

The logo for the Sacred Art of Living Center for Spiritual Formation features a stylized, flowing line that forms a partial circle on the left side, with a small dot above it. This line then curves upwards and to the right, framing the text.

# Sacred Art of Living

Center for Spiritual Formation

## Circle of Trust Touchstones\*

1. **Extend and receive welcome.** People learn best in hospitable spaces. In this circle we support each other's learning by giving and receiving hospitality.
2. **Be present as fully as possible.** Be here with your doubts, fears and failings as well as your convictions, joys and successes, your listening as well as your speaking.
3. **What is offered in the circle is by invitation, not demand.** This is not a "share or die" event! During this gathering, do whatever your soul calls for, and know that you do it with our support. Your soul knows your needs better than we do.
4. **Speak your truth in ways that respect other people's truth.** Our views of reality may differ, but speaking one's truth in a circle of trust does not mean interpreting, correcting, or debating what others say. Speak from your center to the center of the circle, using "I" statements, trusting people to do their own sifting and winnowing.
5. **No fixing, no saving, no advising, and no correcting.** This is one of the hardest guidelines for those of us in the "helping professions." But it is one of the most vital rules if we wish to make a space that welcomes the soul, the inner teacher.
6. **Learn to respond to others with honest, open questions** instead of counsel, corrections, etc. With such questions, we help "hear each other into deeper speech."
7. **When the going gets rough, turn to wonder.** If you feel judgmental, or defensive, ask yourself, "I wonder, what might have brought her to this belief?" or "What is he feeling right now?" or "What does my reaction teach me about myself?" Set aside judgment to listen to others—and to yourself—more deeply.
8. **Attend to your own inner teacher.** We learn from others, of course. But as we explore poems, stories, questions, and silence in a circle of trust, we have a special opportunity to learn from within. So pay close attention to your own reactions and responses, to your most important teacher.
9. **Trust and learn from the silence.** Silence is a gift in our noisy world, and a way of knowing in itself. Treat silence as a member of the group. After someone has spoken, take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words.
10. **Know that it's possible to leave the circle** with whatever it was that you needed when you arrived. Know that the seeds planted here can keep growing in the days ahead.

## COVENANT TOUCHSTONE

**Observe deep confidentiality.** Trust comes from knowing that group members honor confidences and take seriously the ethics of privacy and discretion.

The logo features a stylized, calligraphic symbol resembling a 'C' or a speech bubble on the left, followed by the text 'Sacred Art of Living' in a large, elegant serif font, and 'Center for Spiritual Formation' in a smaller, cursive script font below it.

# Sacred Art of Living

Center for Spiritual Formation

## **Guidelines for Asking Honest, Open Questions...\***

*...in support of the rule “no fixing, no saving, no advising, no setting each other straight”—and in support of our intention to help each other listen for inner truth...*

1. An honest, open question is one you cannot possibly ask while thinking, “I know the right answer to this and I sure hope you give it to me...” Thus, “Have you ever thought about seeing a therapist?” is not an honest, open question! But, “What did you learn from the experience you just told us about?” is.
2. Try not to get ahead of the focus person's language with your questions. “What did you mean when you said you felt sad?” is an honest, open question. “Didn't you also feel angry?” is not.
3. Ask questions that are brief and to the point rather than larding them with rationales and background materials that allow you to insert your own opinions or advice.
4. Ask questions that go to the person as well as the problem, questions about the inner realities of the situation as well as the outward facts.
5. Ask questions aimed at helping the focus person explore his or her concern rather than satisfying your own curiosity.
6. If you have an intuition that a certain question might be useful, even if it seems a bit “off the wall,” trust it—once you are reasonably certain that it is an honest, open question, e.g., “What color is this issue for you, and why?”
7. If you aren't sure about a particular question, sit with it for a while and wait for clarity.
8. As a group, watch the pacing of the questions, allowing some silence between the last answer and the next question. Questions that come too fast may feel aggressive, cutting off the deep reflection that can help the focus person.
9. If you have asked one question and heard an answer, you may feel a need to ask a follow-up question. But if you find yourself about to ask the third question before anyone else has had a chance to ask one, don't!
10. Avoid questions with yes-no or right-wrong answers. At the same time, remember that the best questions are often simple and straightforward.

Learning to ask honest, open questions is challenging. We may slip occasionally into old “fixing” habits and need forgiveness, from others and from ourselves. As the old saw goes, “Forgive and remember!” and try not to make that particular mistake again. It helps to continually remind ourselves that our purpose in this exercise is not to show what good problem solvers we are, but simply to support another person in listening to his or her inner teacher.

