

# Mini Companionship Training

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## Companionship Defined

- Companionship is a relationship responsive to suffering
- Companionship is a relationship supportive of recovery and wellness
- Companionship is a public relationship

Companionship is a way to respond to a person is struggling with a mental health issue. Companionship builds a relationship in which we support an individual in moving toward becoming well and whole. We offer companionship in public settings, where others are present.

## Five Areas of Concern

- Children's mental health
- Trauma
- Serious Mental Illness
- Substance & Behavioral addictions
- Issues of aging

Families seek help and support caring for a child with special needs – delays in learning and in growth, emotional struggles, difficulties in behavior or relationships. We see the effects of trauma – violence, abuse and neglect on a person's life. We see the impact of a serious mental illness – depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia – on individuals and their families. We know that substance use – alcohol, street drugs the abuse of prescription medication – takes a tremendous toll on our communities. We know seniors and their families coping with issues of memory loss and failing minds.

## Companionship Begins with Sensitivity, Compassion and Concern

- Sensitivity – we pick up signals of another’s suffering through our senses
- Feelings of sympathy, empathy and compassion are triggered in us
- Concerns arise

This is natural – we are made to be sensitive, compassionate and concerned

We pick up the signals of suffering through our senses. We see a person who is isolated. We hear the cries of pain and frustration. We can smell the bodily odor of a person who cannot care for themselves. We can taste in our own mouth the texture and spoiled flavor of food fished from a garbage can to feed a homeless person’s hunger. We can feel on our own skin that same sun and cold that touches an individual wandering the streets, alone in their room, or stuck in a cell. Our feelings are stirred by the plight of another. We know what it is like to be isolated, forgotten, afraid. We feel in ourselves something of the sadness, the anxiety, the hopelessness, the other person is experiencing. We have compassion – literally feel with the person the hurt, the confusion, the helplessness of their situation. There may be very little if anything we can do immediately – but share the concern that arises in us. This is all natural – we are equipped to be sensitive, compassionate and concerned for our neighbor.

## Hospitality

- Creating safe space with another person
- Treating another person with dignity and respect; seeing the other person as a worthy and valuable human being
- Offering refreshment, nourishment, a time and place to rest

We don't have to rush right in. We can begin to create safe space with a nod and a smile – start at a little distance today, move a little closer the next time we meet, be patient in our connecting. How we greet and treat a person is part of the practice of hospitality. We can hold another person “in the light,” seeing each person as sacred, bathed in love – someone of infinite worth and value. Hospitality includes simple gestures – inviting a person to sit down, offering coffee or cold water, tea – cup and loaf, shared signs of encouragement and nurture.

## Neighboring

- Sharing common time and space
- Beginning as human beings
- Saying a simple “hello”
- “I’m Chris. How do you like to be called?”
- Starting with what we have in common
- A “frameless” relationship

A neighbor is someone who shares time and space with us. We share something like 75% of our DNA with flatworms. Think how much we have in common as human beings. A neighbor is another human being, like us in so many ways. It is enough to say a simple hello. Companionship does not require an answer or elaborate conversation. “I’m Craig .... How do you like to be called? This is not an interview. I don’t need to know your name. I don’t have to tell you all about myself – my personal history, my background, training or work. I don’t need to know your particulars. We can start with what we have in common – things like the weather, the environment we’re in, the activity around us. In companionship we set aside almost all of the “frames” we often use with each other – teacher and student, customer and clerk, doctor and patient, boss and employee, driver and passenger. We step away from our positions of power and prestige, and sit with each other on two simple wooden stools. In companionship we are neighbors, basically equal.

## Sharing the Journey Side by Side

There are basically three ways we can be with another person:

- we can stand behind someone pushing and telling them where to go.
- we can be face to face
- we can share the journey side by side

In companionship, we share the journey side by side, looking out at the world together. We do not see things exactly the same. The world is a little different for each of us. In companionship we learn from each other. In companionship it is not about who is right or what is better. Our basic role is to listen.

## Tips on Listening

- It is a gift simply to listen
- Listen for the human themes and feelings
- Listen to yourself
- Take care with responses
- Listen over time and in community
- Listen for the words of faith, hope and love
- Listen for a person's spiritual story

Think about the last time someone just listened to you, without interrupting, or jumping in with their own stuff. It is an enormous gift simply to listen. It may not be possible to get everything a person is saying. We can pick up on the feelings and the human themes of a person's story – people want to be safe, have friends, work, enjoy life, find answers, belong. Listen to yourself. As the other person shares their story - feelings, memories, thoughts and ideas will come up in you. We don't have to share what's coming up in us, but it may help us tune in to what the other is talking about. Take care with responses. Don't assume you know. Invite the other person to "say more." "Help me understand." "How so?" "What is that like?" "What does that mean to you?" Be prepared to listen over time, and as the person shares their life and story with others. Listen for the words of faith, hope and love, the language of the soul. Listen for the person's spiritual story – what is at the core of their life and identity, the religious connections and spiritual practices that are important to this individual, their understanding of others and the world, the universe and what is holy and sacred. In companionship this is perhaps the greatest gift we can offer – listening to a person's story with an ear for how this individual sees and experiences the spirit.



## Limits and Boundaries

Companions have limits:

- Physical, emotional and intellectual
- Personal and social
- Spiritual

Model setting limits, keeping boundaries and working as part of team

Practice saying, "I'm not able to do that."

The practices of companionship define our boundaries. Our hospitality is limited. We are neighbors, who come alongside and listen. We help a person connect with care and resources, rather than trying to meet a need ourselves.

## Mutuality

In companionship we move toward increasing mutuality, in a relationship marked by:

- deepening authenticity
- increasing personal responsibility
- an expanding circle of care
- growing social life and community participation
- renewed family, friendship and neighborhood connections

Mutuality characterizes companionship from the first moment. We seek to be honest, authentic, real with each other. We model taking personal responsibility and encourage the person we are companionship to do the same. We ourselves have a circle of care and support and we support the person we are companionship to develop their own care and support network. Companionship does not encourage dependency. We celebrate with a person healthy, growing connections with others.

## The Practice of Accompaniment

- Naming needs
- “The need for charity is an opportunity for community”
- Consult, confirm and refer
- Encourage partnerships and a circle of care
- “Go with,” or hold the person in thought and prayer

As we listen to a person’s story, an individual may begin to name specific needs – shelter, medical help, food, transportation, counseling, clothing, financial assistance. A companion could become quickly exhausted trying to meet a person’s needs. But we are companions – not taxi companies, landlords, banks, grocery stores, clinics. Our role as companions is to support a person in finding resources in the community and building an ongoing circle of care. Consult, confirm that a resource or program is appropriate. Refer. As a companion, you may meet a person at an appointment, or go with them using public transportation. Most often, we simply hold the person in our thoughts and prayers.