**Blackbird Learning Circle Collective.**

**Anti-oppression statement**

* At Blackbird we are learning together to interrogate dominant culture, and practice

new ways to live.

* We are committed to unlearning oppressive behaviours, and creating safe and

 inclusive spaces for people of all identities and backgrounds.

* Our goal is to create a community that diligently examines our participation in systems

 of oppression and takes active steps to build a more just and equitable way of life.

### **Expectations**

We expect all people participating in co-operative work to;

* Demonstrate self-awareness and situational awareness, acknowledging the space we occupy in relation to others.
* Engage others with warmth and curiosity.
* Strive to create safe, inclusive, and compassionate spaces for each other, acknowledging that succeeding at this requires deeply understanding people with different backgrounds and experiences.
* Understand that everyone has different levels of knowledge and comfort with these ideas
* Find compassionate ways of holding high standards, insisting that everybody is committed to a process of learning and growth.
* Be willing to engage with critical feedback when it is offered.
* Ask for help if conflicts arise that cannot be resolved within two days. Be willing to engage in our conflict resolution process of transformative justice.

**Transphobic, ableist, racist, sexist, homophobic, and xenophobic words**

**and actions are not acceptable and will be challenged immediately.**

**We engage with a trauma informed approach, understanding that systemic**

**oppressions are harmful, and any associated words or actions within our spaces**

**will cause further harm.**

**The transformative justice process will be offered, or exclusion agreed.**

**Transformative Justice process**

<https://transformharm.org/tj_resource/transformative-justice-a-brief-description/>

Transformative Justice (TJ) is a political framework and approach for responding to violence, harm and abuse. At its most basic, it seeks to respond to violence without creating more violence and/or engaging in harm reduction to lessen the violence. TJ can be thought of as a way of “making things right,” getting in “right relation,” or creating justice together.

It is not only identifying what we don’t want, but proactively practicing and putting in place things we want, such as healthy relationships, good communication skills, skills to de-escalate active or “live” harm and violence in the moment, learning how to express our anger in ways that are not destructive, incorporating healing into our everyday lives.

**Process**;

Most TJ interventions involve a community accountability process, where a few members of the community work directly with the person who was harmed to take accountability for the harm they’ve caused.

This process, in the best-case scenario, works so that the person who caused harm understands their actions and the impact they had on the survivor(s) and others involved, apologises, makes amends, repairs damage caused by their actions and–most importantly–works to change their behaviour so that the harm doesn’t happen again. Changing your behaviour is a fundamental part of taking accountability for harm you’ve done and it is often one of the main things survivors want:

*I just don’t want them to do this to anyone else. I don’t want anyone else to have to go through what I had to go through.*

**Blackbird process?**

**Community gather to discuss collectively.**

**Two people contact the person who caused harm to discuss the incident - empathy/curiosity. Co-create goals for things to change.**

**Two people (different) contact the person harmed to discuss the incident - empathy/curiosity. Co-create goals for things to change.**

**Exclusion of the person who caused harm whilst this process is going on.**

**Bring thoughts and goals of the people back to the group - what do they need and how can this be repaired? Can it be repaired?**

**Consensus decision making**

https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/seeds-for-change-consensus-decision-making

**How does consensus work?**

**Blackbird- may need membership of the collective- common goal signed up to?**

There are many different formats and ways of building consensus. Some groups have developed detailed procedures, whereas in other groups it may be an organic process. This also depends on the size of the group and how well people know each other. Below we have outlined a process that covers all the aspects of consensus, but can easily be adapted to fit your group. There are however a few conditions that have to be met for consensus building to be possible:

* **Common Goal:** All members of the group/meeting need to be united in a common goal, whether it is an action, living communally or greening the neighbourhood. It helps to clearly establish what this overall goal of the group is and to write it down as well. In situations where consensus seems difficult to achieve, it helps to come back to this common goal and to remember what the group is all about.
* **Commitment to consensus building:** All members of the group must be committed to reaching consensus on all decisions taken. It can be very damaging if individuals secretly want to return to majority voting, just waiting for the chance to say “I told you it wouldn’t work”. Consensus requires commitment, patience and willingness to put the group first.
* **Sufficient time:** for making decisions as well as to learn to work in this way.
* **Clear process:** Make sure that the group is clear about the process they will use for tackling any given issue. Agree beforehand on processes and guidelines. In most cases this will include having one or more facilitators to help the group move through the process. See also our briefing on Facilitation.
* **The process-**:
1. The problem, or decision needing to be made, is defined and named. It helps to do this in a way that separates the problems/questions from personalities.
2. Brainstorm possible solutions. Write them all down, even the crazy ones. Keep the energy up for quick, top-of-the head suggestions.
3. Create space for questions or clarification on the situation.
4. Discuss the options written down. Modify some, eliminate others, and develop a short list. Which are the favourites?
5. State the proposal or choice of proposals so that everybody is clear.
6. Discuss the pros and cons of each proposal — make sure everybody has a chance to contribute.
7. If there is a major objection, return to step 6 (this is the time-consuming bit). Sometimes you may need to return to step 4.
8. If there are no major objections, state the decisions and test for agreement.
9. Acknowledge minor objections and incorporate friendly amendments.
10. Discuss.
11. Check for consensus.

#### **What if we cannot agree?**

In all but a very few cases the above model will achieve consensus within the group providing there is commitment to coming to a decision. However there are times when one or more people disagree more or less strongly with the rest of the group and no solution is in sight. Listed below are some ways of dealing with this. The first two, non-support and standing aside, allow the group to proceed with the decision, whilst allowing reservations to be expressed. See also the section When not to use consensus

**Non-support:** “I don’t see the need for this, but I’ll go along with it.”

**Standing aside:** “I personally can’t do this, but I won’t stop others from doing it.” The person standing aside is not responsible for the consequences. This should be recorded in the minutes.

**Veto/major objection:** A single veto/major objection blocks the proposal from passing. If you have a major objection it means that you cannot live with the proposal if it passes. It is so objectionable to you/those you are representing that you will stop the proposal. A major objection isn’t an “I don’t really like it “ or “I liked the other idea better.” It is an “I cannot live with this proposal if it passes, and here is why?.!”. The group can either accept the veto or discuss the issue further and draw up new proposals. The veto is a powerful tool and should be used with caution.

**Agree to disagree:** the group decides that no agreement can be reached on this issue. What can be done when we genuinely need to reach agreement and we are poles apart? Here are some suggestions:

* Allow the person most concerned to make the decision.
* Leave the decision for later or take a break. Have an energising activity or a cup of tea.
* Ask everyone to argue convincingly the point of view they like the least.
* Break down the decision into smaller areas. See which ones you can agree on and see what points of disagreement are left.
* Identify the assumptions and beliefs underlying the issue. Get to the heart of the matter.
* Imagine what will happen in six months, a year, five years’ time if you don’t agree. How important is the decision now?
* Put all the possibilities into a hat and pull one out. Agree in advance on this solution.
* Bring in a facilitator. If your group is unable to work through conflicts or if similar issues keep coming up, think about bringing in a professional facilitator or mediator who is trained in conflict-resolution techniques.
* Some groups also have majority voting as a backup, often requiring an overwhelming vote such as 80 or 90% to make a decision valid.

**Leaving the group:** If one person continually finds him/herself at odds with the rest of the group, it may be time to think about the reasons for this. Is this really the right group to be in? A group may also ask a member to leave.

#### **Guidelines for consensus building**

* Make sure everyone understands the topic/problem. While building consensus make sure everyone is following, listening to and understanding each other.
* Ensure that all members contribute their ideas and knowledge related to the subject.
* Explain your own position clearly. Listen to other member’s reactions and consider them carefully before pressing your point.
* Be respectful and trust each other. This is not a competition. Nobody must be afraid to express their ideas and opinions. Remember that we all have different values and opinions, different behaviours, different areas and thresholds of distress.
* Do not assume that someone must win and someone must lose when discussion reaches stalemate. Instead look for the most acceptable solution for all parties.
* Distinguish between vetos/major objections and discomfiture/amendments. A veto/major objection is a fundamental disagreement with the core of the proposal.
* Do not change your mind simply to avoid conflict and achieve harmony. When agreement seems to come quickly and easily, be suspicious, explore the reasons and be sure that everyone accepts the solution for basically similar or complementary reasons. Many of us are scared of open disagreement and avoid it where we can. Easily reached consensus may cover up low esteem or lack of safety for some people to express their disagreements openly.
* Differences of opinion are natural and to be expected. Seek them out and try to involve everyone in the decision process. Disagreements can help the group’s decision, because with a wide range of information and opinions, there is a greater chance the group will hit on more adequate solutions. However you must also be flexible and willing to give something up to reach an agreement in the end.
* Remember that the ideal present behind consensus is empowering versus overpowering, agreement versus majorities/minorities. The process of consensus is what you put into it as an individual and a part of the group. Be open and honest about the reasons for your view points.
* Think before you speak, listen before you object.
* Allow enough time for the process of building consensus. Being quick is not a sign of quality. Thinking issues through properly needs time. For taking major decisions or in a controversial situation, it is always a good idea to postpone the decisions, “to sleep on it”.

Consensus process can help a group find the best possible solution to a problem, but it is not an effective way to make either-or-choices between evils, for members will never be able to agree which is worse. If the group has to choose between being shot and hung, flip a coin. When a group gets bogged down trying to make a decision, stop for a moment and consider: Are we blocked because we are given an intolerable situation? Are we being given the illusion, but not the reality, of choice? Might our most empowering act be to refuse to participate in this farce?