

Strategies for Hope and Resilience

A Facilitator's Guide



Created for the
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2017



**GREATER PORTLAND
SUSTAINABILITY EDUCATION NETWORK**
A Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development

Strategies for Hope and Resilience: Personal, Community and Planetary

Summary: In these times of accelerating change and challenge where we are bombarded daily with news that numbs and overwhelms the spirit, how can we build hope and resilience? What practices may assist us in navigating the turbulence occurring socially and ecologically? How do we build stronger internal and external supports for sustainability personally and for our communities? How do we hold hope for our planet? Educator David Orr defines “hope” as “a verb with its sleeves rolled up.” This one-day training provides practical strategies and tools for cultivating hope and resilience from an ecopsychology perspective.

Ecopsychology studies the interconnectedness between humans and the more-than-human world and views humanity’s dissociation from the natural world in recent times as a contributing factor in increased psychological, physical and spiritual distress. It also draws on the restorative properties of nature in addressing and relieving this distress. Ecotherapy, the application of ecopsychology, is not in and of itself a model of therapy; rather, it is a lens through which therapeutic models may be viewed, taking into account not only a person’s relationships to other humans but also their relationship with the natural world.

This training will offer participants the opportunity to learn methods for recovering a deep connection with the natural world that is essential to laying the foundation for building hope, resilience and lasting sustainability. These practices provide supportive paths out of the materialistic consumer culture and allow for engagement with the interconnected ecological self. This builds capacity to creating personal empowerment and reenchancement with the natural world, meaningful community relationships, and vision for the Great Turning into an ecological civilization.

Structure: The training comprises three sections of focus: **Personal, Community and Planetary.** It will consist of a combination of short lecture, group activities and dyads. All of the activities/topics below are options/suggestions as to what could be covered in similar workshops.

Recommended Resources: You will also need simple art supplies like paper (including some larger pieces), colored pencils or crayons, and scissors. A whiteboard or large pad of paper on an easel is helpful for visual aids and some group exercises.

Personal (1 ½ hr)

Hope starts from within. Hope is what we feel when we focus on potential positive outcomes for the future, whether it's hoping for a sunny day tomorrow, or hoping that humanity will make the right choices for the next seven generations. No matter its scale, its birthplace is within each of our hearts.

These days it can feel hard to hope. After all, we're bombarded by tons of negative news and other pessimistic media on a daily basis. Economic, physical and emotional stress wears us down day after day. How can we feel hopeful with all that weighing down upon us?

One way is self-care. Self-care is any constructive activity that serves to help you relax, to give you something positive to focus on, and that encourages good feelings. It's a reminder that not everything in the world is bad. Self-care is crucial to resilience because it gives us a break from the stresses of everyday life and allows us to "reset" ourselves psychologically. Many self-care activities also have positive effects on the body, from reducing stress chemicals like cortisol and increasing endorphin production, to lowering blood pressure and resting heart rate, all of which help us feel better!

It may seem indulgent, but self-care is really good for the world! Every community is comprised of many individuals; like cells in the body, the health of each person contributes to the overall health of the whole. Before we can take on the task of healing our community, it's important for us to attend to our own health ~ psychological, physical and spiritual. There is no one-size-fits-all treatment plan that will work for everyone, of course, but this first module presents some possible strategies for ways you can incorporate ecotherapy-based self-care into your everyday life. After today, you're welcome to adapt these materials as you see fit, and use them as inspiration for creating other solutions that work for you.

All of the exercises in this section can be considered forms of self-care. One of the challenges of self-care is finding the time to do it. While more intensive self-care activities like retreats and vacations are excellent options when possible, often what we need are more immediate techniques.

Let's brainstorm some self-care techniques. We'll start by dividing our board into three sections:

- In the Moment Self-Care
- Daily Self-Care
- Weekly or Monthly Self-Care

The first includes things that we can do when we're stuck in a stressful moment so we can get through it and keep going; the second includes practices we can incorporate into our daily routine; and the third consists of activities we may not be able to engage in every single day, but that we may be able to indulge in anywhere from once to a few times a month. Let's start by inviting all to come to the board and write ideas in the appropriate sections. It's okay if the same idea ends up in more than one section—what works for one person's daily practice may be something another person has to reserve for once a week.

[Note to facilitator: Give participants whiteboard markers, or Sharpies if you're working with a big roll or pad of paper, and let them write at will for a few minutes. Next, allow time for people to discuss their ideas: which ones they may be currently using, which ones they'd like to use, and what barriers may be in the way as well as potential solutions. Encourage people to be positive and focus on what they can do, rather than on what they can't.]

In the Moment Self-care

Exercise: Mindfulness

So we've discussed a lot of great ideas here! We have one in particular we'd like you to have a chance to try out. Mindfulness is the practice of focusing on the present moment. In this society, it's really easy for us to get tangled up in ruminating over past events or worrying about the future.

The following exercise is one you can use anywhere to help you ground yourself back in the now, and it only takes a moment.

First, identify five things around you that you can see.

Next, identify four things around you that you can touch.

Then, identify three things you can hear.

After that, two things you can smell.

And finally, identify one thing you could taste.

It's very simple, but it's meant to draw your attention back to where you are in this moment. You can use this exercise as many times a day as you see fit, in any setting. You don't necessarily have to be in the middle of a very stressful situation, either. Next time you have some time outside, try using this exercise to explore your environment in a little more detail!

Looking at our list we made, what are some skills that you can do in the moment if you're feeling a lot of stress or just need to calm yourself down? What other skills can you think of?

[Give people a few moments to discuss ideas before moving on to the next section. This is a good opportunity to take a five to ten minute break; if it's late enough in the morning go ahead and take an hour for lunch, then come back refreshed for the next section!]

Daily Self-Care

While in-the-moment self-care skills are valuable, one of the best ways to build up ongoing resilience is through daily self-care. We spend every day soaking in negative environments and stressful situations; we can counteract that by spending part of each day soaking in positive experiences and thoughts.

For many people, their daily self-care is "their" time. No matter how awful the day may be, they know that they have that time to themselves to rest and recover. Some people go to the gym or otherwise exercise; others spend an hour playing video games or reading; still others may go out into their garden or yard, or walk in a nearby park or other greenspace. Keep in mind they can also change up their self-care each day. Maybe one day they go for a walk, another day they spend time with loved ones, and the next they take some much-needed time alone.

Part of what makes this sort of self-care so important is that it gives you something to look forward to. This helps build the capacity for hope. If you get used to being able to look forward to something good in your life, even when everything's falling apart around you, it trains you to home in on other positive things. And, as we've discussed, hope is all about focusing on the positive!

Do any of you have daily self-care practices? If you don't, are there any practices that sound like they might be possible for you in the future?

[Spend a few moments discussing. Also emphasize that it's okay if you only get to your "daily" self-care some or most days. Few people are able to practice every single day without fail. What's important is that you try as often as you are realistically able to.]

[Note to facilitator: The next two exercises can both be practiced with participants if you have the time and space. Otherwise choose whichever one you think will be a better fit for the group you're working with. You can also plan to use one, but keep the other in reserve if you end up with more time than you thought you would. Or you can even ask the participants which one they'd like to try out.]

There are so many ways to practice self-care on a daily basis! We'd like to try just one with you today. If it works for you, great! If not, feel free to try others on your own time until you find what works for you.

Gratitude Practice

One of our favorite forms of daily self-care is gratitude practice. This is just what it sounds like—practicing gratitude to remind ourselves that we do have good things in our lives! Gratitude and hope go hand in hand, because while hope is looking for the positive in the future, gratitude focuses on the positive in the now. In this way, gratitude shows us that our hope can indeed be rewarded! And when we know we have good things to fall back on, it helps us to increase our resilience.

It's really easy to lose sight of what's going right when we're so focused on what needs to be changed, and we often take good things for granted. Gratitude practice is a way to remind ourselves that, hey, life's not all bad! And it shows us what we have in our life that we can hang onto when things get rough.

For this exercise, we're going to break up into groups of two, so pick a partner!

Here's what you're going to do:

First, sit facing each other so that you have each other's undivided attention. Then starting with the phrase "I am grateful for..." One of you will start listing things you appreciate in your life. It can be everything from people you care for, to places that you enjoy going to, to the opportunity to be here with us today—the sky's the limit! Once you've spent a couple of minutes naming what you're grateful for, your partner can pick one of those things and ask you "Can you tell me more about why you appreciate this?" You can go into as much detail as you like. If you still have time, your partner can ask you to go into detail about something else you mentioned. We'll spend about seven minutes on the first person, and then it's the second person's turn to list what they are grateful for, and for your partner to then ask you to go into more detail about a couple of them.

[After about fourteen minutes, call everyone back to attention.]

How did that feel?

[Let people give feedback briefly.]

You can do this exercise every day if you want. Even if you don't have someone to practice it with at home, you can still practice gratitude on your own. You can write down what you're grateful for, or list it in your mind. It's okay if your list doesn't change a lot from day to day; what's most important is that you're giving yourself a daily reminder of what's good in your life and how much you appreciate it.

Self-Care with Nature's Help

[When possible, take participants outside for this exercise, assuming there is space and the weather is cooperative.]

One of the more popular forms of self-care is connecting with nature. When we spend time in nature, we experience a lot of benefits on all levels of our being. Just being outside a few minutes can lower your heart rate and blood pressure, which immediately help you feel better and more relaxed. This increases your resilience and stress tolerance, and can reverse some of the harmful effects of daily stress.

There are lots of ways to be closer to the natural world. Some of them involve immersing yourself in nature, like hiking, camping, or just sitting in your yard or on your porch. Others include bringing nature into your personal space, like having houseplants or pets in your home, or looking out a window at birds flying by and trees in the neighborhood, or watching the sky change throughout the day and night through a skylight.

How many of you had connections to nature growing up, whether outside or in your home? *[Let people raise their hands in response.]* How many of you have at least one connection now? *[Again, let people raise their hands.]*

Great! Our next exercise will both let you use any previous connections with nature you may have had, and create new ones, too.

So, this exercise is a way to connect both with nature in the present, and any natural places you may have been in the past that have stayed with you in your memory over the years. Again, these don't have to be grand wilderness areas, and they don't even necessarily have to be outside. A front porch, a window out over a neighborhood, a window sill with house plants, a skylight that shows the clouds going overhead—these are all just as legitimate. What's most important is that this space gives you a connection to nature in some way. Even if you don't have a place right now, be thinking of possible locations you could explore after today, whether near your home or workplace.

[Note to facilitators: Read the following exercise out loud. Use a soft tone, but loud enough that everyone can hear you. Pause for a few moments after each paragraph to give people a chance to explore what you've just offered them.]

First, make yourself comfortable. You can sit, lie down, even stand, whatever you prefer. Close your eyes if you like, and take a few big, deep, slow breaths. Imagine the tension draining out of your muscles and into the soil wherever you have contact with the ground.

Now, touch the ground with your bare hands. Explore the ground slowly and carefully, enjoying the textures and temperatures as your skin comes into contact with it. Think of other nice times in your life where you have had physical contact with the ground, maybe exploring as a child, or sitting in the grass with friends. Remember how safe and good those places were, and how solid the ground was beneath you.

Next, hold your hands out flat in front of you, like you're doing a push-up against a wall. Begin to slowly move your hands through the air like fans, then a bit faster. Feel the resistance of the air against your skin, and play with it. Try using your hands to fan air against your face, as though you were trying to cool yourself. Imagine times in your past where you've felt the breeze on your skin, or when you moved your hands through the air. Maybe you were pretending to fly as a child, or stuck your hand out the window of a moving car to feel the air currents pass by.

Make yourself aware of both the ground beneath you and the air around you, and imagine that they connect you to every other place in the world. That includes every place that you love now, and every place you've felt a positive connection to in the past, even if it's changed some in the years since. Your memories connect you to

those wonderful places and times, too; you yourself are an unbroken connection from the past to the present.

Now, with the support of all these special places you've been, and the immense strength of the earth and the air supporting you, slowly open your eyes and look around the place you are right this moment. This place, too, is connected to all those other places. Quietly introduce yourself to this place and say hello. See what you notice about this place, what plants and animals you might see, what the weather is like, what the sky looks like, what the ground smells like.

Think about this place. Is it somewhere that you like being? Do you feel comfortable here? Does it remind you of other places that you could go now and feel connected to nature?

It's time to come back to our group. Thank this place for its time and attention, maybe touch the soil and the air one more time as a goodbye. Breathe deeply a few more times, feel free to get up and stretch if you need to. Take a moment to bring your awareness back in to what we're doing here today.

So how was that exercise for you all? *[Dedicate a few minutes to feedback and discussion.]*

This is an exercise that you can do every day if you want, no matter where you are. You might have a special place that you like to go to, or you might try this exercise somewhere new each day. Either way, it's an opportunity to both revisit special places and experiences in your past, and connect with the place you're in right this moment.

If you decide to visit the same spot frequently, try seeing what new things you notice each time. Each place has its own personality, and its own cycles of change that happen as the seasons turn. Spend time building this relationship with the place, just as you would with a good friend. Over time you may find that all you need to find solace is to return to this special place for a little while.

[Note to facilitators: here's another good spot for a break—especially as the previous exercise might have relaxed people so much that they're a little sleepy!]

Some Other Ideas for Personal Practices

We have barely touched on the many practices that can be used for healing and restoring hope and resilience on a personal level. Here are a few more of our favorites, in brief, for you to take home:

-- Opening the senses fully: We often spend our days on autopilot, only noticing what's going on around us just enough to get by. But we end up missing a lot of detail! At least once a week, take a little time to walk around your neighborhood or another safe place. Pretend like it's the first time you've ever seen any place like it, and that you want to know it in every detail. Look at leaves close-up; notice the contours of the ground, which ones are natural and which ones are influenced by people; listen for any birds or other animal life; try picking out individual colors like green or blue, and seeing how many different shades of each you see; touch stones, soil, plants, open your fingers to the wind; breathe in any scents you find. Focus fully on your senses in this place, like a young child out to play.

-- Creative projects: Visual arts, music, dance and other creative expression can be a crucial release from your everyday stresses. Not only are you using different parts of your brain than you may do on a regular basis, but you're able to create for yourself, rather than someone else's demands. You get to decide what creative

medium to try out—feel free to explore! You don't need the most expensive materials, either, and you don't have to be an amazingly talented artist. No one's judging your art for its professional quality. What's important is that you're able to let yourself get into the fun of creation, and that you're happy with the process and not just the product.

-- Technology fast: Our technology has given us a lot of opportunities, but we were never meant to stare at screens for hours every day. We often feel overwhelmed after a day full of news stories, memes, email and other media demanding our attention RIGHT NOW. Take a day, or even a week, away from all but the most essential items. Turn off your computer, your TV and your MP3 player, and enjoy the silence. Instead of watching a TV show, head outside and let your attention be gently guided by the sights and sounds you find. Watch the sunset, or listen to how the rain sounds when it falls on different surfaces. Your emails and other messages will be waiting for you; you can catch up on your favorite show next week. For now, see how nice it feels to not be constantly barraged by bad news and advertisements!

-- Weekly day of rest: In our busy, busy world, we often spend our weekends doing work around the house. While cleaning and maintenance are certainly important, it's also important to maintain your own health and well-being. Spend all (or at least a significant part) of one day a week resting. You might like to go hiking or sit at a park, read a book, talk on the phone to a long-distance friend, or even just take a nice, long nap!

-- Gardening: If you have both the space and the physical ability, gardening can be a truly rewarding form of self-care. Not only do you get exercise and outdoor time, but if you grow vegetables, fruit or edible mushrooms you get fresh food, too! You don't need a big yard for this; even a few plants in containers of soil can be enough. If you're worried about killing your plants, try succulents; they're pretty resilient, and they come in many beautiful varieties.

-- Forest Bathing/Shinrin-Yoku: Forest bathing is simple: go to a forest, and be in it. Well, okay, there's more to it than that, at least in the details. Whereas in hiking or backpacking you may be focused on covering a certain number of miles a day, forest bathing is about taking your time to really absorb and be present with the forest. You don't have to take very long; even 20-30 minutes can be enough for the physical benefits to kick in like lower blood pressure, and psychological effects like decreased stress. There are many resources on forest bathing online; a search for "forest bathing" on Google or another search engine will bring some up.

Community (1 ½ hr)

Humans are social creatures, and with as complex as our society is, we simply do not live in true isolation from each other, no matter how we might try to limit our face-to-face interactions. This means we are all a part of our greater community, as well as smaller sub-communities. So, you may be a part of the Portland metro area, but also part of a smaller community based on family or racial connections, religion or spirituality, common interests like hobbies or volunteering, or even just the people that you choose to share your time with because they're your good friends.

Each community, no matter how great or small, is made of individuals, and the energy and attitude of each individual affects the whole. This doesn't mean that someone who isn't feeling so great should be ostracized. Instead, those who are in a better place can work to support those who need their help. In turn, those who receive the help offered in genuine concern and care can make use of them to improve their situation as much as is realistic. It takes all of us to make a system work in a constructive, positive manner, and those who need more help aren't necessarily weaker or less good than those who need less.

One of the ways you can help your community get better as a whole is to share exercises to increase hope and resilience. This is most often done through finding connections with others, and that's going to be one of the main focuses of this section. We connect with other people on a daily basis, whether it's through talking to a business associate, talking with the cashier at the store, or just smiling at someone as you walk past.

But there are also deeper, more intensive forms of connection with others that go beyond these everyday interactions. They allow us time to process emotions and experiences with each other, to find understanding and common ground. If we've both been through a similar experience we can support each other because we know what it's like. Even if you've been there and I haven't, I can still extend empathy to you and show you that you aren't alone. It's vulnerable for both of us, but that vulnerability is healthy and important.

Hope also asks us to be vulnerable, because we open ourselves to possibilities. When we practice vulnerability, we are allowing ourselves to go beyond our usual defenses and internal walls and connect together on a more fundamental level. And hope gives us goals to work toward together. Resilience, on the other hand, allows us strength to endure even in the face of adversity. It's a lot easier to stand up to our challenges when we have others beside us. We have strength in numbers.

With that in mind, let's look at a few exercises that may help us experience these deeper sorts of connection.

Systems Exercise

[Note to facilitator: take everyone outside if you can; otherwise, move tables and chairs to the edges of the room so the center is open.]

This first exercise is simply to demonstrate how a system works. It sounds simple enough, but we often take a system's complexity for granted!

So, here's what you're going to do. Without looking at each other or otherwise giving anyone any obvious attention, pick two of the people in the group, any two. Your goal is to stay an equal distance from both of them. If one of them moves away from you, you have to move towards them, but you also have to keep yourself the same distance away from the other person you picked at the same time. Just be careful not to trip on anyone else while you're attempting this!

Okay, start walking around slowly, again trying to stay the same distance away from both of your chosen

people. *[Let people do this for about a minute.]*

That's tougher than it sounds, isn't it! Okay, let's try it again, only walk at a normal pace. *[Let people do this for about two to three minutes.]*

Okay, now that we're all out of breath from laughing, how are you all doing? Everyone okay?

Good. So, each one of you had the same job: stay the same distance away from two other people. But almost all of you were likely one of someone else's "other people", and so when you moved, they had to move, too. And the people watching them had to move as well. And that's how we all ended up walking in circles here!

All systems are like that to one degree or another. You can take a look at one piece of it and think that it looks really simple. But then once you watch how it works within the system you see just how interconnected it is with everything else. We see that in ecosystems; when a species of animal, plant, fungus or other living being goes extinct, it has wide-ranging effects on its entire ecosystem.

Human systems are the same way. When one of us moves, we affect others. That movement isn't always physical. Sometimes it's emotional and psychological too, and our next exercise will go into that.

[Head back inside/put the chairs and tables back into place.]

Active Listening Dyad Exercise

Very often in our society people only listen to each other enough to be able to formulate their own response. It takes more empathy and concentration to be able to practice active listening. Active listening involves putting all your concentration on what the other person is saying, and then communicating back to them the knowledge that you have heard and understood them. You don't have to come up with anything profound to tell them, or solutions to their problems. Just being there with them and letting them know you're really listening is often enough to help people through a tough situation.

For this exercise we're going to break up into groups of two. *[Let people choose their partners. If you have an odd number, one of the facilitators can work with the one unpartnered person.]*

Now, sit facing each other. You can sit in chairs, or on the floor, whichever works for you, just as long as you're sitting on the same level.

I would like the first person to think of something you would like to tell the other. It can be some challenge you're facing right now, or a piece of good news. Or you can talk about something from your past, either a good memory, or something more challenging that you got through. Let it be something you can talk about for a few minutes, like telling a story. Don't pick something that's really distressing for you or that brings up trauma from the past, or that otherwise you don't feel safe talking about to someone you've just met today. If you can't think of anything else, try and remember one of the best days you ever had.

For the listener, I would like you to really listen to the other person. Let them do the majority of the talking. Keep good eye contact with them. To let them know you're still listening, you can nod, and also say "Mm-hmm." If they reach a pause in their story, especially if it's after a really emotional part (positive or negative), you can even reflect that back to them by saying something like "That sounds like it was really difficult to deal with" or "Wow, that sounds like it's a really great experience for you!" Then let them respond to that and keep talking.

We'll do this for a few minutes, and then we'll let you know when to switch places, and the storyteller can become the listener and vice versa. *[Let each person talk for about four to five minutes, depending on the time.]*

The next exercise will take about 45 minutes, so you want to make sure you have time for a brief break before that exercise.]

So how was that for all of you? *[Take feedback for a minute or two.]*

What we've done here in our dyads can be expanded to much larger groups. Sometimes it's many dyads listening to each other. Sometimes it's an entire group listening to the story of one person. Other times the group takes turns holding safe space for each member, one at a time.

The key is active listening. Whether you're a group of two, twenty, or two hundred, if you are listening to who is speaking with compassion and attention, you can create that safe space for them. And that's an incredibly healing, bonding experience for everyone involved. When you know that your community has your back, you allow yourself to feel hope again because you're not alone. And having the support of others helps to rebuild resilience; that safe space allows you to recover from whatever has been wearing you down.

Our next exercise is going to allow us a chance to listen to another community: the community of nature.

Let's take a brief, three-minute break before we get started.

Council of All Beings

The Council of All Beings is a group ritual designed by deep ecologists Joanna Macy and John Seed. It was created as a response to Arne Naess's call for 'community therapy' to break out of humanity's anthropocentrism and to build capacity for people to engage with the 'ecological self.' The Council of All Beings allows for participants to consider the voices of non-human nature and hear within themselves the voice of the earth. Since its beginnings as a two-day long workshop, the Council of All Beings has been adapted worldwide in eco-spirituality workshops, school settings, church groups, community gatherings and in eco-villages. It is offered at this training for its inspiring ability to allow people to feel a sense of belonging, connection and empathy with non-human nature- the greater community of beings and life-forms, plants or features of nature such as rivers, mountains or deserts with whom we share this planet.

For the purposes of this training, we will enact a short version of the Council of All Beings.

[Note to Facilitators: There are several options on how to conduct this ritual:

- 1. Participants can go for a nature walk with the intention of having an animal, plant, river, mountain or other being choose them. Suggest that they go with the first natural being that strikes their attention.*
- 2. Or, you can use animal cards or pre-selected photos from magazines that you have clipped for this purpose. Have each person pick one randomly so there is a sense of being chosen to be the voice for that species. Have simple art supplies for participants to be able to create images of their chosen beings.*
- 3. If you have more time, you may want to have everyone create their own mask to represent their beings. For further workshop variations, do a Google search on Guide for Council of All Beings.]*

We begin with a reading of our evolutionary journey *[handout to be provided.]*

This reading (5 minutes) tells the story of the development of life from the very beginning of the Big Bang highlighting noteworthy markers on the evolutionary journey such as the emergence of the first cells, the emergence of the first mammals, dinosaurs, the emergence of *Homo sapiens* up to present day. The evolutionary journey is an important antecedent to the Council of All Beings as it gives us insight into 'deep time' which helps us to recognize our inherent shared ancestry and interconnectedness with all life on the planet.

[Note to facilitators: Invite participants to close their eyes and get comfortable so that they can relax and receive the reading from a quiet place.]

After the reading, for this training, we will be “chosen” by another species by choosing an animal card. Using art supplies provided, create an image or some type of representation of your natural being. Engaging with its energy by creating some art around it helps us to open up more to be being able to receive its message.

Once you have created the image, do some writing to capture that message. Consider these writing prompts: What is it like to be this being? What nourishes them? Does your being have a message for humanity? What would they like humans to know about their situation? Speak/write as the being, not as yourself. *[Allow about 15-20 minutes for people to create their image and write their message. Once the art work and listening/writing stage is complete, gather in a circle. Facilitators welcome all beings to this Council.]*

I invite someone to begin and deliver the message of their animal by saying: “I am _____. My message is _____.” Once that animal has spoken, others in the Council welcome and acknowledge the animal and its message. The Council continues in a circle until the last animal’s message has been received.

We invite you to share your experience of the Council from the perspective of being the voice of the natural being and from being a human watching and listening.

Some Other Ideas for Community Practices

-- Community celebrations: Many of our big celebrations tend to focus on things like sports or alcohol; they lack conscious focus on coming together as a community. Cultural celebrations that are open to the public, even (and especially) if they aren’t your own culture, are a wonderful way to form connections and appreciate those you share community with. Arts events can also be celebrations of community. Schools sometimes host festivals that let children show off what they’re learning, and give the community a chance to encourage them in their efforts.

-- Creating seasonal ceremonies: You may also wish to create your own community celebrations; one idea is to host seasonal celebrations on the solstices and equinoxes, or on the full moon. These allow you to both come together with your fellow human beings, and also celebrate the nature around you. Fire ceremonies at these events offer an opportunity to write down what you no longer need onto paper to be thrown into the fire, and to allow new patterns to rise from the flames like the phoenix. Send participants home with ideas of how to carry the connection with the Earth and community with them until the next celebration.

-- Volunteering with/as a group: Thoughts can be followed by actions, and there are countless nonprofit organizations working to create change in the world. Consider volunteering with at least one of them. If you have friends who are interested, go in as a group. If you all have the time and energy, consider doing this regularly, maybe once every month or two. You can even pick a different organization each time, or stick with the same one if you all prefer.

-- Book clubs: Start a book club that reads and discusses books with positive, encouraging messages. These can be anything from resources for community activism, to biographies of inspiring people, to books on

self-care and other therapeutic practices. Consider tossing in the occasional light fiction now and then to give people a good “brain break”!

-- Community outdoor events/bioregional awareness: Groups of hikers and campers already get together through websites like Meetup.com and Facebook. Consider joining in the fun, or starting your own group! While these excursions don't have to have any purpose other than leisure, you might occasionally hold one that's specifically for bioregional awareness. See who can identify the most plants throughout the day/weekend, or help each other learn orienteering skills like navigation by the stars.

-- Creative community projects: There are as many potential community art projects as there are artists! Some of them, like painting murals on buildings or displaying sculptures at City Hall, may need grants and other resources. But it takes very little to organize a paint-in at the park, where everyone brings their own art supplies (and perhaps you have a few spares on hand for drop-ins) and the landscape becomes a lovely art reference. You might also consider joining a community theater group, or starting your own. And lots of people are able to bond over music, so what about a weekly jam session at a coffee shop or local stage? Bring your own instrument, or just come to listen and sing along! All of these and more can be great ways to bring together members of your community without having to start with a lot of resources.

Planetary (1 1/2 hrs)

Active Hope

When we think about building hope and resilience for our world, it can be overwhelming. Where do we put our focus? The problems of our world seem daunting. Typical responses to the onslaught of bad news are psychological numbing, despair and avoidance.

The aim of this section of the training is to shift our focus towards positive visions for the future by highlighting the extraordinary developments taking place worldwide that demonstrate some of the myriad ways that we are moving towards a flourishing ecological society. Positive psychology suggests that shifting attention to what is working, and in supporting people in visioning a healthy future for themselves and the planet, is a critical step that strengthens and empowers people to act with hope, strength and resilience. Psychologists Koger and Du Nann Winter (2010) explain: “Instead of trading on fear, guilt, and despair, ways of tapping into empowerment, joy, and nobility must be found . . . positive images of a healthy environmental future are desperately needed to spur both one’s own and others’ commitment to solving environmental problems” (p. 330). Participants will be invited to create their own positive vision from the point of view of someone living seven generations in the future. A group art project to incorporate the collective visions of the group will complete the training.

For this exercise, we start by introducing several key lessons included in the book *Active Hope* by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone (2012): “Active Hope is a practice. Like tai chi or gardening, it is something we do, rather than have. It is a process we can apply, and it involves three key steps: First, we take a clear view of reality; second, we identify what we hope for in terms of the direction we’d like to move in or the values we’d like to see expressed; and third, we take steps to move ourselves or our situation in that direction” (p. 3).

Sometimes we may have hope for a desired outcome but feel helpless or give up too easily by thinking “what can I do, I’m only one person” or other self-defeating thoughts. We include this model of Active Hope as an example of how we can empower and activate our actions in the direction of what we are hoping for. So, for each desired situation, we can break it down by taking even small actions that will feed our confidence and fuel our engagement in working towards the kind of world we want to live in.

From a planetary perspective it could be said that we are living in the transition space between the unsustainable ways of living on the earth and the new sustainable ways which we are all working towards. Another way of looking at this is that there are three big stories or narratives that are operating: 1) Business as Usual 2) Disaster and 3) The Great Turning.

Let us examine some of the ways we may see these stories taking place around us. For example, if we follow news reports about the environment we may end up feeling despair and as if there is only disaster on the horizon. While all three stories are happening, we can bear witness to all three while choosing to place our attention and efforts to supporting the Great Turning towards an ecological society.

Evidence that the Great Turning is thriving and accelerating is all around us. Positive developments include the rise of renewable energy, local economies, permaculture, holistic and integrative medicine, ride-sharing, biomimicry, amongst many others. For example, in Portland, in the summer, we can go to a farmer’s market every day of the week.

You are invited to offer your own observations of positive shifts you are seeing in society in everything from social justice movements or the unification of common values related to the environment to new technologies or social trends, etc.

[Note to Facilitators: Have a flip board ready for this section or divide a whiteboard into three columns and have participants offer insights for each of the stories. Also, have on hand some simple art supplies and large sheets of paper for the group art projects at the end.]

Now that we see evidence for the Great Turning we will do some visioning to imagine the future that we want to see for our descendants and all life on the planet. Imagine that you are someone living on the planet seven generations from now. A positive revolution in consciousness has taken place and humanity has evolved and now lives sustainably on the earth.

Write about what your life is like. What does it feel like to live on the earth now? Open all your senses as you are imagining into this future time. What do you see, hear, taste, and/or feel? What wisdom might this future person share about living on the earth? Give voice to this future person. *[Give about 15 minutes for this].*

We will now divide into small groups and collaborate on a simple art project incorporating our visions for the future. *[Give about 15 minutes for this, or more if time allows].*

First, have each person share their vision. Notice: are there common themes, images, symbols or words? Consider drawing some pictures or simple scenes or symbols that capture the collective vision. Use your imagination incorporating aspects of each person's vision into the project. You could also be more creative and have each person in your group represent some aspect of the larger vision.

Invite each group to share their visions with the larger group. What visions do you have to share? How can we bring these visions out into the greater world?

Some Other Ideas for Planetary Practices

-- Building positive visions for the future: With all the negative media out there explaining in detail how we're set up for failure, we often forget how to think in detail about how things could go right. Perhaps once a month, hold an open mike session that is specifically dedicated to talking about what hopes you have for the future, and creating community support to encourage growth in that direction. It's an important reminder that none of us is alone in our fight to improve the world!

-- Pen pals aren't just for kids! Consider connecting with people all around the world through various pen pal sites; <http://womantely.com/websites-international-pen-pals/> has a great list of pen pal sites. For those who are unable to travel globally, this is a good way to expand your horizons culturally and otherwise, as well as make new friends.

-- Closer to home, make connections with immigrant populations in your area. If there are cultural centers nearby, check out what sort of public events they have, as well as volunteer opportunities. These centers are usually in contact with the countries people have emigrated from, and often have information on issues facing those populations.

-- Take a day to really appreciate the fragility and beauty of our planet.

- Look at photos of the Earth taken from space.
- Watch Carl Sagan's *Cosmos: A Personal Journey* (which may take a little longer than a day, but today's a great day to start!).
- Walk outside, and consider that the ground you are standing on is one tiny part of the entire sphere of Earth on which we all depend. Think about how our atmosphere connects you physically to every other living being on the planet.

Closing

To close, we will gather in a circle. We invite each person to share one thing that you are taking away from the day's activities.

References

- Koger, Susan M., & Du Nann Winter, Deborah. (2010). *The Psychology of Environmental Problems: Psychology for sustainability* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Macy, J. & Johnstone, C. (2012). *Active Hope: How to face the mess we're in without going crazy*. Novato, CA: New World Library.

Recommended Reading

- Jones, E., R. Haenfler, and B. Johnson. (2007). *The Better World Handbook*, Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.
- Louv, Richard. (2011). *The Nature Principle: Reconnecting with life in a virtual age*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books.
- Macy, J. & Brown, M. (2014). *Coming Back to Life: The updated guide to the work that reconnects*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers
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