



“Trusted Witness” Study Group Preparatory Assignment

MARCH 2023

Deep listening and loving speech are wonderful instruments to help us arrive at the kind of understanding we all need as a basis for appropriate action. You listen deeply for only one purpose – to allow the other person to empty his or her heart. This is already an act of relieving suffering. To stop any suffering, no matter how small, is a great action of peace. The path to end suffering depends on your understanding and your capacity to act without causing harm or further suffering. This is acting with compassion, your best protection. - Thich Nhat Hanh

I. OVERVIEW

Walking with and witnessing a childhood traumatized traveler on their path is a profound, rewarding, and healing opportunity – for both parties. The purpose of this study group is to provide a safe community setting for travelers to explore making an informed Adult decision regarding the possibility of stepping up and making the commitment to be there for a traveler.

For purposes of this study group, we will use “trusted witness” and “witnesser” as the preferred terminology in place of “sponsor” and “sponsee”. Also, for purposes of our work together, it is assumed that the “trusted witness” commitment is a unidirectional or one-way model – one witness and one witnesser. The discussion of the “fellow traveler” model in the BRB openly offers the possibility of a bidirectional or two-way relationship. Notwithstanding, we will focus on the one-way model. A bidirectional “trusted witness” relationship can work - even thrive – yet, let’s take this one step at a time – starting with the unidirectional model. Some may consider the BRB “fellow traveler” dynamic as rooted in the desire for “we are equals”...which may reflect a fear of either traveler being “one down” or “being controlled by another. We can discuss bi-directional further in the study group.

Another noteworthy terminology substitution is replacing “parent” (verb) and “reparenting” with “parent–child co–regulation”. “Reparenting” and to “parent” can mean a variety of practices (loving, holding, dialogue, nondominant dialogue, affirmations, mirror work etc...?), whereas “parent–child co–regulation” is the unambiguous, “gold standard” parental response to Inner Child(ren) dysregulation. To be clear, the parental response to any (ultimately all) dysregulation is to “face” the Kid(s) with the intent to invoke co-regulation. When sufficient trust on behalf of the child manifests, then true and effective co-regulation and healing can occur.

MOST important, as a “trusted witness”– your Adult’s job is to create and hold a safe space...PERIOD !!! You may, in fact, be the one (or the only) human who will reliably listen and pay attention without interruption, advice, and/or, other projection...!!! As such, “trusted witnessing” is a profound act of service...!

II. CONSIDERATIONS (“WHAT’S IN THE WAY”) ASSESSMENT

Identifying, assessing/parsing thoughts, beliefs, concepts, decisions, etc...that stand in the way of stepping up is where we’ll start. Upon introspection, some/many of these may be rooted in childhood trauma-history...reflecting the fear-based childlike logic that of scared little Kids. Resolving and/or discarding these is possible and, thus, opens the door to making a “witnessing” commitment.

Also, it's worth considering our possible history with sponsorship. Being (or getting) a "Sponsor" is a long-standing traditional 12-step term/role originating, of course, in AA. For some of us, the word itself may have – on its face – a negative connotation. Sponsor/sponsee relationships may have been less than great – sometimes laced with controlling, condescending, co-dependent, and even abusive dynamics. If this is the case – we have experienced and/or repeated the very issues that traumatized us in childhood in the first place. (Note: in all fairness, when the sponsor role/responsibilities took shape back in early AA, there was virtually ZERO awareness or knowledge of childhood trauma. One could also make the case that the BRB introduced the "fellow traveler" concept to provide an alternative option – in hope of avoiding these unhelpful experiences.) The point is – travelers may be very hesitant to even consider exploring stepping up to be a "trusted witness".

Step 1: Inventory. It may be helpful to list what issues may be blocking you to step up. Which of the following apply...? "I can't or haven't done this" this because...

- I fired my traditional 12-step sponsor, I'm nervous that I'll repeat that...!
- My sponsor fired me, this relationship can't be trusted...!
- I haven't worked the steps...!
- I haven't finished the steps...!
- I don't have/never have had a sponsor...!
- I'm scared to do this...!
- I'm scared to make a commitment, afraid I'll let someone down...!
- I don't have the patience...! I may screw up...!
- I have nothing to offer...!
- Making this commitment feels overwhelming...!
- I won't/don't know what to do...!
- Other – your own...
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____

Step 2: Objective Assessment (Nothing is in Concrete...!)

Two things are important: (1) which considerations are rooted in Kid(s) history and (2) what mindful and thoughtful Parental action(s) can you take to begin to co-regulate Kid(s) dysregulation to prevent the derailing/disrupting of your Adult "trusted witness" check-ins...?

HINT #1: Reasons rooted in Kid(s) historical, feelings, thoughts, and body sensations live in your "inner world" and are completely separate from your Adult's capacity to step up to witness. So, off the top, consider removing these from the list.

HINT #2: Reasons that "may" not be rooted in history, yet conjure up fear, terror, etc... – you may want to remove those from the list as well.

HINT #3: This is not an exercise in perfection or instant resolution – it is intended for deeper awareness and to re-enforce that "inner world" harmony/disharmony lives and resolved in the "inner world" and is completely separate from the Adult's competency and presence in the "outer world"...!!!

Thoughtful parental actions ought not be foreign to you – you've come a long way in your C2P healing journey. If needed, the C2P Parenting Regime – trauma signature, safe container, "classic",

“lite”, etc... – are available to work with historical issues on your list. Bottomline, here are TWO simple truths to always keep in mind:

1. Your Adult alone owns and is responsible for the “trusted witness” relationships, which exists ONLY in the “outer world”. Inner Kids are not involved...period.
2. The Parent is solely responsible for turning the child’s attention and gaze toward the Parent and away from the “trusted witness” relationship by setting and maintaining the appropriate inner boundaries with the Kid(s). If they get activated, they will be comforted in that moment (“Lite”) and as soon as possible – parental self-co-regulation will occur. With mindful, consistent practice, the Kid(s) will come to understand that they are not involved...and, if they get triggered during a session – they will be taken care of without disrupting the Adult.

III. DETACHED, ADULT ASSESSMENT – ARE YOU READY...?

Here are key questions to consider:

- Am I still experiencing “inner world” dysregulation frequently...?
- Objectively, what is the ongoing state of my parental resilience...? Does it fluctuate a little, a lot...? Be objective, be gentle – whatever your resilience level is – is NORMAL – you’re actively on your healing path and doing your best...!

Are you ready...? If so, let’s do this...!!!

If not, you’ve done nothing and there is nothing wrong with you – you’re just not ready – YET. Also, even if you objectively assess “not yet” – considering participating on the study group anyway...the exploration may still be helpful on your healing journey.

IV. WITNESSING PROFILE – WHAT YOU BRING TO THE TABLE

A profile consists of experience-based qualities, practices, and committed boundaries you offer in any “trusted witness” relationship. Once you establish your profile, you then succinctly offer and detail in the initial, exploratory conversation with the “witnesser”.

Your “profile” is the list of salient recovery areas you have imperfectly “mastered” – i.e., important experiences that formed the foundation of your healing. It is helpful when sharing your profile, you keep it simple / short and sweet and do not get into a lengthy verbose focus on you. If the witnesser has questions, field those when they arise – again – with direct, succinct responses.

Here is a sample profile:

- Parent–Child Self–Co–Regulation. This is the core of my healing. As such, the framework of mind witnessing is sourced in the inner world, and the role of wounded kids, parent, and adult. For example, if I witness an upset during our connection, and I have personal experience, I will ask if I may share my experience. If it’s OK, I will unpack my experience with the circumstances at hand in terms of inner kids, parents, and or adult.
- Safety Commitment. I commit to consistently holding and creating a safe space to witness your recovery. This relationship is about you, having a “trusted witness” as you discover, uncover, and heal your childhood trauma. This is about you getting your needs met on a regular, reliable basis.
- Time Commitment. Once we establish the schedule of connections, I commit to you to show up on time and ask that you do the same. I will show up as committed, unless one of two

things happens: I am unable to make it, and let you know in advance, or you are unable to make it, and you let me know in advance.

- Time Boundary. I wait five minutes for our check-ins. If you haven't arrived within five minutes and have not let me know you'll be late in advance, I will exit without judgment, or taking it personally. If you were to miss a check-in without notice, no apology is necessary. HINT: It may be prudent to bring this up at a later time and not in the initial conversation. Otherwise, this may activate your witnesser – which could remove any hope of trust.
- Money Boundary. If we happen to get together in person for a meal or some other event, meals, tickets, etc. those expenses are paid separately.
- Working the 12 Steps. I've worked steps in AA, NA, OA, WA, ACA, and Tony A. The BRB/YB steps were critical success factors in my recovery. However, if you intend to work the steps in our relationship, I ask that you seek out to do them in a step-study group. If, along the way, you encounter issues or struggles with any given step, feel free to bring that into our check-ins, I will provide my experience upon request.

Begin to build – what components make up your profile...???

V. INITIAL CONVERSATION / INITIAL CONNECTION

It is assumed the traveler, the potential witnesser, reaches out to you. Arrange the initial conversation – ideally in-person, yet if remote, Zoom. Phone can work, though not ideal. It is prudent to limit the length of this first touch, (say 30 minutes) and make clear when the connection is confirmed. This minimizes the chance that the conversation drags on. Remember, keep your side of this conversation crisp and to the point – in the first conversation and all subsequent check-ins, the witnesser is the primary focus – essentially, it is their time, their space.

On the call, open with reminding the time boundary , then setting an agenda. Here is a straw example: Intro/Witnesser Needs/Your Profile/Close.

Then, the exploratory conversation begins:

- Brief intros:
 - “what prompted you to reach out...?”
- WITNESSER NEEDS. What support are you (witnesser) looking for...? Parenting, steps, etc... (Make sure to let them complete their thoughts. It's OK to ask close-ended clarifying questions. You may want to joint down key witnesser needs.
- YOUR PROFILE. Here is what you offer (your profile). “If we decide to work together, this is how I will work with you...” Sample profile:
 - My primary focus in a “trusted witness” relationship is parent-child healing of childhood trauma.
 - My commitment to you:
 - I commit to be available on time for our check-ins. If, for whatever reason, I am going to be late or unable to meet...I will let you know in advance – and I ask that you do the same.
 - I commit to creating a safe space for you to witness your healing. It is your space and I commit to reliably show up and keep it safe.
 - If I have comments or feedback, I will check in with you before offering. My comments and feedback will be based solely on my personal experience. I will not offer personal opinions. It's totally OK if you are not interested and decline my offer. I will not take that personally – this is YOUR SPACE, YOUR TIME...!

- Between check-ins, if the witnesser is experiencing challenging dysregulation, it's OK to reach out to me (preferably via TXT) and let me know you want to connect. As soon as I can (immediate if possible), I will respond and let you know when I am available to connect – and, if not now, arrange a mutually agreeable and earliest time to connect.
- CLOSE. Does the witnesser see a possible match...?
 - If “yes”, spoken from your perspective:
 - Suggest we start this exploratory relationship on a temporary basis. As we connect regularly, you can assess whether it's working or not and, if not, you're free to gracefully end our working together. No harm, no file, no judgment on my part.
 - Let's agree the frequency of regular connection...weekly, bi-weekly, other...? It's the witnessers call. Plus, test driving day/time may be a good idea.
 - Let's agree how long the check-ins are. Suggest 30 minutes.
 - Once frequency, day, and time are agreed – invite witnesser to post this on their calendar and set alarms.
 - KEY – nothing is in concrete – so adjustments can be made – with **complete deference to the witnesser – absolutely 'no harm, no foul'...!!!**
 - Suggestion: It may be helpful that the first, official check-in is for you to hear the witnesser's “story”...without time limit (my preference)...or a fixed window longer than agreed check-in. For example, if a 30-minute check-in is agreed – then the “story” may be 1-2 hours. If the witnesser asks how to do that (which may be common), “you know your story better than anyone, just share what you feel is important in your recovery journey that you want me to know”. When this call happens...be VERY mindful to yield virtually all the space, energy, and time to your witnesser. Clarifying questions are OK...just to get the details straight.
 - If “no”, wish her/him/them peace and blessings...!!!

VI. OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

- It is not your job to assess, take personally, comment, or give unsolicited advice on the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of the witnesser.
- Suggestion: If you're not currently the “witnesser” in a “trusted witness” (or traditional 12-step relationship), it may be quite helpful to seriously consider taking steps to make that happen. The value is that you have a safe connection and space to be seen, honored, and heard...! **SPECIAL NOTE**: this is not a requirement nor a showstopper for you to step up to witness...!
- Suggestion: If you're not currently working with a trauma-trained therapist, that also may be quite helpful to seriously consider taking steps to make that happen. **SPECIAL NOTE**: again, this is not a requirement nor a showstopper for you to step up to witness...!
- The TRUTH always works. The initial discussion of what you bring to the table allows the witnesser to make a thoughtful, considered choice and decision. As many of us desperately seek trust and connection, completely absent in childhood, this desperation may show up in the witnesser as she/he/they explore(s) this relationship. The initial conversation isn't meant to establish a trusted connection, trust organically builds over time – and your part in that is to show up and honor your commitments and boundaries...PERIOD. For example, if the witnesser presses any of the following in the initial conversation:
 - Do you have a sponsor...? You either do or you don't...period.
 - How do I know I can trust you...? Great question...! Trust is built over time, so as we continue our check-ins, that trust will either be built or not. In other words, we really have to engage before trust can begin to be built.

- Vague and ambiguous witnesser speech – two common examples being: “my ACA stuff came up” and “I parented (or reparented)...”. This may be an attempt to skip over what may be uncomfortable details (kids may fear will send you away). In both cases, helpful responses may help: “can you be more specific...?” “When you say your ACA stuff came up, what specifically happened...?” “When you say you parented that, what specifically did your Parent do...?” The details in both key areas DO MATTER...!!!
- What happens if the witnesser’s Kid(s) challenges or confronts you (your Adult)...?
 - Ironically, this could be a good sign – as the witnesser has some level of trust to project the teen’s unresolved history onto you. This may well be rooted in the witnesser’s attachment style from childhood. This is good information to register as it is likely to resurface again.
 - Here are some possible responses actions:
 - Two possibilities on your side:
 - Your Adult holds the space – AKA no Kids get activated or the activation is insignificant and passes...mindful attention on your breath can help as your Adult continues to focus on the witnesser.
 - If you do decide to respond – questions (instead of declarations) can work well: “Why do you ask...?”, “Are you angry...?”, etc..
 - Your Kid(s) do(es) get activated. The idea is to NOT react back and meet the challenge with (your teen’s) counterchallenge. Instead, your Parent acknowledges them (“Lite”) – and continue to breath.
 - This may help:
 - If Kids activation during a check-in is a concern, especially if it has happened...then before check-ins (Safe Container), it may be helpful to have a conversation with your Kid(s) to alert and remind them that they are not involved, the Adult is responsible and – if during check-ins they do get activated – you (the Parent) will take care of them (“Lite”) – while the Adult continues with the mindful check-in.
 - The witnesser’s challenge may well be pushing to see if there is a rise – and, if there is, he/she/they will decide you cannot be trusted – i.e. – it may be an unconscious setup to validate that “no one” can be trusted. Your Adult consistently holding the safe space will, over time, build trust and safety – by NOT REACTING BACK.
- What happens if the witnesser gets highly activated and dysregulated during a check-in...?
 - Breath...continue to hold the space with eye contact and in silence.
 - Hold the space...let them feel and say whatever they need to feel and say.
 - If it seems to escalate or they are (almost in desperation) repeating themselves, when there is a pause...it may be helpful to offer: “how can I support you...?”. This is a loving and powerful response, and usually will shift the witnesser’s activation. If not, repeating may also be helpful.
- What happens if the witnesser comes late...? One off, not an issue, and suggest not bringing it up – create space for them own it or not (keep track). Yet if it becomes a recurring phenomenon, time to set a boundary. “I notice you’re having difficulty in showing up on time. So, going forward, I’ll wait five minutes and if you haven’t arrived, I will exit to check-in. However, if you know you’re going to be late and give me advance notice, I’ll wait. Please know that I do not take your being late personally. This is your time, and it is booked on my calendar, so I’ll be here for you.

- It is common that the witnesser repeatedly texts before a check-in, such as “are we meeting today...?”. This may be their Kid(s) scared, thinking (for whatever reason) you’ve decided to end the relationship and abandon them. The first couple of times – a simple “yes” works. If it persists, consider this: “Our relationship is important to me. As such, our check-ins are on my calendar...so there is no need to check with me beforehand.” This will help build trust...even though you may be – at first – tentative to be direct.
- Are you attached or aware of a possible attachment to a preconceived notion of how a traveler “should” deal with their trauma (or recovery)...? For example, if a traveler is or isn’t interested in working the steps – is that an issue for you...? The point is “what works or has worked for you” may not be what is needed by the witnesser. (Keep in mind, for those of us with prior, successful traditional recovery – this may be hard to swallow – as it flies in the face of the ‘suggested standards of behavior’ in other fellowships...!!!) If you discern any such attachment(s), be mindful to work with and resolve offline – versus projecting judgement on witnesser...it will definitely break trust and safety – especially with their Kid(s). Notwithstanding, if at some point the witnesser asks for feedback in these areas from your traditional recovery (even if you’re attached to), simply tell your truth, and couch your response as “this is what worked for me”. One size does not fit all...!
- If the witnesser is experiencing a challenge that you have direct experience with - and you have transcended or on the other side of...first, make sure they have nothing else to say about their challenging situation. Then inquire if they are open to feedback, and, if they are, share your experience as succinctly as possible. It might be helpful to put yourself in their situation so that your feedback is in the first person. “I’ll be you for a second...I was in a similar situation and I...”

Thank you for considering and exploring stepping up to a “trusted witness” act of service...!!!

IN CLOSING

It is my sincere wish, irrespective of whether you decide to step up or not now, is that this worksheet is helpful as you continue to heal and transform your childhood development trauma disorder into the “realm of wholeness, happiness, and Thriving Adulthood”...!!!

Robert N 🙏