

Session 4: The Awareness Wheel

Purpose: Participants will become familiar with all parts of the Awareness Wheel as a tool for understanding conflict.

Supplies: Paper, Awareness Wheels, easel, pad of newsprint, and markers.

Content:

- Review of conflict
- The Awareness Wheel
- Uses of the Awareness Wheel

Activities:

1. One-on-one: Share an incident, positive or negative
2. Brainstorm why we avoid noticing incidents
3. Discussion of why it's important to notice incidents
4. List incidents
5. Complete an Awareness Wheel
6. One-on-one: Share Awareness Wheel
7. Discussion of Awareness Wheel

T> Good evening. Tonight we're going to be working on a number of areas. We'll begin by looking at incidents and conflict and reviewing last week's material. Then we'll talk about a tool we call the Awareness Wheel, which is the first step for getting in touch with yourself and your experience in a particular conflict so that the conflict can be resolved.

T> Let's begin by letting go and being here with a meditation.

Well, I sure feel much more relaxed! How about a quick Name Game to get our energy going?

T> Okay. Choose a partner for a one-on-one. You'll have about two minutes each, and I'll call time for you. In this one-on-one, share with your partner two or three incidents you had this week; choose ones that either drew you closer or created some distance. Remember – just the facts. Also share what you've noticed in general about incidents this week. If you didn't have any incidents, go into your Inner Witness and explore why that was! Begin!

[After one-on-one.] OK, welcome back!

Sometimes I notice that it's hard for me to think of incidents or notice them. Anybody else have that experience? (Pause) What are some of the reasons that we avoid noticing incidents? Let's brainstorm and write them up here on the chart. What do you suppose would be the payoffs *[make sure you use the word "payoffs" here, since it serves to introduce an important concept]* for not noticing incidents and for not dealing with them directly?

All of these reasons – it's painful; once you notice, you have to do something about it; conflict is unsettling – let's smooth it over and pretend it didn't happen – are why we often don't notice or don't bring them up. But building relationships takes being willing to notice incidents, getting in touch with your experience of the incident, and sharing your experience in a way that draws you closer to the other person. We're going

to use a tool called the Awareness Wheel tonight that helps us get in touch with the experience we have as individuals when we have an incident.

T> Before we talk about the Awareness Wheel, take about five minutes to list your incidents from the previous week—include at least one positive and at least two that you're willing to share. A good way to get started is to make a column headed by each area of your life or each significant relationship. (Illustrate this on the board.) Think – how has it been lately to be with this person? First thought!

What can you do when you notice you are in conflict? I know there is often a lot going on for me when I'm in conflict; so much that I often don't know what to do. The tool we use in this class for sorting out what is happening for us when we're in conflict is the AW. Take a short break, and then we'll introduce this important tool.

T> **Awareness Wheel Lecture.** When an incident occurs, we are often overwhelmed by waves of feelings, thoughts, and sensations, all occurring at once. I know that I'm usually unable to formulate a response that I'm comfortable with at that moment. Before resolving conflict with another, you must first connect with yourself. The technique we use, called the Awareness Wheel, divides our responses into five parts: sensations, interpretations, feelings, actions, and wants. The Awareness Wheel is the tool we use to get in touch with our experience of our incidents, after which we can use this information and decide what type of resolution we want. Doing an Awareness Wheel tunes us in to our Inner Witness.

NOTE: Draw a large AW on newsprint. Share an incident and fill in each part of the wheel as you explain about each part. The incident you use should be very complete and clear for you.

Incident: The incident is something that happens that changes the way we relate to each other. My incident was that I _____
_____.

Interpretations: Interpretations are our thoughts, expectations, judgments, opinions, beliefs, impressions, conclusions, attitudes, motivations, about ourselves and the other person. Our interpretations are our best guesses as to why someone did something and why it affected us the way it did. We think our interpretations are reality, but they are just our way of analyzing the world and our experience. Interpretations vary from person to person, since everyone is different. After I tell you my interpretations, you may come up with others to explain what happened.

In this incident, I had several interpretations about myself:

_____. And I also had interpretations about the other person: _____

_____. Sometimes the first interpretations are control talk thoughts about ourselves and others. (He's irresponsible. That's why he forgot our anniversary.) A good question to ask when the interpretations are all control talk is "I wonder why?" What would cause the other person to act that way? Sometimes "I wonder" will give us some other thoughts in straight talk or search talk. (He has had a lot of tension at work lately.)

Body sensations: Notice to see if you have any strong physical sensations when you're having an incident with someone. They are usually clues to feelings. Hurt, for example, often is that queasy feeling in the stomach. Anger is often first felt as a tightness in the chest or neck or by a rapidly beating heart. My sensations were:

_____.

Feelings: Feelings are spontaneous emotional reactions. Feelings are usually one word expressions such as anger, sadness, joy, hurt, confusion, etc. Sometimes we express thoughts as if they were feelings, such as in "I feel that" Usually, if "that" can be inserted into the statement, we have jumped into interpretations. Feelings are often a clue to interpretations and vice-versa. My feelings during this incident were:

_____.

Notice how some of my feelings seem to conflict? It's not unusual. We're complicated creatures. Feelings will often conflict, especially since they are linked with interpretations. Also, some feelings arise because of our interpretations. So by choosing our interpretations, we generate the feelings we feel.

Actions: Actions are what you did when this occurred. You may have done absolutely nothing, withdrawn, stopped speaking, stormed out. All of those are actions. What I did when this happened was: _____

_____.

Wants: I always leave wants for last, after I've figured out my experience. Knowing what I want will tell me the best way to proceed. What do I want from myself and what do I want from the other person? And what do I want *for* myself and the other person?

What I want from myself are things that only I can give myself. Maybe I'd like to change my behavior; design an affirmation; ask for something; get more in touch with my Inner Witness. In this incident, I had several wants for myself:

Regarding the other person, these are things I want from him or her, and I'd like to ask for them. They should be very specific, so the other person knows what to do and how to do it. I want acknowledgement, reassurance, sympathy, you to be on time, etc. It's important to state them positively. "If you don't like what I'm wearing, I want you to tell me so when I still have time to change. Of course, I'd prefer hearing that I look good!" not "I don't want you to tell me you don't like my dress as we're leaving the house to go out." In this incident, I was very clear about I wanted, since I had done an Awareness Wheel:

How do I know whether my want is straight talk or control talk? Intentions are always a clue. If you want the other person to feel bad about what they did, then you're in control talk. If you truly want to resolve the incident and get closer, it will be expressed in your straight talk message. If I get an angry, defensive response from the other person, I need to look at my intention and how I'm expressing it.

Usually, it's easier for us to begin with the area of the wheel with which we feel the most comfort. I had no trouble with interpretations, but it took me a while to notice my sensations. They are always clues to each other and they create each other. If I think that my relationships with _____ are always messing up, then probably I will feel sad and despondent.

Having an incident is like being in the TV department at Best Buy and trying to watch five different channels at the same time with all the pictures and noise of five shows. Using the Awareness Wheel helps us tune in to one channel at a time so we can get a very clear picture and clear sound of what is happening.

T> Who has questions on the Awareness Wheel? What do you think about the wheel? What are your reactions to it as a tool for looking at your experience? We're going to do one in a minute.

The wheel has a couple of very important uses. First, it helps you get in touch with your personal experience. Second, it helps you understand why you are in conflict. Sometimes it may seem like such a minor, unimportant exchange, but it was an incident for you, and working it through on the wheel helps you understand yourself. Third, the wheel helps us communicate our feelings and interpretations, which can lead to closer, more intimate relationships. And fourth, the wheel helps us get to our wants, which need to be expressed in order to build relationships.

Notice that in filling out her Awareness Wheel, the instructor several times drew a causal connection between a feeling and an interpretation. For example, she felt angry *because she believed* that the other person intended something specific and nasty with his actions.

So who created that feeling of anger? Who's responsible for it? Does it make any sense in that situation to say to the other person, "You made me angry!" or to vent those feelings on the other person?

We're not saying not to have those feelings. Emotions come up, and they need to be experienced in some way. We're only saying that you may want to vent them in some way other than dumping them on the other person. Then the field is clearer to work on the conflict.

T> I'd like you to choose an incident from your list, one that you'd like to know more about and also that you'd be willing to share with at least one other person. Begin by putting the incident in the center. Save wants for last.

Okay, choose a partner for a one-on-one. In this paired share, go over your Awareness Wheel with your partner. Partner, it's your job to listen and help them figure out if all the information is in its place. It is not a time for you to be helpful with advice on how to solve this incident or relationship. You'll each have about seven minutes, and I'll call time.

(NOTE: Circulate to each person within five minutes to make sure that the incident is just the facts; then make sure that the feelings and interpretations are in the right areas and that feelings are feelings, not ideas. Another area people frequently have difficulty with is identifying body sensations. Ask them to make their best guess about what those might have been, or just let it go if they're feeling blocked.)

So, how was it to do an Awareness Wheel? What area of the wheel feels like foreign territory to you? Why do you think that is? Can you see yourself using this?

T> Homework for the week is (1) to continue noticing your incidents, (2) to do at least one Awareness Wheel at home, and (3) to continue to notice the four styles.

T> It's time for a final go-around. What was tonight like for you? What were the high points for you? What are your concerns or doubts? Say anything you need to say goodnight.