



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

Icebreaker: Word Roll

Build a word die to spark communication in your group.

Tami Rudkin | posted 7/12/2002

Take a small square box or use a small square block of wood and write the following words on the sides, top and bottom. One per side so it looks like a die—ADVENTURE, CRY, HOPE, TRUST, PLAY, FEAR.

Have each of your group members take turns rolling the word die. Instruct them to use the word they rolled in a sentence. For example: "Cry ... I cry at sad movies."

For more fun you could make a second die with the following words on it and tell your group that they must use both words they roll in one sentence—OUTRAGEOUS, PAINFUL, EXOTIC, DANGEROUS, GORGEOUS, GRUESOME.

Article: A Safe Place to Heal

Participating in community is vital for those who have been spiritually damaged.

by Jeff VanVonderen and Dale and Juanita Ryan | posted 8/17/2009

Not all social experiences provide the kind of fellowship we need. Most of us know what it is like to be surrounded by people but to feel profoundly alone. Regardless of the specifics of our spiritual struggles, we know that superficial social niceties or interactions that don't go past "How are you?" and "Fine, thanks" will not help us. When we try to replace true fellowship with mere socializing, we may end up feeling emotionally drained and discouraged.

Each of us longs for a community where we can be honest about the spiritual struggles we experience. If our faith community gives us the message that it is not okay to be struggling, each of us will think we are the only one in the community who struggles. We will feel isolated.

There is an appropriate place for coffee and doughnuts, and there is an appropriate time for saying hello and chatting about the weather and sports and whatever. We do not need all our relationships to have honesty, vulnerability and transparency as the highest priority. But we do need a safe place, perhaps several places, where we can be our authentic selves. Recognizing these places and growing in our ability to create such places are some of the most important things we need in the process of rebuilding our spiritual lives.

The first question to ask about any community when we are in the rebuilding process is if this is a safe and supportive place to do what we need to do in rebuilding our spiritual lives. In order to answer this question, there are a few characteristics that are almost always useful to check for.

• **Confidentiality versus gossip.** Communities that understand the importance of confidentiality are almost certainly more helpful than those that do not. We cannot say what we need to say unless we know that the people who hear us have a capacity for confidentiality. If gossip is a common practice in a community—in spite of how sharply it's condemned in the Bible—there is no way for that community to be safe for us. A safe community of any size is one that maintains confidentiality and does not repeat elsewhere the things that are shared in the group.

• **Identification versus advice.** Unless we ask for advice, we probably don't want it—and won't benefit from it. What is much more helpful is to interact with people who can identify with our struggle sufficiently to offer hope. It is always appropriate for people to present their own stories about difficult experiences and how they overcame them with God's help. But this does not mean they should preach or

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

grandstand or deliver long lectures. We need people who can identify ways in which they have experienced what we are experiencing and who can humbly share their experience when it might be helpful.

Identification is given a very high priority in the dynamics of twelve-step groups. People in recovery from addiction or codependency have learned from difficult experiences the importance of having robust boundaries about not giving advice, not asking questions, and not making comments about other people's stories during the group time. It is all too easy to focus on other people rather than on the work we ourselves need to do. Jesus' teaching about the speck of sawdust and the plank seems relevant to us in this context (Matthew 7:3–5). Imagine what a group would look like if every group member took Jesus' teaching seriously and showed up ready to work on their own planks rather than on other people's specks of sawdust!

- ***Responsibility versus blame.*** Communities that focus on other people's sins rather than on their own sins are not likely to be very helpful to us. We need places where each group member takes responsibility for his or her own behavior and feelings. A healthy group is not a place to blame other people for our actions or emotions. Each of us must take responsibility for ourselves if we want to grow in our capacity to receive grace.

- ***Shared leadership versus authoritarian leadership.*** Most safe groups operate on level ground. No one gets to pass laws or create rules of conduct for others. Decisions are made as a group, and members encourage each other to adhere to mutual commitments. By merit of their experience of personal change, some group members will have wisdom to offer. And because they are relatively new, other members will have a greater need. It is natural for need to look to experience for guidance. But it is abusive if experienced members insist that new members follow their demands. We are all God's children, each as broken and as loved as the next. Group dynamics should reflect this reality.

- ***Grace versus judgment.*** Being in relationship with others offers us a continuous opportunity either to pass judgment or to receive and extend grace. We each have our own wounds, our own perspectives, our own thoughts and feelings. These differences can lead to misunderstandings, and they can seduce us into being critical and judgmental of each other. Or they can be opportunities to love and be loved, to accept our differences, to value each other and to listen to each other with respect.

To foster grace-filled communication, we need to practice grace toward each other. Paul described some of the specifics of what it means to practice grace: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:2–3). When a group practices these guidelines over a considerable period of time, its participants become increasingly interested in working for change. They are able to open up and share their struggles, and grow in their desire to receive grace. It is important to remember that just as we do not need a perfect therapist, a perfect sponsor or a perfect pastor, we do not need a perfect community—just one that is a reasonably safe place for us to do what we need to do to take the next steps in the rebuilding process.

A first step toward fellowship is to ask for God's guidance as we join a group or start a new one. It is important to realize that we are not the only struggling people in our faith communities. Even if all the other members of our church appear to be happy all the time, the truth is that most people have the same struggles and need for honest fellowship that we have.

So if we sense God is leading us to start a new group, we might begin by getting together with a few interested, trustworthy people and practicing some of the tools described in this article. You might find it helpful to create a list based on the guidelines we have discussed and read them aloud at the beginning of each meeting. At a minimum, such a list might include the following:

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

1. Anything said in the group is considered confidential and will not be discussed outside the group unless specific permission is given to do so.
2. We will provide time for each person present to talk if he or she feels comfortable doing so.
3. We will talk about ourselves and our own situations, avoiding conversation about other people.
4. We will listen attentively to each other.
5. We will refrain from giving advice.
6. We will ask God to give us the courage we need to be honest and humble in doing the work we need to do as we listen and as we share.
7. We will ask for God's help in being open to receive and to extend grace as we listen and as we share.

Before long, we will want to make our group available to others who want to give it a try. People will come and go, and in time a core group will develop and grow. Then we will have formed a place where people can come and be honest about their lives. We will be part of a group where everyone present can experience grace.

—Taken from Soul Repair by Jeff VanVonderen and Dale and Juanita Ryan; © 2009 by the authors. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press, P.O. Box 1400 Downers Grove IL, 60515. www.ivpress.com