

Bulletin for Gossip

Business

Chalice Lighting

As surely as we belong to the universe,
we belong together.
We join here to transcend the isolated self,
To reconnect,
To know ourselves to be at home,
Here on earth, under the stars,
Linked with each other
—*Margaret A. Keip*

Sharing of Joys and Concerns

Silence

Shared Readings

The things most people want to know about are usually none of their business.
—*George Bernard Shaw*

Gossip is just news running ahead of itself in a red satin dress.—*Liz Smith*

Show me someone who never gossips and I'll show you someone who isn't interested in people.—*Barbara Walters*

So live that you wouldn't be ashamed to sell the family parrot to the town gossip.
—*Will Rogers*

What Peter says about Paul tells us more about Peter than it does Paul.—*Anon*

If you reveal your secrets to the wind, you should not blame the wind for revealing them to the trees.—*Kahlil Gibran*

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

Round I

Take a minute to write down words that come to mind in response to the word “Gossip.”
Take turns reading the words to each other without comment.

Round II

Based on your preparation and thinking about this topic, give a few examples (without divulging too much) of stories told about others that fall at different points along the scale.

Wholesome Conversation-----|-----Vicious Gossip

Share more deeply feelings and experiences of gossip in response to the readings and questions in the preparation material.

Round III

As time allows share additional thoughts or reflect on what others have shared.

Closing Words

May the quality of our lives be our benediction, and a blessing to all whom we touch.
—*Philip Randall Giles*

Song

The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group.
- to let the leader know if I will be absent or need to quit.
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others.
- to do the reading and thinking about the topic ahead of time.
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and tell only my own story to others.
- to honor the safety of the group by listening to what others share with an open heart.
- to refrain from cross-talk, judging, or giving advice.
- to share as deeply as I can when it is my turn.

Leader's Notes for Gossip

Before the Session

In Round 1 members are invited to write down words that come to mind in response to the word, "Gossip." Bring pencils/pens. Either bring paper for this or ask them to write in the margins of the meeting bulletin.

Business

Chalice Lighting

Ask someone to read the chalice lighting reading found in the bulletin.

Sharing of Joys and Concerns (each person about 2 min.)

Silence (3 min.)

Shared Readings

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening During your rounds of deep sharing/deep listening, pay close attention to the time allotted each person to ensure all get to share at least once.

Round I (each person about 2 min.)

Take a minute to write down words that come to mind in response to the word "Gossip." Take turns reading the words to each other without comment.

Round II (each person about 5 min.)

Based on your preparation and thinking about this topic, give a few examples (without divulging too much) of stories told about others that fall at different points along the scale.

Wholesome Conversation-----|-----Vicious Gossip

Share more deeply feelings and experiences of gossip in response to the readings and questions in the preparation material.

Round III (each person about 2 min.)

As time allows, share additional thoughts or reflect on what others have shared.

Closing Words

May the quality of our lives be our benediction, and a blessing to all whom we touch.

—*Philip Randall Giles*

Song

Preparation for Gossip

Whoever gossips to you will gossip about you.—*Spanish Proverb*

Gossip is nature's telephone.—*Sholom Aleichem*

The Puritan's idea of hell is a place where everybody has to mind his own business.
—*Wendell Phillips*

What is told in the ear of a man is often heard 100 miles away.—*Chinese Proverb*

Conversation is an exercise of the mind; gossip is merely an exercise of the tongue.
—*Author: Unknown*

The biggest liar in the world is They Say.—*Douglas Malloch*

Gossip needn't be false to be evil - there's a lot of truth that shouldn't be passed around.
—*Frank A. Clark*

Depending on the source, gossip can be defined in several ways. Although similar, these definitions contain important differences that reflect varying opinions on what sort of talk constitutes gossip.

Gossip: a rumor or report of an intimate nature.

Gossip: The act of spreading news from person to person, especially rumors or private information.

Gossip: Casual or unconstrained conversation or reports about other people, typically involving details that are not confirmed as being true.

Some view gossip as nothing more malicious than sharing news about other people as long as it is not false. Some view sharing other's stories with people as gossip even if the information is not necessarily a secret. Some view the speaker's intentions as the difference between gossip and information sharing.

The author of *Gossip*, Patricia Meyer Spacks, defines gossip this way, "Let me isolate two typical modes, at opposite ends of a continuum...At one extreme gossip manifests itself as distilled malice. It plays with reputations, circulating truths and half truths and falsehoods about the activities, sometimes the motives and feelings, of others...At the opposite end of the continuum lies the gossip... which exists only as a function of intimacy...Its participants use talk about others to reflect on themselves, to express wonder and uncertainty and locate certainties..."

Gossip is something we've all experienced. It exists everywhere in our social system. People gossip in schoolyards, in our workplaces, in our families, and among friends. What is the effect of this seemingly pervasive habit?

According to Offra Gerstein, clinical psychologist from Santa Cruz, the origins of gossip date to early humans. She says that primitive societies used negative information to discredit the reputations of their rivals and offers several reasons why humans gossip. Gerstein suggests that gossip is a form of bonding with another person and it can feel pleasurable, even when done at the expense of someone else. Gossip also serves as a non-demanding way of engaging in idle talk, an activity to pass the time that requires no strain on the brain. According to Gerstein, some people use gossip with the intent to harm others.

Frank McAndrew, of Knox College, in his recently published research on gossip in the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, showed that gossip is pervasive and that the nature of gossip determines how it is passed on. People are willing to share damaging, negative personal information when it involved a rival and they pass on good news if it were about a friend.

Questions to Ponder

1. Think of instances when you were talking about a person who wasn't present. What were the kinds of things being discussed? For example, it's not unusual to discuss someone else's achievements, conduct, past behaviors, relationships, appearance, or work habits. Place your experiences on the scale below. What were the differences that could have made one sort of talk "wholesome conversation" and another "vicious gossip?"

*Wholesome
Conversation*

*Vicious
Gossip*

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2. Most of us have been gossiped about at one time or another. If this happened to you, how did it make you feel?
3. Gossip may be an inevitable part of human interaction. If we cannot stop gossip, what should our attitude toward it be? How can we avoid its negative effects?
4. In your experience what service does gossip serve?