

Community Living Processes

By Amara Karuna, ©2020

Would you like to live in community someday, or do you live with people now and want to feel more harmonious and connected?

These are meetings and formats that we use at Laakea Community, an intentional permaculture community in Hawaii. We have a thriving small family centered community, which has been going for 15 years, and we highly value our emotional connections.

This is how we do it well.

- Morning check-ins- a short report on how each person feels and what activities they plan to do that day, and any request for help, rides, etc
- Long business retreats- a day or two set aside every month or so to talk about deeper issues of vision and policy that take a longer time to consider
- play retreats- spending time together at the beach, or park, or a picnic
- business meetings – happen weekly and handle all current business
- Consensus theory and skills – we all learn how to come to group decisions in a co-operative, non authoritarian manner.
- Heartshare meetings- happen weekly and are a chance to feel connected.

Possible activities during a Heartshare meeting:

We use several formats to do processing emotion-

Communication skills – we all learn how to listen well, give empathy, and the kinds of statements that are and are not helpful when communicating with others.

A primary form is Non Violent Communication - learning to identify and express feelings, needs and requests in a way that others can hear them.

1. The forum- a process of revealing one's true thoughts and feelings in a group setting, involving movement of one person in the center of a circle, as everyone else listens with respect. Some trained helpers can come in and support them at times. There are guidelines that help make this safe and this increases the group's feeling of safety.

2. Let-Go's - A process of revealing things that have been withheld from another person or the group, which are not discussed at that time. These can happen in a group or between two people only.

We ask “does anyone have any let-gos?” and someone might say, “yes I have one for Amara, do you want to hear it?” Then Amara can say yes or no, if she is not in a good space to hear it. If she says yes, then the person shares the let-go in an NVC format: “when _____ happened, I felt _____. I am needing _____ and (optional) my request is _____.” Amara simply says “Thank you” and they discuss it at a later time.

3. Appreciations- We ask “Are there any appreciations?” People offer them to individuals or to the whole group. It could be personal or about something someone did.

3. Co-counseling- a way of introspecting, owning and processing one's deep feelings so that they no longer are controlling our reactions and behavior. This is more about clearing one's own self in order to be able to communicate better with others later.

We might take a 5 minute each mini session, with one person sharing whatever is up for them, and the other person simply listening, or asking questions, but not giving advice or comments. Or sometimes we might give

each person equal time in the whole group for sessions. Any emotions that need to flow are welcome.

4. Long check ins- we divide up the time, and each person talks about whatever is going on in any aspect of their lives they would like to share.

5. Hot seat- can be combined with check ins. We ask the person on the hot seat questions about their life and experience. They can answer or not. If they answer and go on a long time, the questioner can interrupt and say "Thank you" when they have heard enough of the answer. This process helps draw out people who are new to the group and might be shy to speak. Questions should come from the questioner's true curiosity.

6. Appreciation circles: everyone has a turn receiving appreciations from the whole group. Comments should be authentic and spoken to the person directly. The receiver does not respond except for "Thank you". This creates a real feeling of closeness and bonding in the group.

7. Touch check ins- we divide up the time and people ask for the kind of touching they want, like massage or cuddles. They can check in at the same time or be silent or ask for appreciations or songs or toning.

8. Theater Games and other games- playful ways to connect with the group. They might include some of the New Games, or Playback Theater games. We like Whoosh -Bang- Pow and Fluid Sculptures, among many.

9. Massage- we might spend a whole meeting simply trading massage in pairs or triads or quartets.

10. Cuddle Puddles- We might end a meeting with some time in a cuddle pile.

11. The Forum- a process for sharing in the large group, where one person at a time stands up and moves through the center

space, expressing how they feel authentically, including movement. The movement helps to keep the energy moving. The intent is not therapy, but revealing the truth to others. We often use the simple form of 3 minute each turns, with no feedback or facilitation. Not everyone needs to take a turn. Clapping happens after every piece, and when opening and closing the forum. There are more complex forms of the forum that require training to facilitate.

12. Mediations- for people who are in conflict, we may take time in the whole group to help. We prefer to do this in smaller groups and not use the whole group time, but sometimes the conflicts affect everyone. Or we may process a larger conflict that many people are affected by, such as a disagreement on how to move forward on a project.

13. Vision and Policy- we may process group feelings on a certain topic, such as raising children, food issues, drug use, etc.

14. Personal Histories- we share on a certain topic such as our personal histories with sexuality, or sexism, classism and money, etc. this helps us understand each other.