

# ***CIRCLEWORK***

**A Manual for Relaxation and Support Group Facilitators**

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To all those who have helped in this work – to the many colleagues who facilitate these programs, to the administrators who listened to the requests of patients, and to all who come to the sessions creating the powerful medicine of “love among strangers”, this work is dedicated with love and thanks.

Throughout time, people have raised stones to mark their presence. In the Inuit culture, a creation of stones representing the human form is called an *Inukshuk*. Inukshuks point the way to shelter or good hunting, and sometimes they guard a cache of protective clothing or food for a lost traveler. Representing no particular person but the spirit of human kind, they offer guidance and support on a journey.

The inspiration of the Inukshuk runs throughout this book, as a reminder of the encouragement, guidance, support and human kindness that may be found even in the most desolate places we travel.

## **Forward: Origins of the BCCA Relaxation Program**

When Relaxation and Support Groups began at the Vancouver Cancer Centre nearly 20 years ago, there was only a growing awareness that patient's social and emotional needs had to be addressed. The field of psychosocial oncology was still becoming defined and there was little in the way of an evidence-based understanding of the benefits of relaxation techniques and support groups. The mind-body work of pioneers like Herbert Benson, Carl and Anne Simonton, Norman Cousins and Joan Borysenko was still relatively unknown. The landmark studies of Fawzy and Spiegel, which documented longevity benefits of psychosocial interventions, were not yet published. In Canada, at the Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto, Alastair Cunningham had only recently created groups where the techniques of visualization, meditation and guided imagery were being taught and practiced. The very term "psycho-oncology" was viewed with deep suspicion by most oncologists<sup>1</sup>. This was the context in which the BCCA program originated.

At the Vancouver Center of the British Columbia Cancer Agency, a medical oncologist asked Patient Family Counseling for a program to help his patients relax during their treatments. Drawing from the work of clinicians like the Simmontons and Alastair Cunningham, I (Lis Smith) and my nursing colleague, Barbara Warren, developed a pilot group for gynecological patients. We encouraged patients to share their stories and to support each other, and taught them how to use self-hypnosis and guided imagery to help themselves relax.

Word of mouth is a powerful advocate and soon patients with other cancers were requesting a similar program. Richard Doll, the head of Patient and Family Counseling, and a forward-looking administration supported the creation of two Relaxation and Support group sessions that were held weekly. The program attracted patients wanting a more participatory role in their healing. They came together to share the experience of relaxation and to connect with

each other. The patients and their caregivers who attended the groups expressed their appreciation in written comments.

The small room in which the sessions were originally held was soon outgrown and the groups moved to a lecture theatre. In time, this room was outgrown. The John Jambor room, the largest space in the Vancouver Cancer Agency, eventually became the permanent home. People from other parts of the province, receiving treatment at the Vancouver Centre, began requesting similar programs in their communities. Their requests, too, were heard. More relaxation practices were incorporated into the groups, and additional staff were hired. What began as a ground roots movement steadily grew and now exists as an integral part of the Patient and Family Counseling services of all the B.C. Cancer Agency centres.

The Relaxation and Support program has inspired like-minded people to want to create similar programs in their own communities. At the time of writing, there are 23 such groups in B.C. The intention of this manual is to help in that process. The philosophy of group work in cancer care, as we have come to understand it, is described so that the individual and social experience of cancer is better understood. Practical explanations and guidelines on how to create a Relaxation and Support group, a "Circle", are offered. Guidelines cover a range of issues, from finding the most conducive setting to dealing with the challenges that arise within group work. Relaxation is the core component of a Circle, and we have provided guided imagery scripts for the facilitator to help group members achieve the Relaxation Response. As well, a range of techniques are explained, from autogenics to footstroking.

Since the inception of the BCCA Relaxation and Support Program, the field of psychosocial oncology has grown tremendously. The program that evolved at the BCCA parallels others across North America and elsewhere, and research studies have amply documented the benefits we have observed over the years of conducting this work<sup>2</sup>. Notes and references have been provided at the end of chapters so that the reader can situate the BCCA program within the broader context of this research evidence. We have also included comments

from those people who are most familiar with this work – the cancer patients and facilitators – in order that the reader can hear from others who have participated in the program. These “circlewords” have been incorporated into the text. Lastly, we have taken the liberty of including words of personal experience and wisdom from some of the great writers, as these comments, too, further communicate the meaning and the spirit of this work.

Our sincere hope is that this manual is used as a tool for facilitators, and assists in creating more Circles.

Lis Smith, BSW, CCH

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Psychosocial oncology researchers met in a conference held in San Antonio, Texas for the first time in 1975, which could be considered the emergence of the field. Now, psychosocial oncology rests on a firm ground of scientific research. The classic studies and writings mentioned in the introduction are listed in the Reference section, for the interested reader. For a survey of the field, and a historical context, see the definitive text, *Psycho-Oncology*, which represents the single best source of evidence-based information. It is well worth the read.

<sup>2</sup> In a recent meta-analytic review (Luebbert, 2001), it is concluded that the evidence for the benefit of relaxation training is now so strong that it should be incorporated into routine clinical practice for cancer patients in acute treatment. Fawzy (1999) reviewed the research literature in order to definitively answer the question “what psychosocial interventions work for cancer patients and what do not?”. His answer, in short, was that relaxation training and emotional support are two interventions that certainly work, and are even more powerful and enduring when used in combination.



## **Introduction: Context and the Components of the BCCA Relaxation and Support Program**

### **1) The impact of cancer**

*The day I found out I had cancer was the worst day of my life: Hubert H. Humphrey*

The diagnosis of cancer is one of the most horrifying experiences that can happen to a person. Cancer arouses many of the associations that leprosy once did: disfigurement, isolation, pain, and inevitable death. Although there has been an explosion of awareness about cancer, and much has been done to de-mystify the disease, the old images of cancer remain. Our fear is deeply rooted. The disease is complex and mysterious, and despite tremendous medical research, the basic causes of most cancers are still unknown. Cancer treatments are frightening and produce side effects that are often more unpleasant than the symptoms of the cancer itself.

It is little wonder that people living with cancer often experience intense emotional distress<sup>1</sup>. They have to cope with pain, physical limitations and fear about suffering and death. They have to live with uncertainty as even well-established treatments have widely varying degrees of effectiveness. When a cancer is 'cured', patients are aware that a recurrence may happen, and that the nightmare may not be over. These circumstances nearly always create a state of anxiety that spills over into every aspect of their lives, leaving them chronically tense and exhausted.

Most cancer survivors feel that their lives have been inexorably altered. Despite advances in treatment, the gloomy stereotypes associated with cancer continue to pervade the thoughts of most persons diagnosed with a malignancy. Because these stereotypes also pervade the general community, cancer patients can experience a sense of perceived or actual rejection in their environments. Their friends and family can be affected by myths around contagion, fears of death and loss, and the anxiety of communicating with seriously ill persons. The consequence for the patient is often a sense of intense aloneness.

The world becomes divided into people with cancer, and those without. Cancer patients describe a sense of isolation, a feeling that “I no longer belong in my familiar world – not even my nearest and dearest can understand how different I feel now that I am living with cancer”. Cancer patients become members of an invisible group with which they need to connect in order to counterbalance their perceived or actual rejection from the “healthy” community.

*The deepest need of man, then, is to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness... Erich Fromm*

It is the longing to be in a community and to be accompanied by others who truly understand that has inspired the formation of groups for people with cancer.

The cancer journey is often very long and circumstances and needs change, but the need to be accompanied is constant. Support and relaxation groups provide cancer patients with a place to talk openly about their suffering and fears, and out in the open, these fears diminish and become surmountable. These groups also provide patients with an opportunity to practice and develop relaxation skills that will help them endure the treatments and challenges they may face. Even more, groups provide a place for personal growth, enrichment and a new quality of life that is an outcome of growing through the cancer experience. At a time of seeming impoverishment and loss, such groups can help people experience a deep richness<sup>2</sup>.

*“As well as benefitting from relaxation, I also received a great deal of needed support from other patients. The sessions helped relieve my feelings of aloneness and helplessness...Circle member.”<sup>3</sup> “*

Groups take many forms. There are self-help groups, patient-led groups, groups without any leader at all, and groups facilitated by a health care professional. Some groups simply provide peer support, whereas others are

more intensive and may provide information, behavioural training in coping skills and intensive psychotherapy as well as emotional support. The Relaxation and Support group that evolved at BCCA combines the philosophy of existential group therapy with the teaching and practice of deep relaxation and imagery. These are the core components of the BCCA Relaxation and Support groups, and in our view, are essential when working with people dealing with cancer.

## **2) Existential Group Therapy**

Support groups that address existential concerns provide enormous benefit for people grappling with the challenges of cancer. Existential philosophy affirms the need to address issues of ultimate concern<sup>4</sup>. Concerns such as the purpose of one's existence and fear of death become pressing for the person with cancer, but because of social taboos, cancer patients are often silenced. In existential groups, patients share their deepest fears and feelings of loss, and their struggle to experience a meaningful, rich life in the midst of terrible adversity. Sharing these challenges is somehow life affirming, and creates an intense and immediate intimacy between people in the group.

Many support and psychotherapy groups avoid the existential realm, and focus exclusively on interpersonal interactions. These groups can offer comfort and companionship to members, but deeper concerns, such as fear of death, may not be addressed. While death remains a difficult topic for many people to address, discussions of mortality within group work provide an important source of connection for people with cancer. As well, patients repeatedly express that it was not possible for them to fully embrace life or re-enter into daily activities until they faced the possibility of dying. Groups that affirm cancer patients desire to identify ultimate values and reshape their lives in accordance are, in our view, vital in the care of persons with cancer<sup>5</sup>.

Groups conducted from an existential perspective choose not to “water down the tragedy of life” and are able to bear the weight of “extreme experience” such as the death of a group member<sup>6</sup>. In existential groups, the facilitator pays

careful attention to respecting members' struggles, and encourages those present to witness and respect expressions of grief and sadness without attempting to soothe and intervene. In essence, it is this validation of the pain of loss that is at the healing core of groups. Yalom states that groups can heal the sense of social isolation, but are remiss if they try to soothe or fix the existential isolation that accompanies the deepest feelings of loss.

*Whatever happens in the external world, human love and grief, pity and compassion are what matter. These emotions transcend even death... Rollo May*

### **3) The practice of deep relaxation**

At the BCCA, techniques that relax the body and mind are paired with guided imagery work that takes people on 'imaginary journeys'. The relaxation portion of the group session provides patients with a respite from the battering events and consequential distress, as well as relief from the side effects of their cancer treatments<sup>7</sup>. As patients are helped to slow their breathing and unclench their muscles, they can slow their racing thoughts. As they experience a state of physical calm, they regain some equilibrium and perspective<sup>8</sup>. As they begin attending to the symbolic, they regain a sense of meaningfulness and coherence. The depth of connection between people is intensified when they consciously relax together. Barriers are dropped, faces soften and voices change.

People who are unfamiliar with the practice of deliberately relaxing sometimes equate relaxation with being "out of control". They associate 'coping' with denying or masking their fear, and consequently add to their stress. Paradoxically, when people are in a state of constant vigilance, their ability to cope is compromised. Attention is narrowed and their ability to be present, to understand and to communicate is reduced. They don't realize how tense they are until they intentionally relax – and only then become aware of how anxious they are, and the negative effect of holding themselves in so tightly.

Relaxation is an art and a skill that is learned and practised in the circle and transferred into life. As people learn to relax in the group, they become aware of their anxiety in a new way. They learn to read their own distress signals, and in becoming mindful, can use their skills to prevent the escalation of their anxiety. When patients learn relaxation and take it outside the circle to situations of stress, they gain a sense of being in charge and of being calm despite circumstances. Patients who practice relaxation regularly experience significant improvements in quality of life, and a decreased sense of hopelessness, tension, depression and anxiety. This sense is genuine and valid and not rooted in the illusion of “coping”<sup>9</sup>.

*“I know that I am a better patient because of it. I have been able to have informed, calm discussion with doctors and have welcomed their traditional treatments. This is a direct result of the relaxation sessions. They have not only given me a real sense of some control and influence over my recovery, but have put me in the midst of people who are striving to survive. All of these people give me the courage to take everything offered by my doctors”...Circle Member*

#### **4) Imagery Work**

The diagnosis of cancer creates fear and anxiety that take form in images, which in turn impacts upon physiology. Creating positive images can help break this spiral of anxiety and physiological reaction, and can be used as a tool to maximize potential for healing. Over the course of a group relaxation experience, different forms of imagery can be included. *Guided imagery* offers a “storyline” ideally filled with *symbolic imagery*, *receptive imagery*, and general *healing imagery*<sup>10</sup>.

The “storyline” usually involves a traveller or pilgrim on a difficult journey through hostile or treacherous landscape, to find a plateau or high peak of vision or serenity. The story offers a metaphor for overcoming pain and difficulties and achieving a sense of being back in charge. Symbolic imagery – images that have shared meaning such as soaring eagles and mountain peaks and spring flowers

– bring feeling and meaning to the relaxation experience. Periods of silence in the storyline encourage receptive images, that is, images that seem to bubble up from nowhere and are experienced as intensely personal. A general healing image such as a being bathed in light or colour is a helpful way of ending the session.

At a time of impoverishment and loss, the world can become enormously enriched by attention to the symbolic. The symbolic images that have the greatest strength are those which are offered by the members of the Circle. Members bring images with great personal meaning to the group, and speak in a deep way – about their love of life, their sensitivity to beauty, about noticing things in a new way. Members become very eloquent as the poet and mystic is aroused in people who have previously said “I can’t do imagery”.

On the walk to the cancer clinic one morning, following a night of storm, a circle member noticed a single raindrop held in a rhododendron leaf. He described how the droplet shone in the sunlight. As he noticed this, he also became aware of the quality of light, the fragrance of flowers and the smell of moist earth. In sharing this story he demonstrated the human ability to respond to beauty and promise even at times of deep sadness and uncertainty. Another circle member spoke of a sleepless, lonely night of pain that culminated in a spectacular sunrise that turned the mountain tops to rose.

Imagery work, like the relaxation work, continues long after the session ends. For instance, when the flowering cherries have been described in a relaxation exercise, and all the petals have been visualized as blossoming healer cells, circle members have described how each flowering cherry reminded them of their relaxation experience. While out in the world, they re-experienced their earlier state of calm and connectedness.

*“It is a safe place for me to process all that has happened to me, especially the aftermath. I handled going through the treatment well; it is now when I need help”*  
...Circle member

## 5) In Conclusion

We have observed that the Support and Relaxation groups help people cope with the crisis of cancer and additionally, facilitate an inner psychological and spiritual work that it is experienced by many participants as powerful and healing. We have observed healing benefits in people at all stages of the cancer journey. During the initial diagnosis and early treatment stages, when patients experience distress and physical symptoms, the group support and practice of relaxation can provide tremendous relief and comfort, and a new learning. When the treatment is finished and the assumption from others is often 'you're okay now, time to get back to normal', they state 'I don't want to go back!'. Going back implies to many people a return to old patterns that they have outgrown. The reality is that once a person has had cancer, they are unlikely to remain the same. Even when a person is told 'you're cured', they are left with a feeling of unease and watchfulness. What to do now? How can I optimize my living? Who am I now? The Circle continues to be a place where people share a view of a changed world, and equip themselves with skills for their continued journey with cancer.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Epidemiological studies indicate that approximately 30% of cancer patients experience moderate to high levels of psychological distress (see Derogatis et al. 1983; Farber et al. 1984; Stefanek et al. 1987)

<sup>2</sup> Overall, groups appear to provide the most comprehensive and effective help for patients with medical illnesses (Spira, 1998). Programs that incorporate an existential or spiritual component, such as the Tapestry program that is offered out of the Tom Baker Cancer Center, and the Healing Journey Program at Princess Margaret Hospital, have conducted research that describe 'quality of experience' benefits, such as increased feelings of love, peacefulness and acceptance, and increased self-esteem.

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<sup>3</sup> The BCCA Relaxation and Support program was evaluated in 1993 by research consultant, Margaret White. The patient and facilitator quotes cited throughout the manual ('circlewords') were collected then.

<sup>4</sup> For the reader who is interested in learning more about existential philosophy, the books written by Victor Frankl and Rollo May are classics well worth reading. Some of these are listed in the reference section.

<sup>5</sup> This theme – that the possibility of immanent death needs to be faced in order to start living fully – has been well described by Canadian researchers such as Alastair Cunningham and Ross Gray, in their qualitative research.

<sup>6</sup> These quotes were taken from Yalom's (1980) text on existential group work. Irvin Yalom is credited by many to be the father of existential group therapy for medical patients.

<sup>7</sup> The effectiveness of relaxation training as an adjunctive therapy for reducing distress and improving quality of life has been extensively documented: in a recent meta-analytic review (Luebbert et. al, 2001), it was concluded that relaxation training is also effective for reducing nausea and pain.

<sup>8</sup> The reciprocity that exists between physical tension and anxious thinking, and that between a state of physical calm and the subjective experience of peacefulness, has been most extensively documented in the research literature on anxiety. The techniques described in this manual have been shown to reduce clinical anxiety disorders and continue to be used in psychiatric settings.

<sup>9</sup> Over ninety percent of patients surveyed in the previously mentioned Evaluation study reported that they incorporated relaxation techniques into their daily routine as a result of attending sessions.

<sup>10</sup> There are other forms of imagery that are effective when working with individuals, but because of their personal nature, do not lend themselves to group work. Two commonly used forms of imagery include concrete imagery, which is based on biologically correct information, and process imagery, which helps the person rehearse an upcoming medical procedure and transpersonal imagery. These forms have been discussed by Achterberg (1985) and the Simmontons.



## **Setting up a Relaxation Group in Your Community**

## Location and Setting

The group needs a home. Holding group sessions within a hospital or local health centre gives the benefits of an accessible location, as well as bestowing an “official status”, and contributing to the perception of hospitals as places of healing. However, many people appreciate the atmosphere of a church, school, club or other social setting. Ideally, the location itself should be as permanent as possible, for after a while the setting itself becomes associated with the Relaxation Response.

- ❖ Quiet is a great help, so the ability to silence intercoms or phones is a bonus. The room should be away from the sounds of activity so a Community Centre may be less than ideal.
- ❖ If strip lighting is in place, see if there is an outlet for a side lamp with an incandescent bulb of soft colour that can be used to create the right ambiance for relaxation.
- ❖ Can the air temperature be controlled? It is difficult to relax if one is too warm or too cold.
- ❖ Easy access to a washroom is important.
- ❖ Storage area will also be required for the mats, blankets, etc.
- ❖ All facilities need to be wheelchair accessible.

A room that can hold a small circle of chairs can be a starting point, if nothing else can be found or is all that can be afforded. Initially, the first group began with simply a circle of chairs in a room 10 x 10 in a far from silent setting. A spacious room, adaptive lighting and a supply of accessories are helpful, but not essential.

Even if an optimum setting cannot be found, a group can begin. A CD/Tape player for the playing of taped background music is an essential in the absence

of a music therapist. For a more conducive setting, however, the following items will be helpful:

- ❖ Individual foam mats;
- ❖ pillows; ideally 2" in height
- ❖ blankets or afghans; warmth is important
- ❖ bolsters to place underneath the knees for back support;
- ❖ knitted slippers;
- ❖ eye pillows; gentle pressure over the eyes can help those muscles relax, in this way too the level of light can be controlled
- ❖ extra music tapes;
- ❖ at least one Lazyboy chair for people who cannot lie down comfortably.

## **Frequency and Timing**

For a group to become established it is recommended that sessions be held on a weekly basis at regular times. Groups are offered on a drop-in basis, as regular availability of support is important even if participants are not able to attend each week. The reliability of the program makes a supportive statement.

A needs assessment in your locality might indicate whether morning, afternoon or evening sessions would be preferred. Trial and error can set the developmental process of the group back. At the BCCA in Vancouver, the Wednesday evening sessions running from 6:30 to 8:00 pm are often the most heavily attended. However this group evolved out of two daytime groups. Over time many attendees returned to the work force, and because of this there was demand for an evening session. One was provided, and is consistently well attended. In rural areas where people commute long distances to attend their nearest group, long drives on winter nights are not conducive to easy attendance. This would seem to have been borne out in at least two areas where evening groups have not flourished. Morning programs 10:00 to 11:30am are

well attended. The Victoria Clinic has their session in the early afternoon, as does the Courtenay group.

If groups can be continued throughout holiday times - i.e. July, August and over the winter holiday season – it will bring stability to the group. Often these times are particularly stressful and lonely for people dealing with illness. Optimally, a team of facilitators should be available to provide coverage, so the program is not dependent upon one individual.

## **Length of Sessions**

Our experience suggests an optimum range of time for a group session is 90 minutes divided roughly into 30 minutes for check-in and sharing time; 45 minutes for practice work, and 15 minutes for check-in and closure. However, this is a flexible framework, and it is an ongoing challenge to ensure that there is enough time for needs to be met. While people may be concerned about having enough relaxation time, it is doubtful that extending group time will accomplish this. It is in the skillful judgment of the group facilitators to assess how to apportion the time. Participants often want to continue connecting after the session, and the relaxation group offers, for many, a rare opportunity for networking. Offering coffee, tea or snacks after the session, or suggesting that participants meet afterwards can provide for this. The daytime groups at BCCA Vancouver centre gravitate towards the cafeteria after sessions and much invaluable networking continues on a “self-help” basis at this time.

## **Membership --Who May Attend?**

Group sessions are open to anyone dealing with cancer, either at first hand or as a support person. Family and friends are as welcome as patients. The Relaxation and Support Program seems able to embrace a wide cross section of the community. The primal need to be cared about and be taken care of transcends cultural and gender role norms. The circle has its own culture of

acceptance, and it seems that music, voice tone, and appropriate and tender touch create many bridges. Because the focus of the group is upon sharing the practical experience of relaxation, many people attending find themselves comfortable despite initial anxieties about not being a “group person”.

It is acknowledged that support groups are composed mainly of Caucasian, middle class women of middle age; a population not dissimilar to the congregation of churches or membership of many workshops and seminars. Although the format of the Relaxation and Support Group has appealed to some young people in their 20s and quite a few people in their 80s, the preponderance of age range is between 35 to 65.

Increasingly, men are coming to the group sessions though still not in equal numbers to women. The attendance at groups for prostate cancer patients shows that men do value an opportunity to become part of a community. However, there is evidence they are initially more comfortable attending a program that offers information. The Relaxation and Support group sessions can embrace this need by including a formal and structured component.

This program is designed as an open-ended drop-in group, in order to best accommodate people on active treatments for whom the logistics of regular attendance are a challenge, and also to allow for people coping with fluctuating energy levels. Because of the chronicity of cancer, participants should be welcome at any time in the cancer journey, regardless of whether they have current symptoms.

*“ I had come through radiation and chemo but even with good care and treatment felt at the end of my rope coping with side effects -- thankfully I received the help I needed... Circle member”*

In some communities the inclusion of anyone dealing with a life threatening illness other than cancer may provide a needed service within the community. It is important though that the majority of attendees be persons

dealing with cancer, in order to maintain the focus of a group for people with cancer.

There are no age limits, although young children attending as cancer patients could find this an overwhelming experience. However young children have accompanied their parents who are dealing with cancer to group sessions. One father, towards the end of his life, wished to include himself in as many groups as possible. He also wished to spend as much time as possible with his 9 year old daughter. So on many occasions she attended too. Her presence heightened the poignancy of the impact of life threatening illness on whole families, and did not seem to deter other group members from speaking freely. Several times, small babies have been brought to the group. When an infant cried on one occasion, a man in his 30s commented that the sounds of the baby had -- far from creating a distraction -- given him comfort, and many agreed. At such times, participants may be willing to trade the quality of exterior quiet for a deep feeling of community.

However a prolonged period on the mats is demanding on a lively young person. During the relaxation period, a child can be encouraged to colour a mandala (a design within a circle that helps create a state of calm) or be provided with a Walkman with a taped story or relaxation theme more suited to their taste.

## **Is There an Optimum Time in the Cancer Experience to Attend?**

There is no optimum time to enter a circle. This may be a very individual decision on the part of the attendee, or may have been determined by chance. Some people come when the diagnosis is only a suspicion or has just been confirmed. Others use the group for inspiration and support during the course of treatment. Some people use the groups as "continuing treatment" after protocols are complete, and others as a health maintenance program. There are family members who use the group as a place to deal with grief, and all of this adds to the richness of the mix.

At whatever stage in the journey, the first time of attending the Relaxation Support Group can be overwhelming. If the person is in the early stages of coming to terms with the diagnosis, it may be the first time they have heard themselves say out loud “I have cancer...”. This can promote an outpouring of grief which may initially devastate the newcomer. At this deeply emotional moment, many experience the realization that this is a safe place, where there is total comprehension among a circle of people who have all been there themselves. Their often unspoken empathy is deeply helpful. The facilitator can point out that, for everyone in the circle, this is now familiar territory.

Sometimes a person comes to the group having been “encouraged” by family members, friends, or health care professionals. Somewhat resistant to “help”, they may announce how well they are coping: “I’ve sailed through the surgery,” “I haven’t cried,” “My friends say that I’m amazing...” and then they dissolve into tears. Far from this being seen as giving in to “weakness”, it can be pointed out that, in our vulnerability and openness, we are also very real and this brings a gift of truth to the circle.

For the newcomer, struggling to adjust to living with cancer, it is scary to hear of a return of the disease after a person has been in remission. It is scary to see the evidence of the progression of the disease and to join the circle as it grieves the loss of a member. Admitting to such possibilities takes a great deal of strength. Even the most “positive” and “one-step-at-a-time” philosophy does not protect us from knowing and feeling the threat to life style and to life itself that the disease can be. However, when fears are openly acknowledged, they lose some of their power to terrorize. It is the suppressed fears that hold us in their thrall.

There is usually at each session at least one group member present who has defied all the odds. Their stories can be very helpful. One attendee coming as support for her husband, described how she was told - 32 years ago - that her cancer was “terminal.” For several sessions following the telling of this story, people drew comfort by asking her to repeat the story, often asking, “Please tell us how long you have been terminal.”

For the person going through treatment, whose energy levels fluctuate, the open structure of the group is helpful. Some people attend regularly throughout radiation treatment whilst others adapt to the cycle of the chemotherapy, or find their own rhythm. In a clinic setting, it is not unusual for people to attend while they are hooked up to a chemotherapy pump. As long as there is an electrical point to plug the machine into so that the machine is not likely to emit distracting beeping sounds, this works very well. When the machine's gently whirring sound is heard, people in the near vicinity have used the sounds to remind them of hummingbirds or purring cats and, rather than let the sound distract, have used it to help. It is this ability to accept and to integrate what could be judged as a difficulty into a positive experience, which seems to be an integral part of such a group. Participants typically show a willingness to embrace differences, and to create bridges rather than barriers.

A considerable number of people attend who have completed a spell of treatment, or are in remission. When treatment has been completed, people often describe themselves as "sitting ducks" or "waiting for the second shoe to fall" and remark that this is when they most appreciate the group. This is where they can feel proactive and cared about. The group also provides a place for people for whom the traditional treatments of surgery, chemotherapy, radiation are not suitable. The circle provides what has been described as "the fourth dimension of cancer care", giving social support its place alongside surgery, chemotherapy and radiation.

This is a place, too, where people can give. Someone who has come through similar diagnosis and treatment and demonstrates that there is "life after cancer" can offer a powerful role model. One story is told how a new member found himself amazed to hear people in the group chortling over a tale brought to the circle of a misadventure encountered en route to the group that day. A seagull had had a particularly spectacular aim, and there followed speculation over whether or not this was good luck. The teller of the story became a newcomer's role model – a mentor, showing him that humour extends beyond



fear and pain. This learning was shared with others and in due course he himself became a mentor for many group members.

Many people in the palliative stage of illness come to the group sessions. People have even come on stretchers, bringing oxygen tanks with them, sometimes very debilitated by their illness. Several participants attended within the last two weeks of their life.

Eleanore was just such a person. She arranged to be brought over twice a week from the Palliative Care ward at Vancouver General Hospital. She valued a place to grieve and would sit with a towel spread across her knees for the duration of the check-in time so that she could weep and not soak her dress. She provided a beautiful model of the release gained by being able to express deep emotions. She always relaxed deeply during the induction, and reported that her emotional, spiritual and physical pain was greatly eased.

## Facilitators

*It is not what we do  
that makes a difference, but  
what we allow to happen.*  
Rachel Naomi Remen

No one truly understands what it feels like to have one's life imminently threatened until it happens to them. But a facilitator with good group skills and the right personal attributes will be able to help create a space

where the strengths within a group can be fully shared.

A good facilitator has been described as someone "utterly present and invisible." To be utterly present and invisible requires finely-tuned listening skills. Scott-Peck, in "The Road Less Traveled", describes this as "listening until you sweat". The ability to truly hear what is being offered - the subtext as well as the obvious - is vital. This quality of listening creates a spaciousness in the group so that it is not being directed or led but, rather, "watched over". The facilitator is the expression and echo of the group, much as the Inukshuk of the Inuit represents no particular person, but rather the spirit of guidance.

A patient described this quality of facilitation: “the facilitator listens with 100 percent attention to whoever is speaking. This quickly becomes the norm for the group as a whole. In addition, and this is difficult to explain, the facilitator helps usher in an atmosphere of trust and belonging. The experience of each person in the group is one where honesty is honored, where it is safe to say and show exactly how you are feeling. Your statements will be heard, but not judged. You will be listened to, but not advised. You are free to say exactly what you want, and you freely honor everyone else’s right to the same”.

Where there is more than one facilitator, it is essential that they be able to work from a place of cooperation and harmony. The relationship between facilitators needs to be open, trusting, and respectful of each other’s particular skills and vulnerabilities. Working to reinforce the other’s words or actions creates a seamlessness that on a very basic level will be echoed in the relaxation induction.

It helps if the facilitator possesses a voice that can sound soothing. However, as the work becomes more familiar, it is usual for the facilitator’s voice to drop and become softer. It also helps to use one’s sense of humour. Although the work is to be taken seriously, it is advisable not to take ourselves too seriously. There is a saying that: “ Perhaps angels can fly because they take themselves lightly.” It is important to be always in the process of honestly accepting who oneself is, having a good awareness of ones limitations, boundaries and strengths.

Facilitators need to be able to understand and be able to discuss current knowledge of the mind-body connection. This science is still in its infancy but there are many books and tapes available (see the bibliography at the end of the manual).

Facilitators need to be courageous and willing to let go of their natural fear and avoidance of illness and death. This means that the facilitator needs to be working on coming to terms with their own mortality. What does this mean? As George Eliot wrote “It is one thing to say “We all must die” and another to know “I must die -- and soon”. When we allow ourselves to accompany others physically

and emotionally into a place of loneliness and fear, we *know* in a heartfelt way, our own vulnerability. This *knowing* is freeing and personally enriching, and is to understand the impoverishment of denial.

Perhaps the most essential component in a facilitator is to demonstrate caring. Caring is an integral part of listening, of giving attention whether a need is expressed as an emotional or physical one. A smile, a touch, an extra blanket, a pause after a person has made powerful statement -- there are so many subtle ways to demonstrate caring. Mother Theresa has said, "There is hunger for ordinary bread, and there is hunger for love, for kindness, for thoughtfulness - and this is the great poverty that makes people suffer so much."

## **Volunteers**

Because of the nature of the program, this work draws remarkable volunteers. Certainly the existent programs owe much to their presence. Volunteers can offer part of the induction, the foot and brow stroking, and can ensure the comfort of those upon the mats. When recruiting volunteers, it is advisable to offer an introduction to the philosophy of the group program, describe what would be expected of volunteers and have them attend as a participant at least once. It is important that volunteers are comfortable with relaxation techniques, sensitive to the needs of others, and can be open to the expression of strong emotions. It is vital that they be able to preserve patient confidentiality, and it helps if they have experience with Therapeutic Touch or similar techniques.

Among the most reliable and effective of volunteers are people who have themselves experienced the value of the program - usually the spouses, friends or relatives of group members who themselves have died or moved location. Others have themselves been patients and now, recovered, wish to give back. Altruism is a very healing practice. For someone to receive care and attention, to have their feet stroked by someone who a year or so previous was themselves receiving this care is very powerful.

Volunteers can, where appropriate, extend support beyond the group sessions, visiting group members in their homes or on the hospital units. While volunteers must be wary of over-involvement, connections form in the group and sometimes friendships develop which are mutually rewarding. Volunteers are part of the circle and their role can be flexible. Informality gives volunteers a sense of choice to be themselves. And volunteers have expressed appreciation of this approach and find that their involvement is a joy and not “work”.

Each volunteer is a great asset and it is important to acknowledge their time and the talents they bring. When facilitators take time to acknowledge this within the circle, the demonstration of gratitude is beneficial. Volunteers like to be appreciated and thanked, and group members, too, welcome being able to express their feelings of gratitude.

## **Creating a Safe Environment**

## **The Circle**

People have been healing themselves and each other within circles since the beginning of time. The circle is an archetypical shape and powerful in all societies. We know from ancient cave paintings that circles formed a focus for a family or a clan. We still use the terms: family circle, our circle of friends, social circle. Circles are a place of community, and there is a primal need for community, especially during times of challenge and threat .

The opening and closure of each session takes the form of a circle. When we sit in a circle, an atmosphere of openness and cooperation is fostered. We have access to facial expressions and the body language of other participants. There is no vertical hierarchy in a circle. Circles expand or contract to meet the needs of a group and still remain a circle.

Where ever space allows, the mats should be placed in a circle, forming a mandala, heads towards the center. This positioning helps people feel comfortable and connected to each other. The practical advantage is that the facilitator can be more easily heard, and the footstokers can move smoothly and safely around the circle.

A strength of the circle is that it maintains its essence regardless of change of facilitators. The circle is analogous to the protective cast placed around a broken limb, which enables the limb to do its own healing while being so protected.

## **Creating a Sense of Safety**

<p><i>Being safe is about being seen and heard, and allowed to be who you are and to speak your truth....Rachel Naomi Remen</i></p>
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Creating a safe place begins before the check in, when the participant enters the room and is acknowledged by some gesture of welcome. A sense of

safety is deepened when the facilitator can remember and use people's names. When members are addressed by name, this is very warming and indicates that they are personally acknowledged.

The facilitator opens the session by welcoming everyone in the circle, and inviting people to introduce, or re-introduce, themselves. After offering their names people are encouraged to offer any information they wish to share with the group. On a first visit, a person may be so overwhelmed by their situation that their name is all that they can offer.

*"I was afraid — but the sessions seemed so open I just kept coming"...Circle Member*

It is the role of the facilitators to moderate the amount of time each person takes. When group sizes are large there is a real challenge in making sure each person has a turn to be heard. It is important to emphasize that this is a time to simply listen, and not a time for discussion, suggestions, or questions. Facilitators can model this by noting but not responding to the issues that are raised and by thanking each speaker and inviting the next person to speak.

There are occasions, perhaps a first visit or upon receipt of bad news, when a person needs extra time. Usually the group understands this. If, however, someone is over-demanding, it is appropriate to curtail the talk. The group needs the safety of knowing that the facilitator will take charge and maintain balance within the circle.

It is essential to stress the value of everyone listening. No sign-in sheet or other distraction should be present at this time so that the speaker claims the total attention of the group.

Late comers need to be welcomed personally into the circle. Sometimes people try to become "invisible" as they enter which tends to add to the distraction of their entry. The facilitator will ask the speaker to pause for a moment while the newcomer is brought into the circle.

The facilitator can invite members to offer images that will be used in the induction. The images people offer can speak deeply of hopes, and fears, feelings of support or abandonment, and enrich and deepen the relaxation experience. By offering images, people can disclose very personal material and maintain a feeling a safety. Also, imagery is most effective when the specific image is chosen by the person.

Groups benefit from beginning and ending at the stated times. Many participants are not well and they may have made arrangements with family members to pick them up, or have appointments to keep. There are times when it seems appropriate to spend a little more time together. If the facilitator judges that this is such a time, the group should be asked if this meets their needs.

The most important part of creating safety is the ability to midwife the full range of emotions that member's experience. Getting the message across that tears and laughter are both healing gifts is crucial. Tears as well as laughter are elements of the "internal jogging" that Norman Cousins describes as being so healing. Sometimes a person can get "stuck in the dark", trapped amongst the loss, and it is important for the facilitator to help the group back to firm ground while acknowledging the deep feelings of anguish, loss, anger, fear, and despair that may be expressed. In the remainder of this chapter we look at some of the situations that can create a sense of insecurity and need to be addressed by the facilitator(s).

When the heart weeps for what it has lost,  
the soul rejoices for what it has found.

Sufi verse

## **"Fixing"**

Feelings of helplessness can arise in us all when confronted with another human being in distress, and it is natural to want to mend, to ease the pain of



another. We feel less helpless when we are reminded of the value of simply being heard, and that our loving attention is a great gift. However, people dealing with cancer are frequently on the receiving end of unsolicited advice. They may be swamped with books on nutrition, self-healing, or the latest “cure”.

If someone is clearly asking for information or wishes to hear what it has been like for others to undergo a certain treatment or procedure, it is appropriate to draw from the circle. Those who desire to be of help can identify themselves. Later, the person in need may choose to make contact and draw upon the knowledge and experience available. The circle holds a great deal of real expertise and valuable experience but any “fix-it’ approach can result in the speaker closing down.

### **“Doctor Bashing”**

Doctors have the challenging role of being the messenger of illness and are therefore often the object of anger, fear and frustration. It is not the role of the facilitator to defend the medical system, or a person. What is needed is for the facilitator to help the speaker feel heard. The facilitator needs to “hear” the subtext, to acknowledge the feelings behind the words, to encourage the speaker to identify and describe their feelings beneath the anger. It may also be appropriate to encourage discussion about how to communicate needs to a doctor, or even make changes in care providers.

Venting anger invariably increases frustration and helplessness on the part of the speaker, and can result in side-taking in the circle. One day Michael, a young man, came to the circle with angry words about his doctor. Many regular attendees of the group knew of Michael’s history of substance abuse and a destructive lifestyle. Knowing of his pain and sadness, the group members listened in silence to his diatribe. When a student who was unfamiliar with Michael’s story began to defend the medical profession, Michael’s voice rose higher. His body language showed the escalation of his anger, and he rose from his chair as if to leave the room. When the facilitator explained that Michael was

in a circle of people who were able to hear the grief through his anger, he settled back into his seat, and wept quietly throughout the experiential session that followed.

Much of the work of relaxation is about combining our thinking with our intuitive response, and becoming - in the language of meditation - "the watcher on the hill". The facilitator can remind the group members that this is the place where we want to get the "whole picture". From this broader perspective it may be easier to forgive the inadequacies of medicine, to accept that some things are beyond human control, and that much remains a mystery in illness.

### **The Taboo of Death**

*No one minds talking about death or quoting a poet or two - but no one much feels comfortable talking about dying and being dead...* Robert Desseix

Despite the work of Elisabeth Kubler Ross and others, death and dying are still areas of social discomfort. People with cancer are made more lonely by this taboo. This was illustrated when a group member brought a poem to the group. The poem was about an elephant. In the poem, everyone is aware of, but not mentioning, the huge presence of an elephant in the room. Everyone carries on as if the elephant isn't there. The unacknowledged elephant is death. The message for the group was 'we need to name the elephant in our circles because its presence is very large'.

There is a feeling that permission is required from those who are close to death to broach the subject of dying. In any one circle, there are people who want to talk openly about their imminent death. They may hold back for fear of distressing others who are at different stages of their illness. But to be truly helpful to group members, the facilitator must take the risk and "take permission" to talk about death. This is done by expressing what has been said, and left unsaid, by the circle members during the check-in and sharing time, and by acknowledging the anguish underlying some comment that has been made.

It requires skill and sensitivity for the facilitator to move onto such holy ground. The facilitator may feel protective, believing that some members would be distressed or are not ready to acknowledge the possibility of their own death. In this case, it is the role of the facilitator to be sensitive to those who want to break the taboo, and to trust that the rest of the group will manage. When they listen with compassion for the member who needs to speak, people can experience their own courage and feel strengthened. It can be helpful for the facilitator to remember that it is the unspoken fears that hold the most power over us<sup>1</sup>.

Facilitators can be helped by reading some of the wise and helpful books on death such as Stephen Levine's "Who Dies" or The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying. They may read poetry, listen to music, and deepen their own spirituality. However it is not reasonable for us to expect that we can, once and for all, come to an acceptance of death. In 1460 a Franciscan monk, William Dunbar, wrote: "Timor mortis conturbat me" – the fear of death troubles me". We need simply to accept that we too are troubled by our fear of death.

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<sup>1</sup> When the circle is open to discussion about death, it helps normalize death, and creates room for people to develop a personal perspective on death. These two factors have been associated with reduced distress in cancer patients (Smith et al., 1993).

## **Guilt**

Some of the recent self-help literature on the nature and cause of illness and healing can give rise to feelings of guilt, and beliefs such as “I caused my cancer”. This notion can cause deep hurt and feelings of anger and helplessness, and is contrary to what we know about the causes of cancer. One loving wife, faced with the loss of her husband, was told by some “guru” that she had not washed the vegetables thoroughly enough. Another person was led to believe, from a similar source, that her pancreatic cancer was caused by not chewing her food well enough. Yet another woman was told she had been too unselfish and had repressed her emotions. The stress of the workplace or of a difficult relationship may be blamed. Such over-simplification of the causes of a disease that has challenged medicine for centuries is harmful. For some people, however, believing they know the cause engenders a feeling of control and a sense that they can at least *try* to rectify matters. In situations like this, the facilitator’s role is to let the person be heard.

The facilitator can help people in the group discern the difference between responsibility and blame. Many people want to assume some responsibility for helping themselves to be as well as possible. They wish to co-operate and be a member of their healing team. People who attend Relaxation and Support groups tend to fall into this category. Becoming involved in one’s own healing process engenders a sense of taking charge, whereas blame and guilt are immobilizing.

Within the group, there will be different outcomes for people with similar diagnoses, which can leave the relatively well person feeling “survivor guilt”. Patients can feel that they are not suffering as much as others, or facing such big challenges as others. As a consequence, they may feel that they have less right to their own grief than others do and so tend to suppress it. But all tears need to be honored. The facilitator can acknowledge this by saying that there is room in our heart space to experience the fullness of our own grief as well as the grief of others. In fact by allowing ourselves to experience our own grief fully we are

better able to empathize with the grief of others; that grieving for oneself is not selfish.

## **Loss and Grief**

Loss and grief are an inherent part of the circle. As the health of some members diminishes, and they become visibly weaker, a potent demonstration of what illness can bring is provided. The many losses in the group -- of vitality, of employment, of relationship – are to be grieved. When a group member dies, there is a deep sense of loss. By acknowledging loss, and by encouraging the grieving, all participants in the group can be enriched.

It is natural for facilitators and members of the group to feel uneasy about the effect of the news of loss upon a newly diagnosed or particularly vulnerable individual. We live in a society which tends to see death as a failure; grief as a feeling to be avoided. By creating some sort of ritual of grieving, we can help each other to accept death as the part of life it is.

The group may choose to express grief in a variety of forms, such as creating a memorial service where people take turns talking about what that person meant in their life, or telling the story of their life, or bringing flowers, or singing that person's favorite song. While the group grief process can be painful, it is also healing. The members of the group experience mutual comfort, and the loss can bind people closer together. As well, there is a comfort in knowing that one's own death will be grieved. Russell, when very near to the end of his life, spoke to the group of the comfort he gained by knowing the members would talk about him when he was gone.

Group facilitators need to acknowledge the effects of the chronic losses that surrounds them. It often falls to the group facilitator to be the bearer of news of recurrence of disease, or death. This is painful, and can become wearing. However, to deny one's own grief or armour oneself from sadness and hurt is to close down and be emotionally unavailable to group members.

Facilitators of Relaxation and Support Groups are involved with loss and death in ways that shift our perceptions of life, highlighting its brevity, preciousness and fragility. The potential gift of this awareness is an ability to take delight in the moment and treasure the joy and beauty we are afforded. This heightened awareness, however, can also bring a sense of feeling disconnected to the everyday world which tends to deny death.

The effects of acute and chronic grief upon facilitators needs to be attended to. Self care and support are crucial. For some people, exercise is an effective way of releasing built-up tension. Many people are nourished by art, poetry, music, or the beauty of nature. BCCA has created a formal support network for group facilitators throughout the province to meet once a year to exchange ideas, share concerns and support each other. It is vital that we do things that soothes the soul and eases hurts and losses. Ultimately, we need to accept grief into our being, not as a burden, but as a part of the texture of our self.

*I am a part of all that I have met...* Alfred Lord Tennyson

## **Body Language**

We have already mentioned how the shape of the circle allows visibility of body language. When we observe the language of the body, we are told so much. The tone of the voice indicating the breath high in the body; eyes full of unshed tears; lips pursed; arms tightly hugging the chest; the body pulled back or leaning forward – these are signals indicating that someone wants to make a comment or wants to retreat. We know the meaning of these signals, but we tend to have been trained away from this observation. It is almost as if we are seeing someone's emotional underwear and look away out of politeness!

Noticing body language is taking listening to another level, and it helps the facilitator be more effective. While we need to respect a person's defenses, we also need to look for opportunities to help a person express. By giving this

quality of listening, the facilitator can make a judgment on whether at this time, in this circle, a person can be encouraged to express themselves.

This is a very subtle area of work and there are no formulaic solutions about what to do with the signals. Simply showing that the signals have been noticed by a look or a gesture or a nod can be helpful. When the person is lying on the mat, a touch of tenderness can enable tears to flow. This can engender a sense what Jean Vanier calls “being accompanied”.

It is a challenge to be utterly present. It can be very much like learning to drive a car: as experience grows, the driver begins to develop a sixth sense, knowing when a pedestrian is likely to step off the curb or when a driver is about to cross lanes. There will be opportunities lost and roads not taken. Ultimately though, if members of the circle leave with a sense of being cared about, there is healing in the exercise.

## **Disruptive Behaviour**

Disruptive behaviour is defined as whatever distracts the group from its main purpose in a way that is not useful. When it occurs, it challenges the facilitator who needs to lead the group while remaining gentle and respectful. When it is not skillfully dealt with, the whole circle suffers. Disruptive behaviour often masks a deep-seated terror or loneliness. If so, it is appropriate for this to be recognized as such so that the circle can direct support towards this individual.

There are three discernible patterns of disruptive behaviour that we have noticed: the would-be leader, the expert and the clown.

- ◆ The would-be leader.

This individual caps other people’s comments, turns his or her contribution into a lecture or confronts the facilitator on an issue to create a controversy. It is important that the facilitator stay grounded and focus on trying to understanding what the behaviour is about, rather than rising to the

bait. When the facilitator does not take this personally, the useful points can be validated and attention redirected back to the group.

◆ The expert.

The expert uses their own experience as a touchstone of all experience. He or she frequently uses the phrases “you should” or “you must” and tends to denigrate any views other than their own. The facilitator can offer a comment such as “no one of us has all the answers, we each contribute to the circle”. It can also be emphasized that descriptions of personal experience are always valued and that expressions such as “I found”, “I did” are helpful, whereas “you should”, “you must” evokes a distancing on the part of group members.

◆ The clown.

A distinction can be made between the person who feels that their role is to entertain the group and the person who turns other people’s comments, or their own, into a joke. In both cases, the behaviour encourages inappropriate laughter and can cause anxiety. The facilitator can gently comment that sometimes the only way we can bear to express our deepest emotions is with a laugh. Laughter is a gift in the circle but when it is manipulated, insisted upon as a response to a “performance”, it holds no therapeutic value.

To prevent a disruptive pattern becoming established, the facilitator needs to remind the group that each person be given space in which to be heard without comment or challenge.

If disruptive behaviour becomes persistent, it is costly to the circle. Although a facilitator needs to avoid the trap of prejudging or labeling, it is important to prevent demanding behaviour becoming an accepted pattern. If the individual does not respond to the facilitators generic comments, the facilitator needs to speak to the individual explaining how the behaviour is not helpful. The person could be directed to counselling. If none of these approaches succeed then the person must be asked to withdraw from the group. This is a drastic but it is essential to keep the circle a safe and honest place.



## **Closure**

At the end of the session, the members can either remain where they are on the mats or form again into a circle on chairs. The facilitator can use this time to ask for comments from the group about what was helpful or unhelpful. This is a great learning opportunity for the facilitator, especially in the early months of a group.

Finally, the group forms a circle, joins hands and formally acknowledges the supportive, caring energy of each other. Because “energy flows where attention goes”, attention can be directed to absent members of the group, to family members or friends, anyone, in fact, who would wish to benefit from this energy of loving kindness so prevalent in all the circles.

## **Relaxation Techniques**

## Creating the Relaxation Response

The goal of all relaxation techniques is elicitation of the Relaxation Response, which, once learned, can be evoked at will. When the Relaxation Response is evoked, the body moves into homeostasis, which produces a state of mental and physical tranquility. The muscles become relaxed, cortisol and blood lactate levels fall, the heart beat steadies and blood pressure is lowered. In this mode, the body's natural healer cells, the lymphocytes, increase in number. The subjective experience is one of calm and well-being<sup>1</sup>.

The Relaxation Response is biologically opposite to the "Fight or Flight" reaction, which occurs when we are facing challenges or danger. In this emergency mode, adrenaline courses through the body, cortisol levels rise, blood pumps to the muscles to give them extra power, and breath becomes shallow and increases in rate. This reaction also gives rise to the subjective experience of anxiety or panic. While useful in a crisis situation, this reaction is mentally and physically wearing when it become chronic. For instance, anxiety constricts awareness and leads to insomnia and lack of appetite. These changes, in turn, compound physiological imbalances and compromise the ability to think in a clear-headed way. Over time, elevated cortisol levels reduce the number of lymphocytes which in turn adversely affects the immune system<sup>2</sup>.

Learning to evoke the Relaxation Response at will is the goal of relaxation practice. Participants may be supine on mats seemingly "doing nothing", but in fact they are being assisted to actively follow techniques, and this requires effort on their part! Once participants have learned how to elicit the Relaxation Response by practicing in the circles, they will be able to evoke the response rapidly in different situations, such as during radiation treatments or chemotherapy or before surgical procedures. Patients find this tremendously helpful, as they not only feel emotionally more relaxed, but physiologically more at ease<sup>3</sup>.

The following pages offer directions on different techniques that can be used to elicit the Relaxation Response. It is preferable to use a variety of techniques in the groups so that participants can learn which work best for them. Scripts are provided for each of the different techniques, and can be creatively woven into a relaxation experience as wished by the facilitator. For instance, the facilitator may choose to create a relaxation exercise that includes autogenics, a breathing exercise and a brief guided imagery using images suggested by the group. As well, scripts for an entire relaxation session have been provided, and are comprised of images and a blend of techniques that have been used successfully before. These scripts are useful for the beginning relaxation therapist, however, with experience and confidence, the facilitator will prefer to create his or her own.

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## Notes and References

<sup>1</sup> The term “relaxation response” was coined by Herbert Benson (1976), whose early research into the benefits of relaxation helped launch the field of psychoneuroimmunology, an interdisciplinary field investigating the intimate relationship between the brain and the immune system. It is useful for the facilitator to communicate the basic mechanisms of the relaxation response to patients.

<sup>2</sup> Psychoneuroimmunology research in oncology is still in it's infancy, and while research has provided compelling evidence of the influence of the brain on the immune system, the implications for clinical practice are still conjectural (Bovbjerg & Valdimarsdottir, 1998). Facilitators need to avoid making broad claims such as 'relaxation improves the immune system' or 'relaxation will extend life'. On the other hand, the negative impact of anxiety and chronic vigilance, and many specific healing benefits associated with the Relaxation Response, have been well documented and should be discussed with patients.

<sup>3</sup> Cancer patients who learn how to evoke the relaxation response report significant reductions in nausea, pain, anxiety, depression, hostility and physiological arousal during the course of treatment, regardless of type of cancer, stage of disease and treatment protocol (Luebbert, et. al, 2001). As well, cancer patients who regularly practice relaxation enjoy better quality of life, increased sense of mastery and control over problems, and other benefits, long after treatment is finished (Burish, et, al, 1988, 1991).

## Autogenics

All methods of relaxation can be considered autogenic because “autogenic” means self generated. However, Autogenic Training was developed by Johannes Shultz, a Berlin psychiatrist in the early 1900’s. He discovered that when people were relaxed invariably their limbs felt heavy, warm and comfortable. Constant repetition that a certain limb or body part is heavy and warm can result in those muscles of the body “listening” and complying (it is important that the facilitator state that the limbs *are* heavy and not that they *feel* heavy).

This method has also been found to be a very effective exercise for people prone to headaches that are frequently caused by the veins in the head becoming congested. During the autogenic exercise, as blood flow is diverted to the limbs and extremities, pressure is relieved. People also report that this is a very helpful way to induce deep and restful sleep. As this exercise often results in the body temperature rising by 3 degrees, it is very important to include the suggestion of a cool forehead, or discomfort can result. Lastly, it is a particularly good technique for people who have a busy mind, and who fall in the type “A” category as it occupies the mind with a specific task.

Autogenics basically involves repeating simple statements slowly over and over again, such as ‘my right arm is heavy’. Although simple and seemingly boring, the repetitiousness of the exercise makes it very effective. Autogenics can be paired with images of heaviness and warmth to make it a little more interesting. The emphasis in each statement is placed upon the words “heavy” and “warm”.

*“I am lying on a tropical beach, my body on the warm sand, my head comfortably shaded.*

*My right arm is heavy. My right arm is heavy -- My right arm is heavy as a log resting on the sand. My right arm is heavy. My right arm is heavy ---*

*My right arm is warm, sinking onto the sand -- My right arm is warm. My right arm is warm-- My right arm is warm. My right arm is comfortably heavy and warm.*

*My left arm is heavy as a log resting on the sand. My left arm is heavy. My left arm is heavy -- My left arm is heavy. My left arm is heavy -- My left arm is warm. My left arm is warm. My left arm is warm, sinking onto the sand. My left arm is warm -- My left arm is comfortably heavy and warm.*

*My right leg is heavy. My right leg is heavy -- My right leg is heavy as a log resting on the sand. My right leg is heavy -- My right leg is heavy. My right leg is warm. My right leg is warm -- My right leg is warm, sinking onto the sand. My right leg is warm. My right leg is warm -- My right leg is comfortably heavy and warm.*

*My left leg is heavy. My left leg is heavy. My left leg is heavy as a log resting on the sand. My left leg is heavy -- My left leg is heavy. My left leg is warm. My left leg is warm. My left leg is warm sinking onto the sand. My left leg is warm -- My left leg is comfortably heavy and warm.*

*My arms and legs are comfortably heavy and warm. My arms and legs are comfortably heavy and warm. My arms and legs are comfortably heavy and warm, resting on the sand. My arms and legs are comfortably heavy and warm. My arms and legs are comfortably heavy and warm.*

.

(the facilitator repeats this formula for the remaining statements, keeping the voice slow and regular)

*My heart beat is calm and regular. (repeat 5 times)*

*My breath is calm and regular. (repeat 5 times)*

*The breath breathes me. I am being breathed.*

*My abdomen is at ease. (repeat 5 times)*

*My forehead is cool. (repeat 5 times)*

*I am calm and peaceful. (repeat 5 times)*

*My mind is quiet. (repeat 5 times)*

*I am at ease. (repeat 5 times)*

## Use of breath

Abdominal or diaphragmatic breathing is the easiest way to elicit the Relaxation Response. When we are anxious the breath becomes rapid and shallow. As the body struggles for more oxygen, anxiety builds. By consciously deepening and slowing the breath, muscles relax, our state of mind changes and we regain a sense of being in charge. The breath has been described as the pulse of the mind, and when used consciously, it is a powerful tool.

The lung capacity of some people dealing with cancer may be compromised. If the facilitator incorporates breathwork into the relaxation, it is important to suggest that people breathe just as fully as is comfortable, otherwise working with the breath may actually create anxiety.

There are many styles of breathwork. The ones described below are ones that have been found helpful to participants in the Circles.

### **The Sighing Breath**

*Breathe in through your nose as comfortably as possible, release the breath through your mouth -- Now let the in-breath become a little fuller. Hold it for a moment and then expel the breath to form a sigh -- Breathe in again, hold, and sigh more fully -- Notice a little tension in your shoulders and chest as you breathe in, and as you sigh, feel your shoulders release and your chest relax. You might want to take three or four more sighing breaths -- each time relaxing a little more with the out breath -- That's right.*

### **Belly breathing**

*When we were little we really knew how to breathe fully. Bring to mind a baby's tummy filling with air on the intake of breath, and flattening on the out breath. As we mature we lose this spontaneous breath and take the air into the chest. We have to make a conscious effort to revert to this effective form of breathing. It may help if you now place one hand on your abdomen, the other on your chest -- As you breathe in you can feel the hand over your abdomen rising*



*higher than the hand on your chest. Now breathing in feel the air in your chest, let it expand the ribs and inflate the abdomen. Now as you breathe out, feel the abdomen flatten, then the ribs, and then the chest release -- Breathing in, chest, ribs, abdomen -- breathing out abdomen, ribs, chest. Feel the cycle of the breath -- chest, ribs, abdomen -- abdomen, ribs, chest. Just like a baby.*

### **Balloon Breath**

*You might find it helpful to imagine you have a balloon in your abdomen. Perhaps it is a balloon of your favourite colour, or maybe you love many colours and you have a balloon where colours swirl and meld and blend. Place your hand very gently over the top of the balloon -- As you breathe in, feel your balloon inflate. Now, as you breathe out, feel it flatten and deflate -- Perhaps you would like to make the balloon even bigger on the next in-breath. And as you breathe out, see in your minds eye how flaccid the balloon becomes-- see it flatten against the inside of your spine. You might want to add a little pressure just to see that all the air leaves the balloon. Good.*

### **Cleansing Breath**

*You might wish to imagine bringing the breath in through the soles of your feet -- Maybe the breath is like a clear and shining light, clearing and cleansing. As you breathe out, the air moves up through your body and out the top of your head. You might notice the out-breath is cloudy. Breathing in through the soles of your feet, letting the air move through your body and leave from the crown of your head. Breathing in clarity and pure air. Breathing out toxins and any unnecessary tension -- As you continue to breathe in, taking in that clear and shining light, you may begin to notice the out-breath too is just as clear and shining now as is the in-breath. You have released tightness, tension and toxins.*

## Muscle Relaxation

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) was first described by Edmond Jacobson in his book on the subject in 1929. His technique is based on the premise that the body responds to worrisome thoughts with muscle tension. This tension in turn sends an “anxious” message to the mind resulting in an increase of muscle tension and so a cycle is created. Jacobson’s use of tensing muscle groups and then relaxing them can be very effective. While PMR may be very good for caregivers, it is not recommended for cancer patients, many of whom are likely to be experiencing bone pain or fragility. For this reason, we use a modified version of Jacobson’s method, the Body Scan, which involves moving awareness through the body, encouraging the muscles to relax and release, without first clenching. The Body Scan, below, presents the modified PMR in a detailed way and is very effective. A shorter version that simply goes over the following muscle groups --- 1) hands, forearms, biceps; 2) head, face, throat, shoulders; 3) chest, stomach and lower back; and 4) thighs, buttocks, calves and feet – is also effective, and is less time consuming.

### **Body Scan**

*If you will, bring your attention to the very top of your head. There are so many little muscles in the scalp. Let your scalp feel elastic, let it soften, ease, release and relax\_\_\_. As you do this, begin to notice how your forehead too softens --. Let the space between your eyebrows become very wide, as any lines of tightness or tension in your forehead ease away---. Feel the smoothness of your brow,\_\_\_ As your forehead relaxes, let softness ease down over all the little muscles around your eyes. There are so many little muscles here that can hold tension. Let them release and relax. Good.\_\_\_ As these muscles ease, notice how soft your eyes become enjoying the gentle darkness you create with your eyelids. \_\_\_The softness in your brow, around your eyes now smoothes down over your*

*temples like a gentle massage easing away any tightness and tension, letting your scalp ease even more -- Even your ears relax\_\_\_. Softness moves down now over your cheekbones, so they flatten, release and relax, letting softness ease over your jaw line. Let your jaw release and relax so that the upper and lower teeth move apart a little. Now your jaw releases even more.\_\_\_\_ Your tongue is soft , maybe rising to the roof of the mouth helping the jaw to relax even more.- Let your lips become very full and soft --relaxed.\_\_\_\_ Good.*

*As the muscles in your face ease so can all the muscles in your neck. Let all those little muscles in the back of your neck ease one by one, letting the back of your head relax even more. Let the muscles in your throat ease and release and relax.\_\_\_\_ Now bringing your attention to your shoulders let them slide gently down away from your ears releasing downwards, bringing a pleasant sense of heaviness into your arms.- Let the upper arms relax,- the forearms - wrists and backs of your hands --Let the fingers each soften and ease.-- As your arms continue to ease and relax so your shoulders can let go some more. There is always a little more to let go--.*

*Feel how each vertebrae softens , - let relaxation flow down the length of your back body easing over all the muscles letting go of tension and tightness.-- As your back body softens let your front body ease.--- Maybe you notice now how you bring softness to your upper chest,- to your heart.-- Feel how your ribs relax and seem to lengthen creating a sense of length and ease in the side body Now let the very centre of your body, your solar plexus ease- helping all the muscles in your abdomen to soften and relax. Let your hip sockets soften and ease-- the sitting bones and pelvis .relax- and relax some more. As your back and front body ease more and more into relaxation let that sense of pleasant heaviness move down the length of your legs-over your thighs- kneecaps- calves ankles – over your instep to your toes.-- Let them each in turn ease and release and relax.--- Let each muscle in your body enjoy as deep a sense of relaxation as it needs. Letting go, and letting go some more- Good, very good.*

## Guided Imagery

As the Greek philosopher Aristotle said in the Third Century B.C., “Images are the words of the soul.” We have observed that pairing imagery with the relaxation techniques creates a more powerful healing experience for people, and imagery work is one of the core components of Circlework<sup>1</sup>.

There are many ways of doing image work in a group setting. One way is where the facilitator goes with a pre-planned structured relaxation exercise, using commonly shared symbols of relaxation like a sunny beach, and another way, where the facilitator draws imagery from the circle and weaves those images into the story of the circle that day. Everyone enjoys being taken on an imaginary vacation to a sunny beach, but this second method creates a congruency that can be very powerful.

The facilitator should ask the people in the circle to offer an image, if they wish. The image may be drawn from their very immediate experience – the sense of peace and strength gained from comforting a lost cat on the way to the group -- or the image may be from their past - perhaps “a holy moment”, a time of awe or gratitude. Images may emerge from a story going back into the teller’s childhood, or the line of a poem or some moment of insight.

*When we lift up the eyes of the mind to what is invisible, we should consider metaphors of visible things as if they were steps to understanding* Hugh of St. Victor

When the facilitator is open to using images offered by the members, the circle create their own stories that build connection and meaning within the group. For instance, on a very wet day, one participant requested that we use the image of a cleansing rain that would help the treatment wash away the disease. The next week, several participants said that they experienced the rain in a much more positive way. Not only did they imagine the rain as cleansing, but a

discussion ensued about how the imagery helped them remember that they were wanting to live more fully where they really were, in the moment, despite rain.

The facilitator can sometimes discern a theme and weave a story with the images, thereby helping a group create their particular story at this time. Or, images can simply be stated out loud. It can be suggested that if any image is overlooked, it can be woven in by the individual requiring it. Similarly, it can be suggested that we take whatever images fit right now and leave what doesn't.

*The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. Barry Lopez, "Crow and Weasel".*

### **Points to bear in mind when using Guided Imagery**

- ❖ A person's skill and efficiency increases with practice.
- ❖ Imagery works best in a permissive, unforced atmosphere. Expressions like, "You may like to ..." or "perhaps you prefer ...." are helpful.
- ❖ Imagery is more powerful if all of the five senses are engaged. Seeing (visual), hearing (auditory), smelling (olfactory), tasting (gustatory), feeling (kinesthetic).
- ❖ Imagery is particularly effective when it is felt as a sensation in the body, therefore kinesthetic words are very useful. For example: cradled – enfolded – held – surrounded – supported – guided.
- ❖ Guided imagery is generally more powerful within a group than on one's own.
- ❖ People usually do best when guided with imagery that allows their imagination to work, for instance, 'a favorite place', 'a nurturing memory', etc.
- ❖ Using the word 'feeling' helps evoke emotion and makes imagery more powerful, for instance, the facilitator can elicit the feelings associated with watching a child learn to walk or viewing a sunset.

- ❖ Periods of silence can help people deepen their experience of the imagery offered and allow for receptive images (images other than those suggested which simply offer themselves).
- ❖ Touch may be the most powerful accompaniment to imagery that we can employ, both to help people relax and to increase the kinesthetic power of the images. This is why the footstroking during the relaxation session greatly enhances the experience.
- ❖ Music, so subconsciously evocative, greatly enhances the effect of imagery.
- ❖ Certain positions help elicit the Relaxation Response, and the facilitator can suggest that participants use ancient mudras, such as placing their hands over the abdomen or chest, or at either side of the body. Adopting the same position each time serves as an anchoring device which conditions the body to relax more quickly.
- ❖ People need reminders that it's quite all right if they lose track of a guided meditation. In fact, their own "sidetrips" are often very helpful. Perfect attention is not essential or even usual.

*" Though I do relaxation exercises and listen to the tapes at home, the effects are much greater for me when done in a group setting. The presence of others in the same need definitely enhances the experience and the results "...Circle Member*

Until the group has generated its own collection of images, the facilitator can use ones that are common and familiar:

### **Common symbolic places**

sanctuaries,  
 the desert image of peace and expansiveness,  
 the ocean,  
 a calm lake,  
 rarefied air of the mountains,

tranquil light of the forest.

**Popular symbols:**

an alpine meadow,  
tree,  
cactus,  
rainbow,  
stream,  
eagle,  
clouds,  
deer.

**Cleansing and releasing images:**

storm,  
wind,  
container to hold all of one's worries,  
sandbags (when thrown over the side of a hot air balloon),  
backpack set at the side of the track,  
balloons set free,  
leaves drifting on a stream,  
debris washed away by the waves.

**Images frequently suggested in your group:**

[Leave space here]

*Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, wakes.*

C.G. Jung

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<sup>1</sup> Our clinical experience, like that of the Simontons (1980), is that guided visualization can help cancer patients experience a greater sense of control over their disease process. Guided visualization is commonly used in conjunction with other relaxation methods for cancer patients (Jacobson & Hann, 1998). Some clinicians have reported remarkable outcomes associated with hypnosis and guided imagery (e.g. Barber, 1983). Unfortunately, there has been little in the way of rigorous research documenting benefits.



## Scripts for Guided Imagery

Facilitators may have considerable group skills, but can be daunted at the prospect of actually offering the relaxation exercise. The following scripts are representative of imagery frequently drawn upon in the groups, and provide a “launching pad” for group facilitators’ own creativity. The scripts offer a variety of ideas and practices such as breathwork, autogenics, progressive muscle relaxation, and colour imagery woven into different scenarios. The scripts are tools that should be used flexibly. It is always better to speak from the heart, in the moment, than to follow a script mechanically. It is alright if the leader runs out of words. Simply inserting words like: *good - it really doesn't matter - that's right - trusting yourself - safe - comfortable - letting go* – always works, as does allowing pauses.

If the scripts are read, they should be delivered slowly, allowing for pauses (to this end, a small pause is represented by \_\_\_ and a longer pause by \_\_\_\_). The intent is to engage the right side of the brain, and too many words can get in the way of right brain processing. The pauses between the words are very potent because they enable the listener to absorb and work with the images. The fewer the words, the fuller the imagery.

Each script may be “bookended” by the Preamble and Conclusion. When the facilitator does this at each relaxation session, using the same Preamble and Conclusion but introducing new relaxation scripts, a familiarity is created, adding to a feeling of security within the circle. What follows are Preamble and Conclusion scripts, and then a number of relaxation scripts that have been used successfully.

### **The Preamble**

*Are you in as comfortable a position as possible? You may want to loosen your belt or take off eyeglasses, if you feel at ease doing this -- Take time to move and to find the position that is most comfortable for you. And do feel free to*

*move that position if at any time during the guided imagery you feel that you could be even more comfortable.*

*Do you need an extra blanket? or a pillow? or anything over your eyes? Become aware of the sounds around you either outside the room or within and then let them form a backdrop to the words and music of the guided imagery.*

<The word “sounds” is preferable to the word “noises” as it is less pejorative>

*If there is any need for you to respond, be sure that you will be alert and well able to respond. The state of relaxation is one of control - of being in charge - and it is a very safe place to be.*

<It is very important for people, especially when they are new to the work of guided imagery, to understand that they do remain “in charge”>

*Can you notice the breath and allow yourself to breathe just as fully as is comfortable for you right now. And with each outbreath allow everything to settle.*

<Some people’s breathing is compromised because of their disease and being told to breathe deeply can create anxiety>

*Take whatever suggestions fit for you. And let go of the rest. Trust yourself to know just how to do this work, for you. If you find your attention wandering, be gentle as you bring it back. The heart of relaxation is the ability to let go - over and over again, if need be.*

*You can know that you will go just as deeply into relaxation as you need to at this time. And while the thinking mind likes to wonder just how deeply you will go into relaxation, your wisdom self knows that you will do just what is necessary*

*for you at this time. Milton Erikson said “We can swim just as well in three feet of water as in 30.” You will go just as deeply into relaxation as you need.*

<The more permissive the suggestions the more comfortable the listener will be>

*As you create the Relaxation Response, blood cortisol levels drop. And you create chemicals that help your immune system to function at its best level. This is a helpful and healing state and you are helping and healing yourself right now. That’s right.*

<This reminder of the effectiveness and value of the work is a helpful suggestion, and a good ending to the Preamble.>

### **The Conclusion**

*In a few moments it will be time for you to allow your awareness to drift up to the surface, as you move gently back into your day. You might begin to notice sounds around, or sensations, as you begin to return to your social self.*

<allow the transition to be very gradual>

*Know that you bring back with you all the benefits of this time. You have created healing changes in your body chemistry \_\_ Your blood cortisol levels are lower, and you have increased the strength of your natural healer cells \_\_ these good effects accompany you back into your day.*

*You may wish to continue drifting up to the surface in your own way, or you may want to follow the count from one to ten \_\_ noticing the closer you get to ten, the more aware you become of your surroundings.*

<offering choices>

1. \_\_ *feeling that sense of connection to your inner self, at one with yourself.*

2. *\_\_ appreciating the openness within you to this work..*
3. *\_\_ appreciating the freedom you give yourself to explore.*
4. *\_\_ more and more aware now of sounds, sensations....*
5. *\_\_ half way back \_\_ taking your time.*
6. *\_\_ beginning to move hands and feet perhaps.*
7. *\_\_ gentle movements that build to a slow stretch.*
8. *\_\_ opening your eyes, are your eyelids heavy or light ?*
9. *\_\_ reach out your arms, maybe reaching out to the light growing around you.*
10. *\_ bring that stretch into a hug as you move all the way back, grateful to yourself for the gift of this healing time, for good work, well done.*

<If a person remains upon the mat they can be gently approached, using their name, encouraging them to take all the time they need>

## The Scripts

### A Special Place

*“Maybe there is a particular place you are drawn to \_\_\_ is this a place you have known for a long time? \_ or a little while \_ or a place you have read about? Or dreamed of? \_\_\_ Perhaps your place is outside in nature \_\_\_ or inside in a safe and welcoming room \_\_\_ It really doesn’t matter whether you choose a place outside or inside \_ all that matters is that it is a place that matters to you.*

<The repetition is deliberate>

*Do you approach this place gradually? Do you use a special path \_ or a stairway \_\_\_ feeling yourself taking yourself there step by step \_\_\_ Perhaps feeling the surface under your feet \_\_\_ or the temperature of the air \_\_\_ Feeling more and more comfortable at every moment about this good place \_\_\_ .*

*What do you become aware of? \_ Is it the sounds of this lovely place? \_\_\_ what are you listening to? So many good sounds \_\_\_ the whisper the breeze makes as it stirs leaves or grasses \_\_\_ birdsong \_\_\_ or music \_\_\_ or water \_\_\_ a loved voice \_\_\_ or the quiet.*

*Or are you noticing all the shapes and colours of this place? \_ how many shades of green there are in nature \_\_\_ the exact shade of the sky \_\_\_ or flowers, like a beautiful carpet \_\_\_ a picture. The more you notice the more you are drawn into the loveliness of this place of yours \_\_\_ more and more to delight you.*

*As you breathe comfortably, in and out \_ do you breathe in the aroma, the fragrance of this place? \_\_\_ maybe the scent of flowers \_ smell of the ocean \_ pine woods \_ or aroma of delicious food being prepared.*

*Feeling nurtured and refreshed by this place, drinking in its beauty, tasting the pleasure it brings to you \_ as if your favourite food is being prepared specially for you, \_ or a favourite drink.*

*Feeling good about creating some space and time for yourself \_\_ time for you , amidst beauty \_ sights \_ sounds \_ flavours \_ textures that joy you.*

*Sensing how everything around you supports you \_\_ you feel held \_\_ buoyed up \_\_ cherished \_\_ Letting yourself surrender to the gentle mood of this place \_\_ absorbing all the good feelings and sensations \_\_.*

*The more you let yourself visit this place \_ taking time for yourself \_ the more you appreciate this gift you give to yourself \_\_ time to encounter your most creative self \_\_ time to encounter your healing self \_\_ a place that will always welcome, delight heal and nurture you \_ Good \_ very good.”*

### **Watcher on the Hill** *Incorporating Progressive Muscle Relaxation*

*“You find yourself up on a hill top \_\_ Maybe you see the view from inside of yourself looking out. Or, maybe you watch yourself from outside of yourself. Watching yourself be the watcher on the hill \_\_ The watcher who sees far and wide.*

*You can see the view all around you \_\_ There is a path down the hill and, from there, many paths extend\_\_ Some paths may wind, others open straight ahead. Some invite exploration and yet others you may have already travelled \_\_\_\_ You may stay upon your hill for just as long as feels good, enjoying the air upon your skin \_\_ the fragrance borne upon the breezes \_\_ the grasses that grow upon your hill \_\_ all the wild flowers \_\_ or anything else around you that you want to enjoy.*

*It may be on this journey that you seek a guide, a companion. Perhaps this is someone from your own past or present...or someone from our shared history. Or someone you have chosen as mentor \_\_\_ a traveler of many paths similar, perhaps, to your own. Or maybe you choose a guide from the animal kingdom, or the angel given to guard you. Or, again, perhaps, the essence of wisdom itself \_\_\_ Maybe you can see your guide, or perhaps you hear a voice, or sense a presence \_\_\_ Your guide is kind, patient, gentle, strong and good. And you are in safe hands. Only when you really feel the trust you have for this wise being do you set out on this particular journey.*

*And then, when you feel like drifting down the hill path, you may, as you gently drift down, choose a path for now.*

*Feel how good it is to have this understanding presence with you. You can travel in the quiet, or express yourself in words. Or gestures. Know that at all times you are accepted and attended, cherished and loved.*

*Feel how the path seems to be leading in just the right direction. You feel it firm under your feet. You can negotiate any rocks or stones, logs or other obstacles. You are accompanied by gentle streams where you can stop and refresh yourself in waters that you know, in a very special way of knowing, are healing.*

*And when you feel fatigue, that fatigue which accompanies right endeavor, your guide watches over you as you rest \_\_\_ You can trust yourself to rest in this strength and wisdom \_\_\_ to feel carried by it into deep relaxation where any unnecessary tightness or tension simply leaves you \_\_\_\_ Let go of any worry lines on your brow and feel all the muscles in the scalp relaxing as you do so \_\_\_ The eyes settle back into their sockets, soft and relaxed, letting softness and ease flow into all those tiny hard-working muscles around the eyes. That softness eases over the temples and down over the sides of the face. As the space*

*between your brows becomes wider and wider, as your jaw relaxes, feel how all the muscles of your face seem to flow into smoothness \_\_\_ like a landscape of softly rolling hills.*

*As your brow relaxes even further, can you feel ease flowing over the top of your head, over the back of your head and down into all those tiny muscles at the back of your neck. They work so hard to keep your head upright \_\_\_ Can you now surrender to the surface that supports you \_\_\_ feeling, maybe, as a child feels, utterly supported and held in caring, gentle, mature hands. Trusting and letting go.*

*Feel your shoulders now relinquish any weight they have been carrying. Let them release gently and fully down. Nothing you need to carry right now \_\_\_ And as you release the shoulders, let the back of the head and the neck release even more for there is always a little more to let go. That's right \_\_\_ Can you feel a width now in the palms of your hands? Nothing now you need to hang onto. Open trusting hands allowing you to fully receive the goodness of this time. Feel how, as you open your hands, the back of your body can respond, feeling very wide, as ease moves down between the shoulder blades over the spine, down the length of the back body, down over the buttocks, and down the length of your legs. Ease moving over those muscles that have carried you far on your journey and now deserve to be at ease. A width now on the soles of your feet, across your insteps, nowhere else you need to be right now \_\_\_ As you surrender can you feel how your throat is easeful, a softness beyond words moves down over your chest. Feel a sense of expansiveness, a quiet strength flowing over your heart space, a trusting heart.*

*You are in good hands. So now the solar plexus and the abdomen, where so many powerful feelings and emotions are contained, can be at ease, soft as calm rolling hills, an ease that moves across the pelvic girdle and down the front of the legs to ease them even further. Surrender \_\_\_ trust \_\_\_ safety \_\_\_ healing ease.*



*Give yourself time to enjoy this place and space that you have encouraged yourself to create \_\_\_\_ Feel how free you are to ask whatever questions you carry with you or to ask you for whatever it is that you need on your journey to support and sustain you. To ask and to feel received , heard, understood, and be very cherished by this good presence \_\_ and feel how free you are to hear the response in which ever way it is offered for there are so many ways of listening - with the eyes, the ears, the heart, the skin, even with our sense of taste and smell. To listen with your whole being - deep quality of listening \_\_ Your guide carries you in wisdom and strength, beauty and truth, patience and love \_\_ You are in safe hands and you are accompanied on your journey \_\_ you make good choices, you can trust in yourself and in the guide you choose \_\_\_\_ Take whatever sense most fills you with encouragement, power and appreciation for the wonderful person that you are. There may be one particular word or sensation, gesture, something that will remind you as you journey through your day of the gift of this time \_\_\_\_ Bring this gift back with you as you now begin to move back into your day knowing that you will be accompanied at all times by this healing strength. That's right, good".*

### **The Room** *Incorporating Breathwork*

*"Maybe there is one particular room you hold in your memory or in your imagination \_\_ a place of welcome as well as loveliness \_\_ Can you find yourself on the threshold of that room right now and notice what your feelings are as you begin to open the door \_\_\_\_*

*What do you notice as you step into your room? Is it the shapes and colors that fill your room, are the walls painted or papered are they hung with pictures or lined with bookshelves \_\_ Are there rugs upon the floor and is the floor of wood or tile or carpet?*

*How is your room furnished? Maybe it has a fireplace. Is the fire alight now \_\_\_ Does the window of your room show you a view of city or landscape \_\_\_ Does sunlight stream into the room brightening it? Is a window open, a curtain perhaps drifting in the breeze or are the drapes drawn, the lamps lit \_\_\_ Maybe there is softly falling snow outside creating that special sense of quiet, or is rain falling against the window pane making the interior feel warm and welcoming \_\_\_\_\_*

*This is your room and it can be just as you wish. Are you here in this room on your own or is there a pet perhaps sharing it with you? Are there flowers, maybe your very favorite flowers in a pot or a vase \_\_\_ Does music play or a clock tick or do you notice the crackle of the fire? Or maybe you are aware of the quiet in your room \_\_\_ Perhaps there is a special fragrance that you enjoy and this is wafting through the room right now, or you may be drinking something that is refreshing or warming - drinking in this time for yourself in a room created for your delight \_\_\_ Maybe you turn the pages of a book and the words that meet your eyes are wise and helpful. Or are you crafting something with your hands for yourself or another?*

*Let all of your senses notice and enjoy the delights of this room, for it is your place and it is where you can most truly be yourself \_\_\_ A place you have chosen and created \_\_\_ A place that breathes its welcome into you \_\_\_ A place where you can breathe in the pleasures and sigh with relief to be there.*

*You can breathe in and smile and as you breathe out, sigh \_\_\_ Breathe in right now a smile of knowing into the very top of your head, knowing that you can support and encourage your own healing system by taking the time you deserve for yourself \_\_\_ breathing in that smile of knowing for you know that this is a healing place, and as you sigh letting the breath go, can you also begin to let go of doubts or worries \_\_\_ That's right, just let them go \_\_\_ perhaps into a wastepaper basket.*

*You can sigh out everything that you know you don't need right now \_\_ Breathe in a smile of softness into your eyes and sigh out any tightness in the eyes for with soft eyes we are able to see further and more deeply. Let any cloudy vision be sighed away, sighed away maybe into that wastepaper basket \_\_\_\_ Breathe in a smile of fullness to the lips for with soft lips we speak kinder words to ourselves as well as to others\_\_ Sigh out any criticism of self or others, sigh out judgment, sigh them into that wastepaper basket. Breathe in a smile of relaxation to your jaw and then perhaps another for this is a place where we can easily clench\_\_ Sigh out that clenching. Anything that causes your jaw to tighten and clench sigh out into that wastepaper basket and feel how good it is to let go.*

*Breathe in a smile of ease into the shoulders, sigh them down and let that sigh flow right out through your finger tips\_\_ so that anything can you are carrying on your shoulders, and we all of us carry a great deal, just let that go, let whatever you don't need to carry be sighed into that wastepaper basket \_\_ Good.*

*Now breathe in a smile of width a wide smile to the back body, right into the small of the back, sigh out any congestion gathered there\_\_ We often put our backs into our work coming from the place of effort. Sigh out effort now and effortlessly enable your back to be wide\_\_ Really good.*

*Breathe in a smile of patience to the throat, sigh out any words that have an edge of hurt, breathing in that smile of patience with tears, patience with that tightness of the throat that tells us that we need to let go and as you sigh let that softness come\_\_ Breathe in a smile of compassion deep into your heart, a smile that brings the warmth of loving kindness. Feel your heart open to that warmth and sigh out any coldness or hardness at heart towards yourself or others, let it go, you do not need it. An open warm heart is a healing heart.*

*Breathe in a smile of peace into your solar plexus and into your abdomen. Sigh any feelings that tie us into knots that create inner tension\_\_ These are the places where we feel a great deal and a lot of these feelings do tie us into knots. Really sigh out anything that causes you tension and tightness of heart letting those knots untie go sigh them into your wastepaper basket. Breathe in smiles of encouragement to your feet. Right there into the soles of your feet and as you sigh out let yourself know that you encourage your feet in exactly the right direction\_\_ Breathe into your whole body a smile of understanding of love. Sigh out anything that still remains that you do not need. Sigh out into that wastepaper basket. Let go. \_\_\_\_\_*

*Breathe into your whole being that smile of understanding of loving kindness, being kind to yourself for you deserve this \_\_ Sigh out and let go so that now as you breathe in a smile you also breathe out a smile. Breathing in a smile of compassion, breathing out a smile of compassion and when you are ready you might want to take your wastepaper basket to the fire \_\_ and as you tip it out see the shape and colors of the flames \_\_ Feel warmed by a sense of freedom, lightness.*

*Just as you have chosen your room you can choose the furnishings of your own being \_\_\_\_ You can choose exactly what you wish to surround yourself with, what it is that nurtures your being. The more often you visit this sanctuary, this special room of yours, the more you may notice what creates for you the setting in which you can be most truly yourself. What joys you and more and more you will feel encouraged to re-visit this room to take time for yourself for you deserve the very best”.*

### **The Cove Incorporating Autogenics**

*“The mind has many paths, can go in so many directions \_\_ Find the path that will take you to a cove. Maybe it’s a cove or beach that you know and love*

\_\_\_ Or, maybe, it's a place that you create for yourself - just for now \_\_\_ Can you feel your feet upon the path? What does the ground feel like under your feet? Feel the air against your skin, the air that tells you that you begin to approach the water \_\_\_ With every step you take, the sound of the water reaches your ears. You breathe in the loveliness, the clear water-washed air.

Let yourself feel lighter, more focused \_\_\_ taking steps to give yourself the time that you deserve, the time you need. Just how many steps along your path until you come upon the cove, only you really know \_\_\_\_ Maybe now you feel pebbles under your feet. Or are you walking on the sand? Is the sand firm, sea-washed...or...soft and warmed by the sun. Turning your head from side to side, you take in the shape of the cove. Perhaps it's a small semicircle, bounded by rocks \_\_\_ Or maybe your cove extends this way and the other, offering you places to walk \_\_\_ to find shells \_\_\_ or seaweed. Can you let yourself really absorb all of the details of your cove?

Do you notice the colour of the sand or the pebbles \_\_\_ the colour of the water - whether it's blue or green or grey? Do white wavelets wash on the shore like lace that disappears into the sand? Or, perhaps, you can see seabirds soar and then dive \_\_\_ Or maybe the silk-like ripple of quiet gentle waves rising up and gently down...up ...and...down again \_\_\_ Maybe what you most notice is the sound of those waves as they wash upon the shore...or the call of the seabirds...or some other sound that captures your attention.

Which direction do you choose, this way or the other \_\_\_ Is the sun gentle on your face or your back? Can you feel the soft breeze on your skin \_\_\_ Do you pick up a shell and feel whether it is smooth or corrugated \_\_\_ maybe smooth on the inside and corrugated on the outside \_\_\_\_ Or, maybe it's a piece of drift wood that you're feeling now - polished smooth by the sea.

*Have you watched and listened and walked enough? Is it time to encourage your body to truly relax and to let your mind direct a tide of healing through your entire being? If so, find a special place that welcomes you. Do you find sun or shade \_\_\_ Perhaps you can stretch out on this lovely beach, making yourself as comfortable as you can. As you stretch out, let your facial muscles ease. Let a wave of relaxation flow across your forehead...across your eyelids...and down over your face. Let your cheekbones and your jaw relax.*

*Now can you bring your attention to your right arm and hand and invite them to be heavy and warm and comfortable. My right arm and hand - comfortably heavy \_\_\_ my right arm and hand - comfortably heavy \_\_\_ My right arm and hand \_\_\_ very comfortably heavy like a log washed up on a lovely beach, a log settling into the sand, a log that is warmed by a safe and gentle sun. \_\_\_ My right arm and right hand, warm \_\_\_ My right arm and right hand, very pleasantly warm, like a log soaking up the sun upon a beach. My right arm and my right hand is comfortably heavy and very pleasantly warm.*

*You may notice that your right arm feels different to your left arm. Perhaps now you would like to bring your focus to your left arm \_\_\_ My left arm, my left hand - heavy \_\_\_ My left arm, my left hand, heavy \_\_\_ My left arm, my left hand, heavy \_\_\_ heavy like a log on a beach \_\_\_\_ Let the safe sun warm the log through and through and let your left arm and left hand become just as heavy and comfortably and pleasantly warm as that log. My left arm and hand, warm \_\_\_ My left arm and my left hand, warm \_\_\_ My left arm and my left hand, pleasantly warm \_\_\_ Just like a log \_\_\_ Sinking into the sand \_\_\_ Soaking up the sun on a beach \_\_\_\_ Both my arms are heavy and warm \_\_\_ just like logs.*

*Now can you let your focus move down to your right leg.*

*My right leg is heavy. My right leg and my right foot \_\_\_ heavy. My right leg, right foot, heavy, heavy like a log washed up on a beach. A log that soaks up warmth*

\_\_\_ *My right leg is warm, warmth flows all the way down into my right foot. My right leg, my right foot, warm.*

< Repeat the above 5 lines changing right leg and right foot to left leg and left foot >

*Now you can bring your awareness to the centre of your body. My abdomen is at ease \_\_\_ washed by waves of relaxation \_\_\_ wave upon gentle wave \_\_\_ muscles as silken as a calm, quiet sea \_\_\_ I am drifting into relaxation.*

*My heartbeat as rythmical as the waves \_\_\_ My heartbeat regular \_\_\_ Regular heartbeat.*

*Breath waves of relaxation. I am being breathed. Breath waves of relaxation*  
\_\_\_\_\_

*And my forehead is calm, cooled by gentle breezes from the water \_\_\_ Cool \_\_\_ calm \_\_\_ clear.*

*Bathing in waves of relaxation in my lovely cove. Safe \_\_\_ drifting into relaxation*  
\_\_\_\_\_

*I am calm \_\_\_ Whatever I do not need drifts away as if on the tide.*

*I am grounded in the beauty of this place.*

*I am timeless as the ocean waves.*

*I am being breathed.*

*I can deal with whatever arises.*

*I draw upon a timeless strength.*

*I am supported and cared about.*

*I matter. And I am loved \_\_\_\_\_*

*You can drift \_\_\_ You can float further into relaxation \_\_\_ buoyed up by these affirming words \_\_\_ And you can take just as long as you wish right now \_\_\_\_\_*

*Floating \_\_\_ and drifting \_\_\_ and taking the time for yourself that you really deserve \_\_\_ For you deserve the very best.*

*Then let your awareness drift you to the surface, floating you back into your day. \_\_\_\_ You find yourself on the beach and you take the path that leads from your cove \_\_ Take that path back. With each step of the way affirming to yourself your skillfulness in accessing such a place of healing”.*

## **Meadow and Woodland** *Incorporating Progressive Muscle Relaxation*

*“You are about to embark on a journey \_\_ Can you imagine that you’re looking through a backpack. There are many things inside this backpack, some that you can set aside because you do not need to take these on the journey you are about to undertake \_\_ Just sort through all the things so that you can choose whatever you want to leave behind, reclaiming them later, if you wish, and carry only what you need for now \_\_ And notice now that the backpack feels comfortable and it is so good to know that you have exactly what you need.*

*Let your journey begin on the top of a hill and feel how comfortably the backpack rests upon your shoulders as you move down the hill. Notice how your feet scarcely seem to touch the ground, so gentle is the slope of the hill, so inviting, so easy to just drift gently down, travelling lightly.*

*As you reach the bottom of the hill, you find yourself in a meadow full of wild flowers. Perhaps you notice the colours \_\_ the flowers of gold, blue, purple, white, some flowers are taller than the grasses and some almost submerged by the grass. Even the flowers that you walk upon, for there are so many creating a rich carpet of colour, spring up under your feet, so resilient are they \_\_ You can enjoy this meadow for just as long as you wish, walking through the flowers, noticing the colours and breathing in their fragrance.*

*After a while, you come to the edge of a wood. There is a deer grazing right here where the wood meets the meadow. The deer looks at you with warm, soft eyes, then turns as if expecting you to follow. There is indeed a deer path for you to*



*follow\_\_ A gentle, winding path moving through the trees and the bracken. There are places where the light falls in pools, lighting up the moss and the grasses \_\_ There are places of shade, refreshing, cooling. You find as you walk through the places of light and shade that you can feel warmed by the sun and gently cooled by the shade.*

*As you follow the deer path, you know you are moving in exactly the right direction and, indeed, after a while you come to a glade. Here the deer seems to melt into the trees and you really are aware you have been led to a very special sanctuary, a place where you can stretch out either in sunlight \_\_ or shade, where you can listen to the sounds of the stream and to bird songs \_\_ and you can breathe in the fragrance of tree resin, breathing in the quiet beauty \_\_\_\_ Maybe you have a blanket and a pillow in your backpack. Or, maybe you find, instead, a cushion of moss. It really doesn't matter. All that matters is that you feel safe and utterly comfortable, cradled in this place, lulled by the music of the water, bird song and breeze, very soft in the trees, whispering through the grasses, the scents of the forest \_\_ and perhaps you have even tasted the pure clear waters of the stream.*

*As you take in this beauty, you might feel your back body sinking onto the surface supporting you \_\_ Then let the front body settle into the back body \_\_ You might even want to imagine that the shining stream that flows through this glade were flowing through and around you, washing away any tightness, any tension \_\_ Let the tension flow away from your muscles...let streams of relaxation flow down your arms and out of your finger tips. Let the flow of relaxation wash all the way down your body \_\_ maybe feeling the quiet waters calm your mind and ease any tightness or tension from the muscles of your face\_\_ let your eyes become soft, filled with all the shades of green of the forest around you \_\_ let your cheekbones flatten, washed smooth as a stream of relaxation flows around your lips and over your jaw \_\_ That's right, can you feel that flow of relaxation now. Flowing over the back of your head and down over those little muscles in*

*the back of your neck. Feel that flow again down over your shoulders and flowing all the way down the length of your arms, over the wrists and the backs of your hands and streaming out through your fingertips, carrying away any tightness, any tension.*

*Feel that flow of relaxation continue down the back body, creating a wide channel between your shoulder blades and moving down over your spine, easing and releasing and relaxing as it goes \_\_ Feel a gentle eddy of water, like the water of the stream flowing over flat smooth stones, as the water moves down over the small of your back and then down over your buttocks. Let your back body sink even further onto the surface supporting it, as you just let tightness and tension flow away\_\_ Feel that flow of relaxation all the way down your legs\_\_ all the way down the legs, from the hip sockets down over the thighs and calves and around your ankles, over your insteps, so it feels as if any tightness or tension is just flowing away, washed away, flowing out the tips of your toes.*

*And now, can you feel that flow of water that gently washes over your facial muscles, wash down over your neck and your throat, washing down over your chest \_\_ soothing, easing \_\_ Gentle over your heart space \_\_ And as that flow of relaxation washes down over your ribs, you feel a sense of spaciousness \_\_ That flow of relaxation down over your solar plexus \_\_ and then down over your abdomen \_\_ Let that flow continue down across the pelvic girdle and, in your mind's eye, you can watch that wash of relaxation flow all the way down the length of your legs again, letting go of any tightness or tension as if through the tips of your toes.*

*Feel your whole body washed clear and free of tension and free of toxins. Experience this refreshing flow \_\_ and then take the light that glints upon the clear water, a clear and shining light, and let it flood your whole being\_\_\_\_ Take the light to where ever you feel it is most needed \_\_ Bathe in this light as if it flows like the water of the stream through the top of your head down to the very*

*tips of your toes, let yourself feel, bathed \_\_\_ refreshed \_\_\_ and strengthened. And you can take just as long as feels right for you, right now, to enjoy being bathed in such clarity and purity and shining light.*

*When you are ready, you can retrace your steps back along the deer path, feeling that silent gentle presence accompany you, guiding you back to where the wood meets the meadow, a presence that can accompany you as long as you wish \_\_\_ Retrace your steps back through the meadow, up to the hill and up into your day, feeling, as you gently move up the hill, you move more and more into awareness. Moving back, bringing back into your day all the quiet of this place and this time, a sense of refreshment \_\_\_ clarity \_\_\_ peaceful strength”.*

### **The Garden** *Incorporating breathwork*

*“Do you have one special garden that blooms in your memory? Maybe a particular garden that you have known and loved\_\_\_ Or perhaps there are parts of many gardens that create your one garden. Or is this is a garden that you create for yourself right now?*

*Some gardens are surrounded by a wall or a fence or a hedge. What is your garden like? Is it large\_\_\_or small enough for you to see everything from one place? What do you notice first? Is it how many flowers and shrubs and trees are blossoming now \_\_\_ Does one colour draw your attention or are there many different colours \_\_\_ And can you notice how many different shades of green there are here, green of the leaves of trees, of flowers, of herbs, the grasses \_\_\_ Do you take in deep breaths of the fragrance of this garden, the fragrance of flowers, herbs, the air aromatic with the smell of green growing things. The smell of earth after a shower. Or grass, newly mown \_\_\_ Perhaps there are many different birds drawn to your garden, song birds. Maybe you can hear the splashing water from a fountain, or a little stream \_\_\_ Does the breeze make gentle sounds in the leaves and grasses. Are there soft wind chimes \_\_\_ What are*

*your feet walking upon? Gravel paths or flagstones or grass? What do you choose to reach out to? A soft petal, soft as velvet\_\_ or strong slender stem of a flower\_\_ or bark of a tree?*

*Is there a compost heap in your garden? A place that changes what is waste, what is no longer fruitful, into strength for tomorrow's flowers and plants. You can compost anything you no longer find useful or beneficial, confused cells, stale ideas, concerns, outgrown feelings, anxieties, hurts of mind or heart or body \_\_ Compost from which rewards can come. It can feel so good to let go, to recycle, to give back to the earth what you do not need \_\_ and be given, in time, rich compost, can you feel how rewarding it is to release and to let go. To return whatever it is that has outgrown it's use to you.*

*Now can you notice a place in your garden that invites you to stretch out and to relax. To breathe in fragrance and to feel a growing energy around you. In this place of colour and of light, maybe one colour most appeals to you right now\_\_. Colour that for you is the colour of peace or of strength, the colour of delight or of healing, or some other good feeling. Can you breathe this colour in fully, as if you were breathing through the very soles of your feet \_\_\_\_ And if no colour arises for you right now, you can just breathe in the clarity of light, the quality of beauty in your garden.*

*Can you notice how far in one breath you can take this light into your being? Breathe in the colour, breathe in that colour over the insteps of your feet, and up your calves right up over the thighs into the hip sockets. Can you let this colour of whatever good you wish to draw into your body right now take its own power to bring you what you need.*

*Breathing more of this colour, perhaps you direct it now over the back body, up over the spine, up into your shoulders \_\_ and feel this colour moving up the body, feel it bringing you whatever it is that you need \_\_\_\_ Let this colour now,*

*that you draw up through the soles of your feet, flow up through your legs, move up the front body over the pelvic girdle and up into your abdomen. Breathe this colour in and feel it flow, filling your being. Let it move up to your solar plexus. Let the centre of your being be aware of it calming all those little nerve endings there, and let this colour do its good work as it moves on up over the ribs \_\_\_ floating in between the ribs \_\_\_ creating a feeling of spaciousness, bringing a length to your whole body. Breathe that colour now into your heart space \_\_\_ Let this colour, let this light, fill that landscape of your heart space, flooding it with light and colour and whatever good feelings you wish to draw upon just now.*

*Then let that colour be drawn, breathing into it deeply, right up into your shoulders \_\_\_ so that it can flow over your shoulders and down the length of your arms \_\_\_ Let that colour, let that light, flow into the palms of your hands, flow right into the tips of your fingers.*

*As you breathe in, as if you're breathing in through the soles of your feet, breathe in this colour, this light, and take it to your throat. Let it colour your words, most especially the words that you offer to yourself, words of hope and encouragement and appreciation \_\_\_ Filling yourself with the colour of strength, ease, peace and healing \_\_\_ Breathe into your eyes \_\_\_ Let this colour slide over the muscles of your face. Let it be as a gentle breath of colour on your forehead.*

*Let this lovely colour now, your special colour of clear light, be breathed right into your mind. Mindfulness \_\_\_ Peace of mind \_\_\_ Strong minded so that you take time and place for yourself \_\_\_ You need this time. You deserve this time. And you use this time creatively and wisely.*

*Take this light to the very top of your head and feel it cascading around you , encircling you in colour and in light. And as you do so, can you feel how all your healing cells, all those cells you have within you that know exactly how to keep balance, how to watch out for anything that is not for your good.*

*Can you feel those cells bloom just as all plants and flowers of your garden bloom. As you move back into your day you bring a bouquet of healing with you. May every leaf and grass and flower you notice in your day trigger that blossoming of healing within”.*

## **The Storm**

*“There are times of disruption and chaos in all our lives. Times when we feel buffeted and bruised, overwhelmed by events. A sense of being knocked from our feet, off balance, deluged by waves of hurt or fear or dread, in the midst of a whirlwind of emotions. And even though we know deep within ourselves that we can withstand such challenge, at such times we need to be able to acknowledge the profound depths of bewilderment, loss, vulnerability loneliness we feel\_\_ just as in nature dark skies, fierce winds, pelting rain demand our acknowledgement of storm.*

*While our minds remind us that above the storm there is sunlight, that even below the wildest of seas there is calm, that in the eye of the hurricane there is quiet we need first to grant the power of storm\_\_Allowing ourselves to move into and through the storm\_\_ While we feel the churning within, we also know we have hidden strengths and wide resources, so we can also acknowledge the sense of loss of control, the pain.\_\_Taking whatever we need on this journey to warm and protect ourselves as we brave the storm. To honour these deep, dark, scary emotions and bodily aches. Notice the clenching in the muscles, the tightness in the body braced against the elements, the shallow fast breath and the pounding of heart.*

*If you choose right now In your imagination you take yourself into the heart of the storm.\_\_ or perhaps you watch from a distance. Maybe you are on a lonely beach sky so dark above dark, dark clouds, waves pounding on the shore hurling*

*themselves against rocks, punishing the air. Spray flying in your face\_\_ feeling yourself buffeted by the wind\_\_ hearing it sob in your ears\_\_ you fight just to stay upright, maybe lightning blinds you for a moment and thunder fills your ears with its sound\_ You may feel wearied, exhausted by the turbulence around you.*

*With eyes more than half closed against the wind and the spray, can you notice a solitary seabird daring the elements blown by the wind,\_ yet somehow staying aloft. Wings far outstretched heading into the wind, defying the wind's strength. Can you feel for the bird and with the bird\_\_and feel your spirit respond.*

*Can you gather all the strength remaining to you right now and like defiant sea bird rise into the storm\_\_ Feeling the effort required but holding your course. You will know how long it seems that you are simply fighting to hold your course, until you feel the strength of the elements around you support your efforts.\_\_ You begin to ride the very storm.*

*Can you trust the support under your wings enough to begin to let go of clenched muscles\_\_ Can you let your shoulders and neck muscles, so hunched against the storm begin to ease, to soften\_\_ Shoulders moving away from your ears letting some of the tension ease away, -and then some more- and yet more. Ease beginning to flow down your arms into those fists that now unfold.\_\_ As you experience some sense of freedom from this letting go notice how you can let the muscles in your face begin little by little to relax.\_\_ Your eyes, soft now, eyelids, soothed into softness by a gentler air. Your forehead uncreases, smoothes and eases.\_\_ Softness now eases the cheek bones that had frozen into a tight mask- and lips soften. As the muscles of your face ease, as your shoulders slope down away from your ears you may notice how your chest feels more expansive. Your breath fuller, -- you are being breathed by the gentler softer air. Being breathed and letting your heartbeat move into a gentler rhythm. You chest feeling as wide and expansive as the sky above you. Muscles continuing to ease- and release- and relax into soft power. Quiet strength.- Helping you rise above the*

*storm. Feeling the ease in your abdomen the centre of your being,--Feeling centered ,gaining vision the air clear ,clarity and lightness and perspective.*

*Finding respite from the storm , trusting yourself –trusting whatever inspires and guides you – the power of hope, of trust, of love\_\_Trusting all that is good to hold you in that place of quiet strength –whatever challenges arise.*

*Take as long as you feel you need right now to consolidate your strengths---- before returning to your day\_\_ feeling strengthened and supported .*



## **Supplementary Techniques**

As a minimum requirement, a Circle requires time for checking in and time for the facilitator to guide the members through a relaxation script. If there are more helpers -- either another facilitator or volunteers -- supplementary techniques can be included. Circle members have appreciated these following techniques:

### **Double Voicing**

When possible, two leaders can offer the relaxation practice together. When there are two voices offering images, the effect can be very powerful. This is done by having the speakers initially finish each other's sentences, and then interweaving, overlapping and echoing each other's sentences. Once a rhythm is established, the speakers can begin using completely different imagery and phrases. For instance, if one speaker is talking about the sky, the other can talk about the earth. Because this draws the attention in such different directions, a space is created where the persons imagery can become very personal and creative. It does take some practice, but double voicing is effective and has been very valued in the circles.

Double voicing is particularly useful for making affirmations. Phrases such as these can be used:

*you are a gift to the circle*

*you are a healing presence*

*you really matter*

*there is no one like you in all of creation*

*you are wise and you make good choices*

*you trust yourself*

*you say Yes to yourself*

*you are loved and you are loving.*

Such words make a special impact when the hearer is in a state of relaxation.

## Footstroking

This use of touch was inspired by the foot massages offered at St. Christopher's Hospice in London, England where they were found to be very effective as a calmative treatment. People hospitalized at the BCCA reported finding foot massages helpful during procedures such as bone marrow biopsies or during chemotherapy. Both the foot and brow stroking used in the group aid the Relaxation Response, and are one of the most appreciatively commented upon aspects of the group.

The optimum time to introduce foot and brow stroking is after the introductory circle. The facilitator or one of the volunteers should give a brief description of what is entailed, and state that it is only done with the permission of the Circle participant. If a Circle member prefers not to receive touch, they are asked to let the facilitator or volunteer know this.

Foot stroking is usually done when the participants are reclining on floor mats with the foot stroker kneeling or sitting at the participant's feet. The blanket covering the participant may either remain in place or be gently rolled up above the knee. The participant will not be wearing shoes.

*"They really relax me and I find the footstroking part of therapy the most wonderful thing I have ever experienced"...Circle member.*

Fig. 1 & 2. One hand holds the person's foot gently but firmly. The firm hold ensures the soles of the feet are not tickled. The other hand is drawn gently and lightly down the leg from knee cap to instep once or twice.

Fig. 3. The hand then sweeps several times over the foot from ankle to toe.

Fig. 4. The foot is gently held between the stroker's hands.

Fig. 5. One hand moves to hold and support the sole of the other foot.

Fig. 6. Left leg and then foot are stroked in the same manner.

Fig. 7 & 8. Both hands may brush gently down the length of the both legs and feet.

Fig. 9. Brush hands gently down the length of the legs an inch or so above the surface of the skin.

Fig. 10. The hands may touch the feet lightly on completion. Draw blanket back in place.

Receivers frequently comment that the sensation of being stroked and held continues long after the stroker has left. When the touch is truly gentle it is as if the nerve endings in the feet (and there are at least 7000) are listening attentively and continue to “hear “ the echo. This has been described as the presence of the “phantom footstrokers“ in many of the groups.

Because of the number of people attending the groups, and the soft lighting in the room, a card is left at the foot of each person who has received stroking, to avoid duplication. Or a card may be left at the feet before the work begins if a person prefers has indicated that they do not want to receive touch. These cards have been derived from the Findhorn Angel Cards and carry one inspiring word apiece, such as “Healing “ “Gratitude” “Openess” etc. People often comment on the aptness of the word for them at the time. Usually the cards are gathered up and reused.

Footstroking is done only with the permission of attendees.

### **Brow Stroking**

Brow stroking in the group originated at the request of three young members who were undergoing chemotherapy, and had experienced hair loss. They found the gentle attention to their faces both emotionally and physically soothing. Others in the group soon requested the same attention.

Some people cherish the experience of simultaneous head and foot stroking, while others prefer to prolong the experience of touch by having first the brow and then feet stroked. Every effort is made to respond to such personal requests.

Fig. 1. The volunteer begins by placing both hands upon the shoulders of the receiver. This soft pressure encourages the person to settle more fully, and creates a sense of spaciousness in the chest and enables deeper breathing.

Fig. 2 & 3. The fingers of both hands then meet about 1" above the bridge of the receivers nose and, with a little pressure, draw out towards the temples, easing away any lines of tension in the forehead. Repeat three or more times.

Fig. 4. A light circular movement of the fingertips massages the temples for a few moments.

Fig. 5. The hands slide gently down the sides of the face, cradling the face, making sure the fingertips remain above the jawline.

Fig. 6. In completion, the hands return to the soft pressure on the shoulders and lightly leave.

Foot and brow stroking are supplementary and not essential techniques. However we have observed that the cherishing attention is highly valued by patients and volunteers alike.

*“Since my husband died, after a period of grieving and receiving relaxation and footstroking, I decided to experience doing it. For the past nine years I have been footstroking at the relaxation group 3 or 4 times a week...I receive so much and it has been the best support system for everyday life after loss”.*

## **Music**

Sound has tremendous power to soothe and energize body, mind and spirit. When used intentionally and carefully, music provides a vehicle for the release of muscle tension and serves as an accompaniment to relaxation strategies. In addition, the stimulus of music reduces anxiety and may encourage the release of beneficial hormones and endorphins that are important to immune system functioning and general well-being<sup>1</sup>.

*Today, we are just waking up to the incredible potency of music as a healing force..... beautiful melodies and sound vibrations enter our bones, our consciousness.....and can unlock blockage in our physical, mental and emotional layers. Hal Lingerman*

The music used in the relaxation sessions needs to be carefully chosen as it is such an important element of the experience. This can be provided most skillfully and sensitively by a music therapist accompanying the facilitator. A variety of instruments - guitar, flute, piano, harp, gong, chimes etc. - have been successfully used in Circles, in addition to the therapist's singing and humming voice. Usually the music is improvised but, at times, songs can effectively enhance the spoken imagery and affirmations. When the moment and the song are right, the experience of singing together as part of the closing circle can provide participants with a deep sense of connection and completion.

If a music therapist is not available, carefully chosen recorded music will work well<sup>2</sup>. Ideally, a tape or CD should play over a period of 45 minutes so the music lasts for the duration of the relaxation. The pieces should be selected and compiled with the length and flow of the session in mind. Consulting with an experienced music therapist will ensure that the music is suitable, if this is not possible, consider the following guidelines:

- **Dynamic Range:** The music should not suddenly become loud or soft (such dynamic shifts are common in some of the most beloved classical music).
- **Rhythm:** A steady beat is helpful for continuous relaxation. Look and listen for 60 beats per minute, as an echo of a relaxed adult heartbeat. Melodic lines that ebb and flow with the rhythm of the breath can also be very effective - as in chanting, bamboo flute, meditative music.
- **Repetition:** Repetition of a melodic phrase, chord progression or specific rhythm can assist in relaxation. The predictability serves to create a safe container and a somewhat hypnotic effect.

- **Timbre:** There are some instruments that seem to elicit and enhance the Relaxation Response more than others. Alto flute, harp, piano, guitar, cello, and voice are favourites. The multi-layered tones and resonance of a gong softly played can also have a very soothing and balancing effect.
- **Silence:** *Silence is golden.* It allows space for the words, the images and music to resonate fully.

As a facilitator, it is important that you find the background music soothing if you are going to use it as an accompaniment for your voice. It's also important to remember that familiar music is more likely to be associated with memories that evoke emotion, and when the goal is relaxation, this may not be desired. The ability to choose the appropriate musical flavour and nuance for the particular moment is one of the skills that is most appreciated in a music therapist.

Another option is simply to play ocean/nature sounds in the background. Inviting participants to make an audible sound on the outbreath can often facilitate the release of physical tension and/or busy thoughts and encourage fuller breaths.

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, see Haun et al.(2002). For a more complete description of the role of music in Circlework, see Nicholson (2001).

<sup>2</sup> Appendix 3 contains a list of recommended pre-recorded music.

**Chapter 6:**

**Looking into the Future**



*“it is privileged work, to be part of a process for people that is likely the most difficult they will face”... Circle facilitator.*

The BCCA continues to receive requests from communities wanting assistance in setting up Relaxation and Support groups. There is a greater need than ever for the respite and healing that Relaxation and Support groups can provide. Cancer patients are living longer with cancer, waiting longer for test results and treatments, and there is more anxiety and uncertainty, and more adjustment required than ever. Facilitators witness this need, come to care deeply about this work, and want to create more Circles in more communities.

*It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.... Ralph Waldo Emerson*

At the same time, provincial health care dollars are being severely cut and within the BCCA, all services are being scrutinized. Those deemed as ‘non-essential’ are particularly vulnerable to receiving further cuts. This trend is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

The changing climate of health care is inducing anxiety in many health care providers, but facilitators of relaxation and support groups should not get caught up in an atmosphere of threat. There is now much greater public awareness of the benefits of relaxation and support, as well as greater awareness of the supportive care needs of cancer patients. There are powerful national as well as local advocacy groups, and corporate as well as individual benefactors, all of who have the will and means to help cancer patients experience greater quality of life. What is required is that these groups understand the value of this kind of work – how it contributes to patient quality of life – and understand that we do this work very well.

This is a current challenge for all of us who are committed to meeting the supportive care needs of cancer patients and their families: making the work more visible and gaining broad support from the communities in which we work. All of us who care about the sustainability of supportive care have a role to play, and we are all being challenged to think and act differently about the work we do.

Facilitators have a role to play in ensuring that Relaxation and Support groups not only survive the health care transitions ahead, but that the work reaches more people in more distant communities. Facilitators can encourage or discourage the growth of this work by their actions and how they approach the work. These are some of the ways that facilitators can help:

### **Inviting professionals to attend groups**

When the program began 15 years ago, there was mixed support from the medical community. Although some of our colleagues appreciated the work and referred appropriate patients, most were unfamiliar with the value of support groups and techniques such as guided imagery and self-hypnosis. Although there is now a wider recognition of the value of this work, and medical staff understand the need to reduce patient stress, many do not know what happens in a Relaxation and Support group. Providing opportunities for healthcare professionals to “come and see for themselves” can eliminate any hesitation they might feel towards something that is unfamiliar.

Ideally, when consideration is being given to the launching of a relaxation support group, local healthcare professionals, as well as people who themselves are dealing with illness, should be invited to attend some sort of open forum. It is useful to offer a demonstration of the program and to ask for input, with a view to adding what suits the local needs.

Once a group is running, nurses from the community, music therapists and other professionals can be invited to attend a session. At BCCA now, nutrition, pharmacy, nursing and medical students attend at least one session as part of their practicum, and thus come to endorse the work. Opening the Circles in this way has not been disruptive -- group members are invariably welcoming

and appreciative of the interest. It also increases referrals, as it is more comfortable to refer people to what is known.

### **Educating others about the benefits**

Facilitators promote support and sustainability when they can educate others by discussing contemporary, relevant research in a professional way. While it is not desirable to lecture patients on mind-body medicine and the specific mechanisms of the Relaxation Response, the facilitator should be able to offer comments about the known effectiveness and basic mechanisms of relaxation. This is helpful to patients and likely increases the benefits received<sup>1</sup>.

It is also important that the facilitator be informed about current research and make evidence-based claims about the effectiveness of relaxation and support. For instance, much was made of the few studies linking this work to longer life, and we frequently heard statements such as “scientific research proves that relaxation prolongs life”. It is never the case that one or two studies ‘prove’ anything, and indeed, these studies have since been re-interpreted, as often happens over the course of research<sup>2</sup>. Overly enthusiastic endorsements about the benefits to duration of life damage the credibility of this work, and may be harmful to patients.

*“it is important to note that our interest as therapists is not related in any way to claims of increasing the quantity of life for our clients (though this may be an outcome) but that our passion is engaged by the possibility of enhancing the quality of life for those suffering from cancer and other life-threatening illnesses”*  
... Facilitator

### **Encouraging the patient to be an advocate**

More than any other source, it was the patients themselves -- in waiting areas, hospital rooms, the cafeteria, sharing rides to the Clinic -- who drew other patients to the program at the BCCA. The Relaxation and Support program was a grassroots movement that spread gradually over time. Patients are the

advocates with the most power, and they can be encouraged to speak about their positive experiences. By telling their doctor of the benefit they are getting, or better yet, by writing a letter to the hospital or clinic that is supporting the group, patients have enormous influence. It doesn't harm them to be told "you are powerful – speak to others if you believe this is helping"!

### **Being sensitive to fundraising possibilities**

Facilitators have expressed being uncomfortable having to take on the role of fundraiser, and in our view, should not be expected to have to do this work. On the other hand, sometimes a patient or family member wants to make a contribution, and the facilitator should be able to comfortably discuss options.

The "Russell Kelly & Lis Smith Relaxation Circle Fund" was created by Russell (a former patient) and his wife Joan in the Fall of 1997 to provide a specific way of contributing directly to the continuation of the relaxation and support program. It is administered by the BC Cancer Foundation, and the money is used to establish Circles within the province. When patients and family members are made aware of this Fund, they often wish to donate to the program as a way of helping others. For instance, when a group member dies, family members often wish to express their appreciation. Letters or cards of condolence from the facilitator and group members have been sent to the family, with information about the Fund provided also. All donations to the Fund are tax deductible.

*Man's mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions.*  
Oliver Wendell Holmes

There are products that are sold through the BCCA, the proceeds of which go to the Russell Kelly & Lis Smith Relaxation Circle Fund. "Life Lines" is an easel-style book of inspirational sayings which were contributed by people dealing with cancer. This work, with beautiful calligraphy by BCCA patient Evelyn Huberman, sells for \$10.00. Russell Kelly was an accomplished photographer and cards of some of his work are obtainable from the four Cancer Centres in

BC. Part of the proceeds from the sales of audio tapes and CDs created by Shannon Schweizer- Lavell in Vernon are donated to the Circle Fund.

### **Keeping accurate records and evaluating the group**

Record keeping, and periodic evaluation, help maintain a necessary level of professionalism and keep the Circle relevant to the needs of patients in the particular community.

Record keeping is done on a sessional basis and, in order to be non-intrusive, simply includes the attendee's name, whether they are patient or support person, the area from which they come and phone number. Facilitators should mention that phone number are requested so that participants can be quickly advised if there is any change of time or location, or for networking purposes with their permission. Information about the patient's age or tumor site is not required.

*"I am constantly renewed and inspired by both the support time and the relaxation time...it is deeply gratifying to give comfort. For me, being part of the group is often a heart opening experience and yet a reminder to stay with my own self care"...Circle facilitator.*

There are minimum requirements regarding evaluation that all facilitators should adhere to. These are: 1) the use of a sign-in sheet (in order to track trends in attendance, and to identify how many members attend on a continuous basis); 2) the use of a first session evaluation form (in order to determine how people are learning about the program, and what their experience was in terms of meeting their needs and expectations); and 3) yearly program evaluation (in order to assess the effectiveness of the program and to invite feedback for improvement). The first two sources of information will allow the facilitator to understand the community needs and to make necessary adjustments as the program evolves. The yearly evaluation provides information for program

administration, including fund raising. The forms are provided in the Appendices, and the provincial PFC research consultant will guide the evaluation process.

### **In conclusion**

The Relaxation and Support Group Program of the BCCA has been running now for nearly twenty years. Patients have told us that they believe their journey through the cancer experience has been less painful, less frightening, and more love-filled because of the Circles. Facilitators have told us that they have found the work deeply satisfying. Research has demonstrated that relaxation and support programs are not costly, have no known negative side-effects, and are effective. We must continue to make this work available.

### **Notes and References**

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<sup>1</sup> Patients should be able to understand, and explain to others if they wish to hear, the objective benefits of relaxation. It is also well-documented that positive expectancy increases benefit of treatments, and facilitators can utilize this effect by reminding patients of benefits.

<sup>2</sup> The question of whether psychological therapies can prolong life of cancer patients has not been answered despite the intense interest of researchers and patients. Few studies that have attempted to answer this question have used a rigorous methodology. Of those studies that have been judged to use an adequate method, approximately half have shown a positive effect of an intervention on survival, and half have failed to find an effect (see Cunningham, 2002 and Classen et al, 1998 for further discussion).

## **Acknowledgments**

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Without the ongoing support of Richard Doll, a visionary head of department, who made the Relaxation Program possible, this book would never have been written. To all the members of the administration, and the physicians and nurses who gave their encouragement and support, thank you so much. Many of you attended group sessions where your willingness to get down on your knees to offer soothing touch to participants was so moving.

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The program would not have spread as far as it has into the Province of BC were it not for the dedication of the facilitators and volunteers who have worked so hard and so generously to ensure there is a Relaxation Group in their community. In particular, Laurel Babcock (Trail), Vickeri Cochrane (Nanaimo), Lynda Cowan (Prince George), Diane Davies (Courtenay), Nina Dickins and Alan Gow (Salmon Arm), Angelita Gerbracht (Prince Rupert), Val Mackay – Greer (Kamloops), Dale McKinnon (Penticton), Patti Rossi (Trail), Shannon Schweizer-Lavell (Vernon) and Marie-Paule Wiley (Sicamous) and their support teams.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Slipper pattern**

Jacqueline Osborne was diagnosed with cancer in her early 70's, and she attended the Relaxation and Support group sessions regularly during times of treatment and remission over a period of 9 years. When footstroking was introduced into the group Jackie began to knit slippers to keep participant's feet warm. These slippers made of brightly coloured scraps of wool have become a beloved component of the groups. Jackie told us she found the knitting meditative, and crafted many hundreds of pairs. When her eyesight weakened, volunteers in the group sewed up the slippers. Before she died in her 80's, she joked she was "going for a million ".

The pattern Jackie adapted is used by knitters throughout B.C. All of the 22 Relaxation and Support Groups in BC have added to their own collection, but many include "Jackie Originals". People continue to feel the welcome, warmth and thoughtfulness of Jackie's slippers.

#### **Knitting Pattern for Slippers.**

Size 4 ½ Needles-Worsted or Heavyweight Yarn

Cast on 31 sts. (Leave 8" for sewing back of slipper)

Row 1-K back of 1<sup>st</sup> st, K 9, P1, K9, P1, K9,YF, slip as if to purl.

Row 2- K back of 1<sup>st</sup> st, K to last st, YF, slip as if to purl.

Repeat these two rows 15 times. (Total -16 ridges) then Row 1 again.

Next Row-K1, P1 Across the row

Next Row-P1, K1 Across the row.

Repeat these two rows to 16 rows.

Toe Cap:

Row 1-K1, P1, four times, SL 1, K1, PSSO, K1, K2 tog, Rib 5, SL1, K1, PSSO, K1, K2 tog, Rib 8.

Row 2-Rib 8, P3, Rib 5, P3, Rib 8.

Row 3- Rib 7, K1, K2 tog, SL 1, K1, PSSO, Rib 3, K1, K2 tog, SL 1, K1, PSSO, Rib 7.

Cut yarn - leaving 10" for sewing toe.

Slip sts on to darning needle- pull tight and sew up toe.

Sew up heel. Finish and decorate as desired (a bobble or pompom on the toe can get in the way of footstroking).

## **Appendix 2**

### **Making a Personal Audio Tape**

Although there are many generic audio relaxation tapes available, there are times when group members will find a tape by the voice of the facilitator they are most familiar with invaluable. Perhaps the person is facing particularly challenging medical procedures or is no longer able to attend the group. The facilitator's voice can evoke the supportive atmosphere of the group and help to dispel a sense of loneliness.

In order to make a personal tape, you will need:

- ◆ either an office dictating machine using standard size audio tapes, or a microphone that plugs into the outlet on a CD or tape player.
- ◆ if background music is required, a second tape player will be needed.
- ◆ a 60 minute audio tape, that is, one with playing time of 30 minutes on each side. A completed tape of about 20 minutes playing time is usually ideal.

Quieten the phone or pager, place a "Do not disturb" sign on the door. You will likely not be in a sound proof studio so early on in the work acknowledge that there will be sounds both inside and outside the room. Suggest these sounds can be reminders for the person relaxing of the every day world, that can be let go for the next little while.

Whenever possible, the person for whom the tape is designed should be present and closely involved with its creation. Use of the person's name is very powerful. Ask if the person has a pet name, a name from childhood or used by those close to the person. For example, a woman called Patricia was known in her family circle as Rosie and this was the name she wished to be called on her tape.

Discover what is that person's preferred style of relaxation. Is it breathwork, autogenics, progressive muscle relaxation? If the latter, do they prefer the order of head to toe or toe to head? Does the person have a very special place in



mind? What images are most evocative for them. Do they have any specific affirmations? Ask them to tell you what they are.

By listening to the language the person uses as they respond you may be helped to discern their strongest primary sense. We all use all of our senses but one or two will dominate. We sense our world visually, orally, by movement (kinesthetically) with our sense of taste (gustatory) or smell (olfactory). The words we use can reflect this. For instance, if a person uses a lot of “seeing” words such as *taking the long view, getting the picture, I see what you mean, I look at it this way*, there is a strong likelihood that visual images will be the most powerful for them. If however the person describes feeling *bowled over, stunned, flattened, or overwhelmed*, it is likely that they are strongly kinesthetic, and so on. By using the person’s primary sense as a bridge they can be helped more readily to access their imagery.

If you feel unsure of the person’s primary sense, suggest that they allow themselves to “notice” the details of their chosen special place. For example, ask them rhetorical questions, such as, do they notice the shapes or colours, the sound of breathing in, the fragrance or aroma of their place. While the person relaxes in their chosen place, they are most responsive to positive affirmations.

Hold the microphone about 8” away from your face. Test that the tape is recording. Let your breath settle as gentle steady breathing is relaxing and lets the voice be soft.

A 20 or so minute tape may be arranged in many ways to suit the need. However, our experience is that it tends to follow these stages:

- ◆ Settling. Suggest finding a comfortable position, letting sounds go, etc.
- ◆ Relaxation style of choice.
- ◆ Imagery. A special place, etc.
- ◆ Affirmations.
- ◆ Conclusion. The tape is concluded by following the person’s wishes to suggest that they either re-enter the routine of their day, or take time for further rest.

When the tape is completed break the seal on the tape so that it cannot be accidentally erased. Suggest the person use a photograph or illustration to make a cover so their tape looks attractive. Or you can have several cut to size pictures from magazines etc already prepared to make a cover. Write the person's name on the tape label.

## Appendix 3

### Suggested pre-recorded music

#### Instrumental Music:

The following selections are sometimes referred to as "New Age" music. Most listeners experience this type of music as less structured than classical music and therefore more suitable as an accompaniment to spoken guided imagery. Some relaxing classical compilations are also listed below.

UUShepherd Moons Enya (soft vocals and synthesizer)

Inner Voices R. Carlos Nakai (Native American flute)

Musical Massage: Balance David Darling (cello, flute, synthesizer)

Guitar Meditations – Soulfood & Billy McLaughlin (guitar and synthesizer)

Wind Shadows II, Moonrise - Kim Robertson (harp)

The Yearning – Tim Wheater (alto flute), Michael Hoppe (keyboards)

Romantic Cello – Michael Hoppe (keyboards)

Piano Reflections, Roses and Solitude, Quiet Colours - Kelly Yost (piano)

Quiet Heart, Spirit Wind - Richard Warner (bamboo and alto flute)

Timeless Motion, Velvet Dreams – Daniel Kobialka (violin, synthesizer, guitar)

Cristal Silence Series, The Silent Path – Robert Haig Coxon (synthesizer)

Effortless Relaxation and other recordings – Stephen Halpern (synthesizer)

#### Instrumental Music and/or Sounds of Nature

Seascape - Georgia Kelly (Harp)

Garden of Serenity, Sequoia Records

Sanctuary Sequoia Records

Piano by the Sea

Environments 1: Sounds of the Ocean

Stream of Dreams (Solitudes collection)

Also many other recordings in the Solitudes Collection by Dan Gibson

Satie Gary Sill, piano

Most of these recordings are available at :

Banyen Sound,  
2617 West Broadway,  
Vancouver, BC  
[www.banyen.com](http://www.banyen.com)

(These recordings may also be available at A&B Sound or Future Shop)

**Classical music:**

Meditation - Mischa Maiskey (cello)

Adagio collections of great composers

French Connections (Debussy, Faure, Massenet) English Chamber Orchestra

Solflojt 4 - Gunilla von Bahr (solo flute)

Many of these classical recordings are available at :

Magic Flute,  
2203 West 4<sup>th</sup> Ave.,  
Vancouver, BC  
[www.magicflute.com](http://www.magicflute.com)

**It is important to listen to the music first before purchasing it and/or using it for relaxation purposes.** Most retail stores will allow you to do this if they have the selection in stock.

## **Appendix 4**

### **Issues that the Circle leader should be aware of**

#### **Treatment and Side Effects**

Cancer treatments are intended to destroy cancer cells and bring about a remission as well as help control pain and other symptoms. Unfortunately during the process, healthy cells can also be destroyed, causing a variety of unwanted outcomes. Typical side effects include: disfigurement due to surgery, radiotherapy and/or tumor growth; nausea; fatigue; hair loss; burns; pain, and changes in sexuality. It is not uncommon that people with cancer fear the treatments as much as or more than cancer or death.

#### **Chemotherapy**

Chemotherapy refers to any drug which has direct tumor-killing properties. These can be administered intravenously, subcutaneously, orally, and/or topically. Treatment generally occurs over a period of months thus patients may be visiting a clinic two to five times a week for hours at a time. In addition to the interference with daily life, effects can range from mild nausea to severe reactions. Side effects such as nausea and vomiting, loss of hair, fatigue and weakness, neurological changes, personality changes, early onset menopause, and sterility are well known and often anticipated by patients and families. Thus, while one might assume that treatment for disease is an obvious choice, chemotherapy for cancer patients presents a particularly challenging and difficult alternative.

#### **Radiation Therapy**

Radiation therapy is probably the most feared and misunderstood form of cancer treatment. Reasons for this include being alone in a room with a large and impersonal machine, having to lie completely still, the invisibility of the treatment, and the fear that the treatment itself will cause cancer. Radiation is

usually given daily, up to five days a week with the duration of treatment depending upon the site and malignancy.

Radiotherapy aims to damage and kill cancer cells through high energy x-rays and electron beams. The rays are directed at malignant tumors, however as in chemotherapy treatments, normal cells in the vicinity will also be damaged. While normal cells are better able to repair the effects of radiation than cancer cells, side effects from exposure to radiation are usually unavoidable. Hair loss occurs in the area receiving radiation and skin may be burned and needs to be protected from sunlight. Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea are common, and weakness and fatigue set in as a result of lowered white cell and platelet counts. These effects constitute the acute effects which occur within two weeks of treatment and remain for up to six weeks after completion of treatment. Late effects can develop over months or years.

## **Surgery**

Surgery is generally considered to be the most effective form of cancer treatment. Disfigurement due to surgery however is an irreversible side effect and can cause great distress in patients. Common fears include: anesthesia and lack of consciousness; pain; loss of the affected body part; visibility of the damage; interruption of normal life-style; dependence on others; long hospital stay; unknown complications (Rando, 1984). Despite these fears, traumatic distress symptoms tend to decrease significantly within several weeks post-surgery.

## **Pain**

Over time, pain becomes a problem for at least 70% of cancer patients. It may sometimes be the first sign of cancer, but is most common and severe in patients with advanced disease. Cancer pain can be: caused by the malignancy (bone/soft tissue infiltration); related to treatment (post-operative pain, postradiation inflammation); related to the cancer (bedsores, constipation, muscle spasm), or unrelated to the malignancy (headache).

The meaning attributed to pain impacts upon a person's experience of discomfort (Rando, 1984). Often patients believe that pain means that the disease is advancing which may well not be the case: simple reassurance on this point is often helpful. The fear of pain almost always exacerbates the discomfort and forms a cycle of anxiety and pain that can be difficult to break. The relaxation work can be helpful here too.

## **Depression**

Many patients initially experience symptoms such as insomnia, loss of appetite, irritability, depressed mood and anxiety. This is a normal reaction to the shock of diagnosis and the attendant threats and losses that cancer represents to people. Others suffer ongoing episodes of depression and anxiety which affect their long-term functioning. Most studies indicate that an average of 20 to 25% of cancer patients meet the DSM IV criteria for major depressive disorder at some point in their illness (Passik et al., 1997).

Symptoms such as fatigue, loss of appetite, depressed mood, sleeplessness, and difficulties with memory and concentration can be side effects of treatment. Because these symptoms are so common, depression amongst cancer patients may go untreated. Facilitators should be alert to these symptoms in circle members. If some of these symptoms – in particular, depressed mood and a loss of interest in what used to bring pleasure – go on for a more than a few weeks, the facilitator should gently suggest to the person that they discuss this with their family doctor or oncologist. If there seems to be no change within a few weeks, the facilitator should approach the subject with the patient again, expressing concern that the person may be suffering unnecessarily; that there are treatments that can help.