

# ABOUT BNASAA: Workshop Guidelines

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Over the course of holding workshops, participants in the BNASAA process have found that there are certain guidelines for consultation and personal conduct that are important to understand and refer to during the course of a workshop experience. These guidelines are offered for your consideration and reflection and should be treated as general principles rather than rigid rules.

## Many ways to participate

In general, as a workshop participant you should never feel that you need to do anything that you are not comfortable doing. In any activity you are free to pass, take a turn later or simply remain quiet. Later on, if you feel like sharing, you can always join in.

## Breaks

If you find that you are uncomfortable in the group at any time you should feel free to quietly excuse yourself and take a break. If you feel like excusing yourself there is no need to explain or even to comment, since it is often the case that we may not know at the time exactly what our concern is. If you feel like you need to discuss something with someone, feel free to ask the Auxiliary Board Member or any of the session organizers. In all cases, feel free to return to the group or participate in discussion at a later time.

## Avoiding “cross-talk” and “advice”

When we gather in conference sessions our purpose in consultation is to speak from our own experience and focus on our own issues. It is important in all consultation to avoid “cross-talk,” which means directing comments to other individuals or giving feedback on other people’s comments unless invited to do so. We also avoid giving “advice” or offering opinions on how others should deal with specific situations. Instead we suggest that each person focus on their own experience and share from the heart about their personal insights in dealing with a particular issue or situation.

## The issue of touch

An area that can be particularly sensitive in sessions like this is the issue of touching or hugging. Because of our widely diverse experiences in situations like this, not all people are comfortable with unsolicited touching or hugging. There are also times in which we may feel strong emotions that bring tears and which may cause others to want to hug or

console us. Sometimes tears are a healthy part of the process and hugging or embracing may interrupt the process of experiencing the feelings that are occurring. At other times a hug or embrace during an emotional time may be very welcome and important. The general principle is to ask whether or not a person is comfortable with touching or hugging before you just assume it's okay. A simple question like "Would you like a hug?" is usually sufficient. If you are not comfortable being touched and find that someone is not aware of that, feel free to tell them that touching or hugging is uncomfortable and that you would prefer to relate in other ways. In all these situations it is important to understand that the reaction is usually not personal and relates to prior experiences and comfort levels.

## **Bahá'í standards of conduct**

In all BNASAA activities it is assumed that participants will comply with the overall Bahá'í standards of conduct including refraining from use of alcohol and drugs, observing appropriate levels of modesty in behaviour and dress and refraining from inappropriate sexual activity. If the meeting is held at a Bahá'í facility, then all ground-rules of that facility need to be observed. If the event is held at another facility, all must respect the requests of our hosts.

## **Physical expressions of intimacy**

Although the issue of sexual activity is included in the principle of Bahá'í standards of conduct, we have found that it has been helpful to be explicit about physical intimacy. There have been several instances at workshops in which physical intimacy between workshop participants, particularly if they are of the same gender, has created problems either for the individuals or others. It is important to understand that workshop participants come from a wide variety of backgrounds and, just as not everyone may be comfortable with issues of drug or alcohol addiction, not everyone is comfortable with physical intimacy between members of the same sex. In general, physical expressions of intimacy between participants in the workshop can be very problematic, even if it takes place completely in private. Even a seemingly innocuous exchange of hugs may be uncomfortable or confusing, especially if one of the members is in a vulnerable or emotional state of mind. For these reasons we ask all participants to err on the side of moderation when it comes to physical intimacy.

## **Intense emotional experiences**

In workshops of this type, particularly ones that involve discussions of abuse or abuse situations, participants sometimes experience intense memories or "flashbacks" of earlier experiences that can be highly emotional and even painful. This is a normal part of the recovery process and is often a very good sign of healing. But at the time it occurs, the memory can be frightening and somewhat disorienting. If you are experiencing some-

thing of this nature please make contact with a member of the group who you know and trust. Share what's going on and work out a plan to do what you need to do to protect and nurture yourself during this time.

## **Participants in abuse situations**

In conferences that deal with abuse issues there are many individuals who have been participants in abuse situations, often as the targets or “survivors” of abuse and sometimes as the initiator or “perpetrator” of abuse. It is our goal to make this a safe environment for everyone who has experienced abusive situations to be able to share and learn from others. This can sometimes lead to very uncomfortable situations, and, in fact, many healing workshops on abuse will not mix survivors and perpetrators in the same conference or workshop. If you have been the initiator of abuse and feel that this will be a topic you would like to share about, please speak with the conference and/or workshop organizers before taking part in any activities that may involve intimate sharing. If you have been the target or survivor of abuse and you feel uncomfortable in any way with the participation of others in the consultation, please share this also with conference and workshop organizers. It is our experience that both these needs can be met in BNASAA activities, but it requires careful consideration ahead of time and should include a plan to gain group consensus on how to handle these types of consultations.

## **Transformative vision**

These guidelines suggest that there are many issues that may arise in the course of this conference that can be perplexing or disturbing. It is our experience, however, that the transformative vision of the Cause can illuminate even the most tense or difficult situations. We are encouraged to keep this illuminating vision in our hearts and to turn its light onto every situation that arises so that we can nurture growth and transformation and foster the spirit of love and unity that is the essence of Bahá'u'lláh's gift to each of us.