

V2 Exploring Small Group Tension

for pairs & small groups in person or online

This themed approach is useful for exploring mild group, team, or community tension. The results of this process may resolve tension in one session or form the basis for future problem-solving, goal-setting, or strategy sessions. There are multiple approaches to this game.

The core method is designed for small groups of 3 to 12 participants. Groups larger than 5 or 6 can work as one group, though they are typically arranged into smaller groups of 5 or 6 participants. One facilitator supports each group. Groups sit in circles, taking turns storytelling, listening, and guessing. The facilitator supports participants and the process.

PLAY

Facilitator

- Brings already shuffled cards – 1 set per circle
- Welcomes participants, reviews the theme and how the process works
- Organizes the group into one or more circles, asking for a volunteer in each group to be the first Storyteller
- Randomly distributes the feelings deck among Listeners before the Storyteller starts
- Tracks time

Storyteller

- Holds no cards
- Shares their relationship with the group – even if everyone knows who they are. For example, “I’m So and So, Supervisor of the XYZ team.”
- Shares how the specific event impacted them personally and possibly their team. For example, “Our team was directly impacted by the ABC event last month. In response, I rescheduled our LMNOP event, reorganized the team structure, and have been working through the resistance to some of those changes.”
- May or may not mention feelings – if they do, the Facilitator will record them for the group to see – on the flip chart or, online in the chat

Listeners

- Listen silently to understand the Storyteller, avoiding the tendency to focus on fact-finding and assessment

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- Look through their feelings cards, selecting which cards they will guess are present for the Storyteller
- Take turns placing their feelings cards face up on the table or floor while using a connective statement such as:

“You sounded *sad* about the ABC event and *disappointed* when you learned that the response led to disagreement and *upset*.”

- Avoid conclusive or ‘telling’ statements such as “You *are* feeling...”

Facilitator

- May coach Listeners to *guess* feelings vs. *assign* feelings

Storyteller

- Silently observes how each guess lands within themselves
- Resists offering a judgment of ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to each guess
- Waits for all guesses to be made
- Thanks Listeners for guessing
- Selects the top 3 to 5 feelings guesses that most resonated with how they were feeling at the time of the event or when telling the story

Facilitator

- Gathers the feelings cards, leaving the top 3 to 5 in place for the next round of needs guesses, records the top 3 to 5 feelings
- Randomly distributes needs cards to Listeners

Listeners

- Look through their needs cards, selecting cards they will guess are connected to the top 3 to 5 feelings named by the Storyteller
- Take turns placing their needs cards face up on the table or floor next to the feelings card they are connecting the need to using a connective question such as:

“Are you feeling X for the need of Y?”

- Avoid conclusive or ‘telling’ statements such as “You *are* feeling X *because of* Y.”

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Storyteller

- Silently observes how each guess lands within themselves
- Resists offering a judgment of 'Yes' or 'No' to each guess
- Waits for all guesses to be made
- Thanks Listeners for guessing
- Selects the top 3 to 5 needs guesses that most resonated with them
- Shares individual positive connection statements for each of the top 3 to 5 needs such as:

I have the beautiful need of _____.

Facilitator

- Records the top 3 to 5 Needs
- Gathers the cards
- Thanks participants
- Solicits and addresses process questions
- Distributes feelings cards in preparation for the next Storyteller

The process repeats until everyone has a turn as Storyteller.

ENDING PLAY

Facilitator

- Reviews the number and diversity of feelings and needs shared
- Encourages discussion about the complexity of the group's feelings and needs collectively and individually
- Summarizes the group's hard work
- If there are multiple circles, brings the full group together for closing activities
- Facilitates discussion about each circle's experience, patterns of feelings and needs
- Depending on the group's original goals, may begin planning for follow-up problem-solving sessions
- Facilitates a closing round of one-sentence takeaway statements, naming feelings or needs that they are leaving the session with. For example,

I'm taking away appreciation for the needs of communication,
psychological safety, and connection.

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ORGANIZER NOTES

- The typical session is scheduled for 2.5 hours, allowing 20 minutes of introduction, topic review, demo, participant settling in, and Q&A, followed by rounds where each participant has an opportunity to be the Storyteller.
- Because timing and the opportunity for each person to speak is essential, it is strongly recommended that individual circles in a typical workplace setting be no larger than 6 participants. However, larger groups are often impacted by the same issues. Thus, it's recommended that the full group be engaged in the same setting at the same time but broken down into groups of no larger than 6.
- Timing is critical to success! It's recommended that:
 - Storytellers have 3 to 5 minutes for sharing
 - Listeners 1 to 2 minutes for guessing
 - Q&A between Storytellers is 2 to 5 minutes
- Do the math. Knowing how much time the group needs allows you to set realistic expectations for the group
- Encourage organizers to allow ample time. Rushed circles tend to produce rushed, perhaps less than authentic, results.
- Using the recommended timing for a group of 6 each, sessions can run from roughly 1.5 to 2.5 hours with no breaks, and before closing statements :
 - Introduction etc. = 20 minutes
 - 6 Storytellers at 3 to 5 minutes = 18 to 30 minutes
 - 5 listeners = 5 to 10 minutes each round x 6 rounds = 30 to 50 minutes
 - Time for Q&A between Storytellers 2 to 5 minutes each x 5 rounds = 10 to 25 minutes