety, especially after dark, people are encouraged to walk out together.