



**THE ARTFUL
CONVERSATION**

COMPANION LEARNING GUIDE



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Q: What Is a Companion Learning Guide?

Each of the workshops will have a companion learning guide that will serve many purposes.

BEFORE THE SESSION

- You will find the **Pre-workshop Burst Video**, designed to stimulate your thinking before the session.
- There are questions for **reflection**, **journaling**, and/or **discussion** with trusted colleagues.
- If you are so inclined, you can **review the PowerPoint** that we will be using in the workshop to familiarize yourself with the content.

DURING THE SESSION

- Additional **instructions for breakouts** are included.

POST-SESSION

- The companion learning guide will have **further information and additional resources** to continue your learning.
- Additional **reflection**, **journaling**, or **chat** topics are also included.

ABOUT NCRC

Your facilitators today are from the [National Conflict Resolution Center](#), a San Diego-based nonprofit that works with campuses, governments, businesses, and community groups around the world to find solutions to our most challenging conflicts.

This workshop is part of a series for community leaders. The series has been designed to build on the strengths you already have in order to support your work in managing the challenges of today's communities



BURST VIDEO:

Welcome!

**Balancing a Problem-Solving Orientation
with Being Human Centered**

REFLECT:

What stood out for you in the video?

JOURNAL: *In what ways has my problem-solving mindset been helpful in my community work? In what ways has it been detrimental?*

DIALOGUE WITH A TRUSTED COLLEAGUE:

How can we support one another to increase our ability to be human centered in our work?

Overview of the Series



We will do all we can to create a [psychologically safe space](#) for you so that you can comfortably share your experiences and perspective.

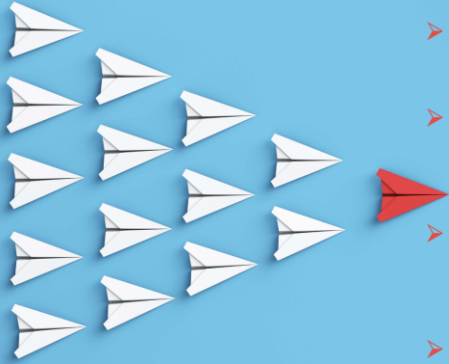
We also ask that you consider the work of Dr. Carol Dweck of Stanford University in taking the approach of a [growth mindset](#) as you participate in the sessions. While each of you is an expert, there is always more to learn!

NCRC utilizes a scaffolding approach that builds skills and expands mindsets. This four-workshop series is packed with skills, tools, and techniques that will assist you in tackling challenging situations. Each session is highly interactive, and you will be able to share your experience and knowledge with others.

- 1. The ARTful Conversation:** You'll learn how to effectively handle challenging one-on-one conversations. This foundational course lays the groundwork for all subsequent sessions.
- 2. The ART of Inclusive Communication:** You'll explore strategies and techniques to embrace and promote inclusivity.
- 3. The Bystander Challenge:** You'll learn what to do when you observe micro-aggressions and how to empower others to become thoughtful upstanders as part of creating a sense of belonging in your community.
- 4. The Exchange:** You'll learn a conflict resolution process that helps you lead a problem-solving conversation, focused on collaboration and future success.

Learning Outcomes

Culture, Communication, and Conflict: Overall Learning Outcomes



- Effectively handle challenging one-on-one conversations (The [ARTful](#) Conversation)
- Implement strategies and techniques to embrace and promote inclusivity (The ART of Inclusive Communication)
- Respond to micro-aggressions, and empower others to become thoughtful upstanders (The Bystander Challenge)
- Lead collaborative conflict resolution processes (The Exchange)

REFLECT

How do people feel after they interact with you? How do you create safety and support in your leadership?

Group Agreements



GROUP AGREEMENTS

- Show respect
- Listen with compassion
- Keep confidentiality
- Share the airtime in breakouts



This quote by Maya Angelou captures a great amount in a few words. As community leaders, building relationships based on mutual respect and inclusive behavior makes a significant difference in how people feel about you.

We are mindful of this as we set up a psychologically safe space for you in this series. With that in mind, we ask that everyone agrees to our group agreements.

FURTHER LEARNING

For many community leaders, *making a difference* is a driving force in the work that they do. This book examines successful organizations: [“The Healing Organization: Awakening the Conscience of Business to Help Save the World.”](#)

First Breakout



This will be your first opportunity to connect with others in the cohort.

You will have an opportunity to **share** a bit **about yourself** and the **roles** in which you find yourself in **community work**.

What kinds of **challenges** around **collaboration**, **communication**, **culture**, and **connection** do you face?

Lastly, discuss the **first burst video**. What resonated with you?

NCRC THE ARTFUL CONVERSATION

Learning Outcomes

This workshop will provide a useful framework for **active listening** that will establish the philosophy and skills necessary to create a **psychologically safe environment**.

- **Listen actively** and **empathetically**
- Treat all stakeholders with **respect** and **dignity**
- Demonstrate **approachability** and **openness**

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NCRC THE ARTFUL CONVERSATION

ACTIVE AWARENESS

RESPOND RESPECTFULLY

TROUBLESHOOT TOGETHER

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The ARTful Conversation workshop officially begins! This first workshop lays the groundwork for all subsequent sessions and provides the scaffolding necessary to build understanding. This is the scaffolding that is necessary to build understanding.

Active Awareness

Being mindful of all factors that may be playing a role in our communication.

Respond Respectfully

Communicating so that others feel fully heard and respected

Troubleshoot Together

Expressing our perspectives in a productive way and finding shared solutions

Active Awareness



Recognize Style Differences

Check Your Bias and Your Ego

Process Your Perceptions



For the first part of our session together, we will be focusing on increasing our awareness.

Having **Active Awareness** means not only being aware of our style differences but also being aware of and **checking our biases and egos**. Not *checking our egos* may prevent us from being able to effectively collaborate and consider the ideas of others. Approaching challenges in an ego-based way results in seeing issues **ONLY** from our own perspectives and addressing solutions that **ONLY** meet our own interests instead of working on solutions that benefit the diverse communities we serve. Our **cultural egos** also get in the way of embracing an inclusive approach.

Processing these perceptions will help us to understand the situation more fully and consider the perspectives of others more effectively.



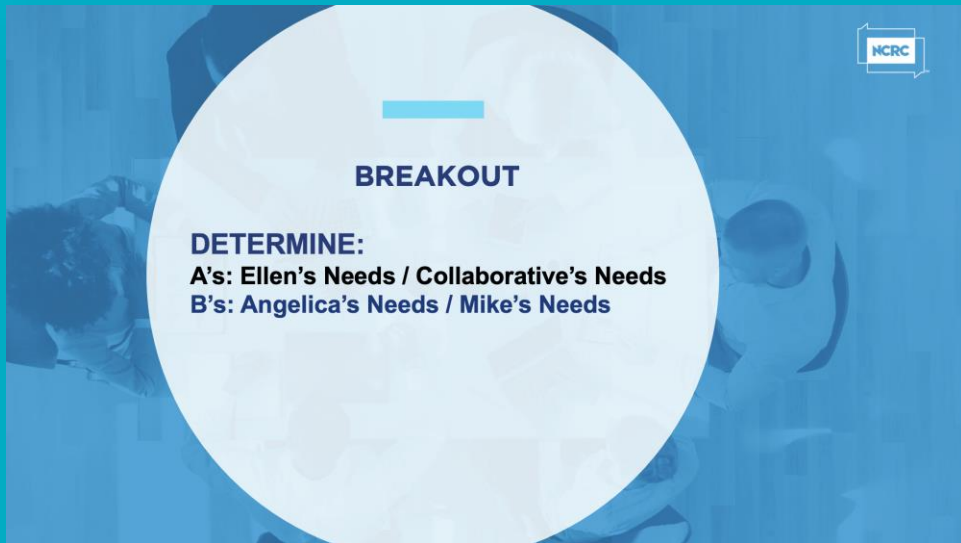
REFLECT

Think about a personal conflict you recently had. What did you really need in that situation? What were the other person's needs? Were these needs met?

Being able to identify your underlying needs and hear the needs of others fosters effective communication and positive transformation within a relationship or community.

Every person has underlying needs. Conflict most often arises when those needs are unmet. In the next workshop, we will cover communication style, which affects the way we articulate our needs. Our cultural backgrounds can also influence the prioritization of some needs over others.

Underlying Needs Discussion



We will be using a community-based collaborative scenario to understand better how to determine underlying needs. We will discover how they find solutions to the issues later!

The main characters in the collaborative include:

- Randy:** Healthy Futures Collaborative Leader
- Mike:** Healthy Futures Co-chair
- Angelica:** Healthy Futures Co-chair
- Loretta:** CEO of the Community Counseling Center and Angelica's Boss
- Ellen:** Director of Butt Out, an anti-smoking campaign and member of the collaborative

[WATCH VIDEO OF THE CONFLICTS](#)



REFLECT

What are a community member's needs when they come to a leader with a concern? What are your needs? Which needs take precedence in that moment?

Common Underlying Needs for Community Members

- **Safety:** feeling safe physically and psychologically
- **Acceptance:** feeling accepted by others in the community
- **Respect:** feeling respected for their contributions or lifestyles
- **Positive experience:** making a positive impact
- **Fairness:** being treated fairly

Common Underlying Needs for Community Leaders

In addition to the needs of community members, leaders typically need:

- **Order:** feeling that the community rules are respected
- **Justice:** believing that services and opportunities exist for people
- **Collaboration:** seeing that people who care about the community work well together
- **Reputation:** feeling that they are respected by others in the community

Further Learning on Active Awareness

Most of the time, adults are expected to self-regulate their emotions in their autonomic nervous system. Stanford University's Dr. Shirzad Chamine's research and work on enhancing [*positive intelligence*](#) through self-care and short grounding exercises helps us to understand how to regulate ourselves better. You may want to look at the nonscientific article [Cultivating Co-regulation in Yourself](#) for ideas about how to co-regulate.

Survivor Brain	PQ Brain
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Activates fight-or-flight response• Emotions are strong and uncontrolled• Fear and aggression dominate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-awareness• Centered• Management of negative emotions• Empathy

Here is a [free quiz](#) to check your positive intelligence. A person can't have Active Awareness if they are operating from the survivor brain.

REFLECT

What do you do to ground yourself? How do you ensure that you balance self-care needs with the work that you do?

Active Awareness is about maintaining mindfulness when you are actively checking in with your own thoughts and reactions. When we are exhausted or overworked, it can be difficult to reflect thoughtfully. Grounding ourselves helps us to approach situations with more Active Awareness and reduces the chances of misunderstanding and negative assumptions.



How we **ask questions** to understand better is important as well. As much as possible, try to **maintain a curious stance** about the other person’s perspective. In this way, your questions will reflect a genuine desire to **gain an understanding** of their perspective rather than asking a series of questions that antagonize the other person. Watching the tone of voice to remain respectful also makes a difference.

As we move into the R of the ARTful Conversation, we will be looking at how we Respond Respectfully to help create a culture of respect and inclusion in our communities and workplaces. A successful leader will model this behavior. We will practice the skills of demonstrating understanding, identifying needs and acknowledging responsibility—as these skills are the key to clear, respectful communication when things matter to people.

Taking responsibility for your part of the breakdown of communication means being able to say that you made a mistake, assumed something incorrectly, or that you are sorry for something that you did. Rather than making you look weaker or more vulnerable, it does more to set a tone of honesty and understanding. This will help the other person feel safe enough to look at their responsibility and, often, to apologize for any missteps they may have made as well. In the end, your ability to acknowledge your responsibility tends to **strengthen the relationship**.



How do you **RESPOND RESPECTFULLY** with your **TONE** and your **BODY LANGUAGE**?

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REFLECT

What are some ways that you can create a feeling of safety through your body language, eye contact, and safety signals when working with others?

FURTHER LEARNING

Body language and tone influence communication much more than many understand. Some people are naturally inclined to reading body language and tone, while others, especially those who have experienced trauma (in their childhoods or in their current situations or repeated [microaggressions](#)) are sometimes triggered by body language and tone.

Neuroception is how neural circuits in our brain distinguish whether situations or people are safe, among other things. Information about polyvagal theory and neuroception, or how neural circuits in our brain distinguish whether situations or people are safe, and how those perceptions can impact us physiologically, can be found [here](#).

When we looked at Active Awareness, we reflected on how adults are responsible for **self-regulation**. However, there are times when **any adult can become dysregulated** (such as when they have experienced a challenging life situation). That person will benefit from interactions in which the other person is able to [co-regulate](#) with them.

In addition to eye contact and other safety signals, [mirror neurons](#) play an important role. Our warm and responsive interaction connects on an unconscious level. A calm, compassionate demeanor can positively impact a person who is out of regulation. **Being mindful of how our body language and tone may be playing a role in our communication helps create psychological safety for others.**

Neuro-Reception: How it Impacts Communication

Micro-Expressions

The facial expressions occur within a fraction of a second. This involuntary emotional leakage exposes a person's true emotions.

Micro-Gestures

The movements in the face or body. The gestures that send negative messages, such as distracted eye movements that demonstrate impatience and break trust.

Examples

- ▶ Happiness
- ▶ Sadness
- ▶ **Anger**
- ▶ **Disgust**
- ▶ **Contempt**
- ▶ Fear
- ▶ Surprise
- ▶ Impatience
- ▶ Distraction

FURTHER LEARNING

For further investigation about the impact of body language, we examine here the concept of **micro-expressions** and **micro-gestures**.

You may want to consider what might lead you to demonstrate any micro-expressions and micro-gestures that you commonly show. Perhaps it's too many tasks on your to-do list. This is understandable, but when others share personal experiences with you, do what you can to take a human-centered approach, being present with the other person. It can make a tremendous difference in how you are perceived.

It could be that the micro-expressions and micro-gestures you demonstrate are connected to your own self-development. Stanford's Dr. Shirzad Chamine examines *inner saboteurs* (Chamine's term) in his work, including in this [TEDx Stanford](#) presentation for workplace leaders.

Respond Respectfully

RESPOND RESPECTFULLY: A Key Step *Before* Problem-Solving

DEMONSTRATE UNDERSTANDING

Recap speaker's main concerns in your own words

ACKNOWLEDGE IMPACT

Reflect the person's feelings

IDENTIFY NEEDS

Say what you think their underlying needs were



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Respond Respectfully is a framework for active listening that invites effective dialogue. These techniques can significantly improve communication, provide clarity on both ends, encourage collaboration, and help employees feel deeply heard and understood.

RESPOND RESPECTFULLY EXAMPLE

Angelica complains to you that her co-chair with Healthy Futures, Mike, doesn't treat community members respectfully and only focuses on his agenda of weight loss rather than listening to the community member.

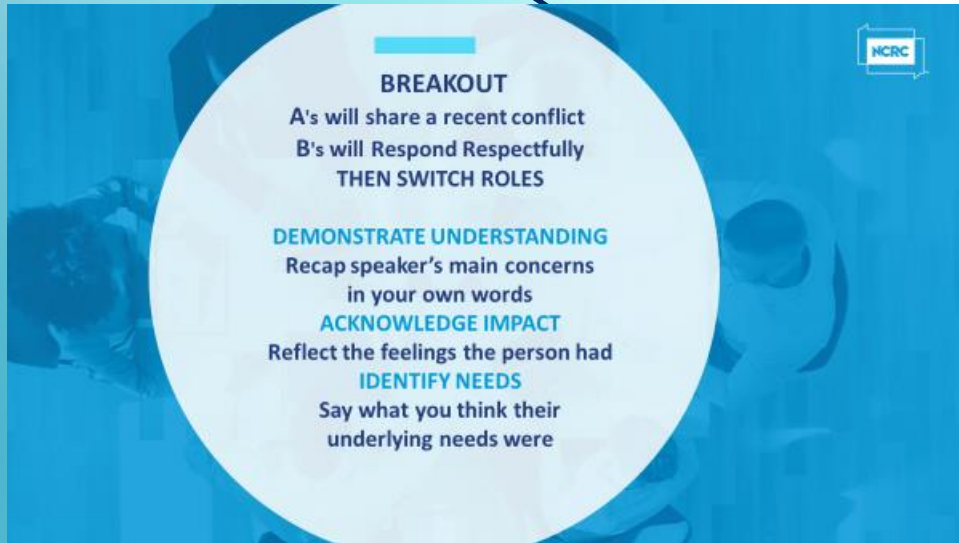
You may be tempted to react by giving Angelica information about how to solve the problem, but effective leaders Respond Respectfully before problem-solving so the person feels heard. It will also help to clarify Angelica's underlying needs.

Demonstrate understanding: It sounds like you have concerns about Mike's ability to listen to concerns of community members as well as his overemphasis on weight loss.

Acknowledge impact: I am hearing that you are extremely uncomfortable with this, and I wonder if you are also concerned about how it might impact community trust and involvement?

Identify needs: Is it important to you that community members are heard and respected? Would you also like to see more balance in addressing all issues of concern with community members?

Respond Respectfully Practice



BREAKOUT

A's will share a recent conflict
B's will Respond Respectfully
THEN SWITCH ROLES

DEMONSTRATE UNDERSTANDING
Recap speaker's main concerns
in your own words

ACKNOWLEDGE IMPACT
Reflect the feelings the person had

IDENTIFY NEEDS
Say what you think their
underlying needs were

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You will now have an opportunity to practice the Respond Respectfully skills. Some may be familiar to you, yet we find that most people need additional practice with **identifying needs**. Spend more time with this if the other skills are already central to how you listen and speak

It is best for learning to pick a real conflict that you have experienced rather than making one up. Find an example that you feel comfortable sharing. We would caution against picking the worst thing that ever happened to you, as there won't be enough time for your partner to fully listen and support you.

After the A's have an opportunity to share and the B's Respond Respectfully, please switch roles.



TROUBLESHOOT TOGETHER

Give your perspective in a nonconfrontational way

Make sure everyone's needs are addressed

End on a positive note

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REFLECT

How does this approach to discussing sensitive topics invite a more respectful dialogue?

TROUBLESHOOT TOGETHER

SHARE YOUR PERSPECTIVE IN A NONCONFRONTATIONAL WAY

- State how the situation is affecting you or others without attacking the other person.
- State your interests: "One thing that is important to me/our organization is ..."
- Use "WE" statements: "I'd like it if we could figure out a way to ..."
- State organizational values: "We value ... and for this reason, I need to ..."



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Troubleshoot Together is the third and final component of the ARTful Conversation. It's your opportunity to explain your perspective in a nonconfrontational way, to provide clarity on considerations the other person may not be aware of, and to focus on a common goal.

Though not all demands can be met, making sure **everyone's needs are addressed** is much more possible when we take this approach rather than an adversarial approach.

Lastly, **ending on a positive note** allows you to maintain a healthy relationship with the other person.

Troubleshoot Together

FURTHER LEARNING

We offer further learning by suggesting that you consider the [goals of the conversation](#). Ensuring that you are on the same page with others will help you Troubleshoot Together more effectively.

Additionally, many leaders have indicated that they would like to learn a methodical approach to sort through challenging conversations.

The checklist provided here illustrates a structured approach that we borrow from our Exchange methodology. Leaders can use this framework to sort through tough issues.

During challenging conversations, there are often multiple topics of concern, each with multiple issues. Addressing all at once can be overwhelming. Utilizing the 5 D's approach, topics of concern are disaggregated into their smallest parts, and then each issue is examined through the five-step method: DEFINE, DEVELOP, DETERMINE, DECIDE, and DOCUMENT.

Facilitate Problem-Solving: The 5 D's

GOALS

- ▶ Identify and determine possibilities
- ▶ Create an action plan



Respond Respectfully Practice

ACTIVE AWARENESS

- Recognize style differences
- Check your bias and your ego
- Process your perceptions

RESPOND RESPECTFULLY

- Demonstrate understanding
- Acknowledge and identify needs
- Ask open-ended questions
- Acknowledge your responsibility

TROUBLESHOOT TOGETHER

- Give your perspective in a nonconfrontational way
- Make sure everyone's needs are met
- End on a positive note



See Randy from Healthy Futures utilize the ARTful Conversation with Ellen, director of Butt Out, an anti-smoking organization for youth.

The ART, in its entirety, is very effective in showing respect and inviting inclusive dialogue. It is not necessary to memorize it. Instead, think of it as a tool for promoting a culture of equity, respect and clear communication in your community work.

Practicing the ART every chance you get can give you a solid foundation on which to build your skills. In a sense, these skills are like a new language and a philosophy of communication and negotiation.

The philosophical basis for the human-centered approach we promote was originally based on the work from the Harvard Negotiation Project (particularly the book “Getting Past No”), though we have continued to expand our thinking and theoretical understanding from many sources and our lived experience.



TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERS RECOGNIZE **THREE TRIGGERS** THAT BLOCK FEEDBACK

- **TRUTH TRIGGERS**
Set off by the substance of the feedback. Is the feedback given in a way that implies that it is 100% true?
- **RELATIONSHIP TRIGGERS**
Set off by how the recipient feels about you. Do you always point out only what's wrong? Are you in touch with their world?
- **IDENTITY TRIGGERS**
Set off by the employee's sense of who they are when given feedback. Does the feedback lead them to feeling that their identity is threatened?



REFLECT

Consider your own growth. Have you ever been triggered in these ways when you have received feedback?

FURTHER LEARNING

We have many leaders share with us the challenge of giving feedback, even when others ask it of them. Successfully providing feedback is important to supporting growth. Needs and potential triggers of those receiving feedback are illustrated to the left. Awareness of the intersection of these can help leaders be more thoughtful in their approach

In our look at feedback, NCRC credits the work of Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen from the Harvard Negotiation Project and their book **“Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well”**

*even when it's off base, unfair, poorly delivered, and, frankly, you're not in the mood.

Conclusion

ACTIVE AWARENESS

RESPOND RESPECTFULLY

TROUBLESHOOT TOGETHER

WHAT'S NEXT

- > Watch burst video on a leader's use of humble inquiry
- > Next week: The ART of Inclusive Communication

What is one takeaway for you from today's session?



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Thank you for your participation in the ARTful Conversation. We look forward to seeing you in the ART of Inclusive Communication.



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