



## DINNER TABLE PROCESS

**TIMING:** Friday afternoon; follows the break after Group Building

**EXPECTATION:** Process is committed to memory; all Staff participate in leading a Dinner Table process; Senior Staff backs-up Junior Staff and provides guidance during processes. First time staffers do not lead a process and other non-senior staff have the option to lead a process. First time staffers must prepare for the Dinner Table even though they will not be leading a process. Senior staffers are expected to back-up each leader, prompt and step in to facilitate if necessary.

**PURPOSE:** To bring to awareness that the past can still impact the present and that there are messages, positive and negative, that we take into our adult lives from the past. The negative ones can be the foundation upon which we create false selves. This task also begins the process of building a group container. It serves to help the Staff identify where the women are in their journey.

**ENERGY:** intentional, interested and compassionate

**VIDEO MODEL:** Watch this video to re-familiarize yourself with how to lead the Dinner Table Exercise: <https://vimeo.com/617271493/5b54177a50>

**INSIDE SET-UP:** SGL and Small Group members pull enough chairs from the outer circle to the area where the group will be doing the process. They sit in a circle and go through the following process. Other staff members stand near their assigned Dinner Table group but not too close, ready to begin when it is time.

### **PART 1: Small Group Leader (SGL) with group members**

1. SGL introduces herself to the group, and tells them that they are going to start with introducing themselves and telling where they are from. She goes first and the Attendees follow.
2. Remain sitting in the circle. SGL says,  
*"I invite you to close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths. Imagine your dinner table and who was around it when you were between the ages of eight and 12 years old. (pause) Imagine what the physical table looked like. (pause) Imagine the mood of the people sitting at the table. (pause) Imagine what you were like and how you felt as you sat at that table. (Pause for an extended time to allow them time to access these memories.)"*

*When you are present to this time in your life between the ages of eight and 12, go ahead and open your eyes."*

3. Instruct them that they are now going to go through the exercise that was just modeled. (You only need five chairs - one for Mom, Dad, Sibling 1, Sibling 2, and Attendee.)

NOTE: You may touch the Attendees if it feels appropriate. Always ask permission first.

## **PART 2: Other Staff join with the Small Group**

Attendees and staff stand in a small circle. Make sure that the chairs are moved out of the area that will represent the dinner table and pull them back in one by one as the woman adds family members to her dinner table. Pay attention that the area is not too cluttered with chairs and that the Attendees have space to be present to the process.

**Senior Most Staff Woman** starts the first process and is responsible for backing up the other women leading. This is not a time to over-process a woman, and one of the senior staff members should help prompt leaders to move onto the next step or physically step in to help move a process along if a leader is struggling or if the Attendee is getting stuck in story-telling.

**NOTE:** First time staffers DO NOT lead a process, but other non-senior staff have the option to lead a process.

- Ask for a volunteer. All others remain standing. Speak loudly enough for all group members to hear. Repeat EVERYTHING the Attendee says using her words.
- Staff members other than the SGL begin by saying, *“My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am going to be leading you in this process.”* Say, *“\_\_\_\_\_ (name), we’ve given you a chance to become present to your dinner table between the ages of 8 and 12. Would you please describe the physical table.”* (Round, square, dark wood, etc.) Eyes are open.

### **1. Father**

- Ask, *“Was your father at the dinner table?”*
- Say, *“Please choose an Attendee to be your father.”*
- Ask, *“Where would your father have sat at the table?”* Move the chair to that position, and have the role player sit there. (Oftentimes, dad was absent. Ask the woman to place her father wherever she wants in the room to symbolize how dad was absent. For example, she could place dad at a distance from the table with her back to the table or off to the side. DO NOT place the role player so far away from the group that they can’t hear.)
- Stand behind the father and motion for the Attendee to come stand beside you so that she is also behind the role player.
- Ask, *“What was your father’s mood during this time of your life? How did he show up to the dinner table?”* (His mood is his temperament, attitude, a description of his personality. Be careful to lead the woman away from talking about what her father is like currently.)
- Ask the role player to remember what the Attendee says. Repeat back EVERYTHING she says so that everyone can hear and to help the role player remember.
- Ask, *“If your dad were a color, what color would he be?”* REPEAT back.

NOTE: Things to avoid: Do not say things like “good” or “that’s great” when a woman describes her father, mother, siblings, etc. Stay away from making comments about what she says. Just keep moving.

## 2. Mom

- Ask, *“Was your mother at the dinner table?”*
- Repeat the above process for mom (Many times mom was busy serving and didn’t sit at the table. The Attendee can choose to have her standing at the table or slightly away from the table to indicate this. Again, DO NOT place the role player so far away from the group that they can’t hear.)

## 3. Siblings (2)

- Ask, *“Do you have any siblings?”*
- If they have more than two siblings, say, *“Please choose the two siblings who impacted your life or your experience most during this time of your life.”*
- Repeat the above process for each sibling.

## 4. The Attendee

- Ask, *“Where did you sit at the table?”*
- Have her sit. Stand behind her as you repeat the above process, having her describe herself and choose a color for herself.
- Have another staff member help you remember what she says if necessary.

## 5. Summarize

- Say, *“Take a look at the people sitting around your table.”* (Give her time to look at each person.)
- Say, *“Now I’d like you to close your eyes.”* (Her eyes will **REMAIN CLOSED** for the rest of the process.)
- Say, *“Think back to that time when you were between the ages of 8 and 12. Imagine the people around your dinner table and become present to that time in your life.”*  
(Give her time to become present to this.)
- As the Attendee keeps her eyes closed, recap each family member’s mood and color in order (Dad, Mom, Sibling 1, Sibling 2, Attendee) by saying, *“Dad showed up to the table and he was (have role player repeat back what she said) and his color was (insert whatever she said)”*. The last one will be the Attendee. *“You showed up to the table and you were (have staff member help you repeat back what she said) and your color was (insert whatever color she said).”*

## 6. Messages

- **Keeping her eyes closed**, ask *“Based on this time in your life what messages did you receive, either spoken or unspoken, from the people in your life? What were the things you came to believe about yourself?”* (Say these two sentences together. They are not two separate questions. They are the same question asked differently.) The goal is to get two to three clear messages/beliefs about herself. They should refer to something about her BEING – IDENTITY – WORTH/VALUE, etc. For example, if the woman says, “My dad was a jerk to me.” Ask her, “So what does that say about you?” Don’t sell the woman short by settling for something shallow or something about the other person. Probe a bit more if necessary to get to the message she internalized.
- Repeat what the woman says, but change it to a “you” statement. For example, “I am worthless.” Say back to her, “You are worthless.”
- When you have two or three messages, thank her and say “Good work.” A couple other staff members should also thank her and let her know she did good work. **(NO APPLAUSE)** Ask for the next woman to volunteer.

### Continue through all Attendees

- Continue until all Attendees have gone through the exercise.
- DO NOT REMIND THEM TO TAKE THEIR ROCKS WITH THEM ONCE THE EXERCISE IS OVER.
- Once all the women have been processed, all Staff except the SGL leave the group and the SGL then debriefs the experience with her group.

### THINGS TO REMEMBER...

- Keep the energy up and moving forward.
- You may touch the Attendees if it feels appropriate. Always ask permission first.
- Be aware of time. Guard against storytelling.
- Do not make comments or elaborate or come up with your own words about what an Attendee is saying.
- Repeat back what the Attendee says.
- The Attendee keeps her **eyes closed** during the summary of the family members and herself and all the way through until the end of the process. Keeping her eyes closed when she is hearing the summary and formulating what she came to believe about herself will allow her to stay present to that time in her life and the feelings surrounding it.
- It is OK for things to be left unsaid during this exercise. This is not a time to “process” them.

**NOTE to SENIOR STAFF:** If another staff woman is having trouble moving the woman along in her Dinner Table exercise, whisper in her ear what she needs to say. If it is still taking too long or she is struggling, STEP IN and take over. Do NOT worry about stepping on the toes of the staff woman. Likewise, if a Senior Staff member steps in, do not take it personally. All of the groups need to finish at about the same time.