

Triangle Insight Meditation Center

Ruth King's Racial Affinity Group Guidelines

From *Mindful of Race: Transforming Racism from The Inside Out*, by Ruth King, 2018

The intention of a RAG is to be mindful and to create a safe place to explore racial ignorance, aversion, and urgency. Discussion topics should be focused on understanding group member racial conditioning at the individual and group identity levels. The group should not focus on addressing social issues or learning about other races. Rather, RAG members are to discover intimately their relationship with their own race. Some groups have studied various books or explored genealogy, family programming, racial trauma, or history museums. The idea is not to have a tight script but to have a firm inner focus and safe container for deepening understanding.

Waking up together in a RAG is not insignificant. The intimacy of a small group makes the emotions and vulnerability more intense. Our experiences will fluctuate from being aware that we are unskilled, to having what we are unaware of pointed out, to noticing and even being surprised by our own goodness. When we add the shame and embarrassment that leaks out when we discover what we don't know, or when we say or do something that exposes our imperfections, ignorance, aversion, or selfishness, we may want to withdraw from the group to avoid embarrassment and discomfort. For these reasons, I offer the following guidelines, which have been helpful in forming and sustaining a RAG.

- Attend your RAG eager to listen, learn, share, and be heard.
- Commit to your RAG. Inconsistent attendance or distractions by outside interests negatively affect safety and the quality of disclosure.
- Throughout your RAG gathering, maintain respect for the humanness of each person participating.
- At the beginning of each meeting, commit to confidentiality, pledging that whatever is said in the RAG stays in the RAG.
- Only the person sharing should speak. There are no interruptions or cross-talking. As the group becomes more stable, engagement or dialogue can be added.
- When sharing, you determine the level of disclosure and vulnerability you will express.
- When speaking, take your time. Speak slowly and experience your words.
- When someone else is sharing, pay attention to what is being said and recognize the courage it takes to say it.
- Relax and release expectations. No opinions, judgments, or dislikes are to be expressed (verbally or nonverbally) toward the person sharing.
- Tune into your own experience—how you are being touched and shaped by the gifts offered. Be curious about your inner experience, not just your thoughts.
- No questions should be asked of the person sharing. Listeners should receive what is being said as a gift that is being slowly unwrapped. You can't know what the gift will be until it has opened, and it is always opening. Maintain compassionate patience and curiosity.
- While gentle, clarifying questions can be useful, listeners are not to probe, argue, seek agreement, or invoke anger or passive forms of retaliation. Nor should listeners speak of their own story when someone is sharing. Do not in any way take attention away from the person speaking.
- When you feel uneasy, turn inward to how you feel, while also staying present to what you are sharing or to what is being shared.
- At any time during your RAG, when things become too intense or if you feel uneasy, you can request that the group pause in silence together. Stillness and breathing may be all that are required. You may also track your experience in silence by applying the RAIN inquiry (recognize, allow, investigate, and nurture). Or, if the person speaking is willing, they may track their experience out loud while others bear compassionate witness.
- Should you want to talk about something that was said during your RAG once the group time has ended, ask permission of the person before engaging.
- Whenever you are expressing your concern, make presence and deepening the relationship a priority.