

The Witness Stance

Developed by Martha Isobel Lask and Peter Norlin (revised, 5-08)

“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing, there is a field. I’ll meet you there.”

Rumi (13th century Sufi mystic)

What is a “Witness Stance”?

Taking a “witness stance” means **paying special attention** with *intention, vigilance, and care*.

- 1) We operate from a *witnessing stance* when we:
 - Focus our attention (intention).
 - Take accountability for our personal assumptions and reactions (vigilance).
 - Suspend our judgment and evaluation and activate our compassion (care).
- 2) When we offer our perspectives to another person from a *witnessing stance*, we:
 - Take ownership for our own experience and viewpoint.
 - Consider that the other person may have a different experience.
 - Respond with curiosity to the other person’s reaction.

The Benefits of a Witness Stance

- When we listen carefully to each other and respond without judgment, we validate one another as human beings.
- We create a safe and compassionate environment for learning and growth.
- We establish a foundation from which to identify and expand common ground and to examine differences.

How to Witness

- 1) Pay attention with care and consciousness.
- 2) Recognize the assumptions you make.
- 3) Suspend judgment and evaluation.
- 4) Listen with compassion and humility.
- 5) Notice your own internal reactions.
- 6) Of your reactions, choose carefully what to offer, staying true to yourself and with the clear purpose of being helpful to the other person.
- 7) Offer your response, knowing that what you say is your personal perspective, e.g.:
 - “While you were speaking, here is what I was thinking, or feeling . . .”
 - “I find myself wondering about . . .”
 - “Here are the images or questions that were evoked as I was listening . . .”
- 8) Then, check in for a response from the listener, e.g.:
 - “What is your reaction to my response?”

“The experience of being understood versus interpreted is so compelling you can charge admission.” B. Joseph Pine II, *The Experience Economy*