

## **Spiritual Companion Training Part 6**

### **Self-Disclosure in Spiritual Companionship**

Besides “being present” and “listening,” another way of being with your spiritual partner is to “self-disclose” – to reveal something of or about yourself that is appropriate and relevant to something your partner has said. This can help to build and strengthen the bond between you both, as your companion may realize that you have undergone a very similar experience and do empathize with him/her.

S/he may even say to you at some point, “You know what I mean?” Saying “Yes, I do” is one way to respond. (Note: Say this only if you really do understand. Be straightforward and honest in all your responses. S/he will know if you are not. If you do not understand, ask for clarification, such as, “No, not entirely. Can you tell me more?”) Telling him/her something of your own personal experience is another, and potentially more impactful, way of communicating your understanding. This can be a time where you share some of your own journey.

It is important to keep some points in mind when self-disclosing:

1. Appropriateness
  - Your sharing should be germane to the topic your partner is discussing.
2. Timing
  - Make sure to not jump right into self-disclosing; give your partner a good chance to talk before you share.
  - If your partner asks what you think, etc. and you don’t feel “ready” or comfortable to disclose an experience, you can defer by saying, “I would be happy to share with you my experience but I would like first to give you a chance to talk about yours.”
3. Frequency and Length
  - Don’t share too often. Be careful to not overdo it; don’t dominate the conversation. Remember your two “tasks.”
  - When you do share, don’t talk for too long. Keep it as short as possible to be able to honestly share your relevant experience and let your partner know you do understand.
4. Intention
  - Be sure that sharing is to communicate understanding and empathy, to let your partner know you are with him/her.
  - Share your experience, not your opinion. Do not share in order to teach, instruct or edify.
  - The sharing can speak for itself as “This is what I felt, did or said” but not to say what s/he should do.

When you are finished sharing, find a way to turn the speaking back over to your partner. Most often s/he will simply pick up from there and may respond to your sharing. If there is silence, let it be. Silence is truly golden – much can happen within it. Let him/her take the lead.

**Reflection:**

1. Write a paragraph about a time when someone appropriately self-disclosed with you. How did this affect your spiritual growth experience and your connection to him/her?
  
2. Write a paragraph about a time when someone inappropriately self-disclosed with you. How did this affect your spiritual deepening?

**When you are finished, SAVE this file and attach it to an email message (or copy and paste everything to a new email message) to [ellen@fpcnorfolk.org](mailto:ellen@fpcnorfolk.org). Please use the file name as the Subject line.**

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