

A Sample Group Ritual: The Shawl Ceremony for Healing and Transformation

Preparation

- Arrange chairs in a circle.
- Find one or two large shawls preferably in healing colors like blue, green, or purple.
- Create a focal point in the center of the circle using cloths, candles, and symbols that have meaning for all involved but do not carry negative connotations for any members of the group.

Introduction

- Begin by saying a sentence or two about the importance of ritual or ceremony in healing individuals and organizations that have experienced trauma. For example:

Rituals are symbolic actions that help us express our deepest feelings and thoughts which often can't be completely expressed in words. They can help us do the work of healing, changing, or transforming that no other vehicle can do as well. Today we will offer a shawl ceremony that can address some of the hurts and trauma we have not addressed in other ways. Both healers and the healed have worn shawls over the centuries in ceremonies in many cultures and religions. Remember the tallit (the Jewish men's prayer shawl) or the stole used by priests.

- Explain the process, using words like this:

For those who are willing, I will go to the first person who volunteers to start our ceremony. I will bring the shawl to them and place it around their shoulders as I stand behind them. Then I will ask all of you to send your prayers and energy silently to that person. After two or three minutes, I will move back to my chair and that person will stand up, take off the shawl, and place it on the shoulders of the next person. Feel free to choose not to participate and simply indicate verbally or nonverbally when your turn comes that you do not want to participate.

- There is usually no need to repeat the directive of sending silent prayer and energy, but to be sure everyone is comfortable you may want to repeat the directions one more time.

Process

- You may facilitate the process alone, but if the circle is fairly large you may want to have two shawls and a second person to work with you. In the case of two facilitators, it's easier for you to be seated next to each other. One of you starts with the person to your left; then the other, places the shawl on the person to the right, always leaving the time and space of quiet so that each one experiences the caring energy of the whole circle. By modeling that way, the participants can pick up that same rhythm. First one on one side of the circle, then the other and so on until you have completed the circle.
- You may want to end with a simple invocation, such as: May all of us here continue our healing journey, renewed and refreshed with the compassion and caring of this circle.
- If a song is desired, Shaina Noll's "How Can Anyone" on her album Songs for the Inner Child, is very meaningful for this ritual.

Notes: *This ritual can seem like it might be too feminine a process for some men, but the opposite is often true; once the idea is presented that both men and women wear shawls, it allows everyone to relax into the process. For people who may not be receptive to hugging or physical contact, the shawl can also be an alternative way of physically expressing care and nurturing.*