

NAME: .....

# Foundation Training Handbook

Please bring with you to every module

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All teaching materials in this handbook belong to the Centre for Systemic Constellations

**Content of this Course Handbook include:**

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## Welcome

Welcome to the *Centre for Systemic Constellations Foundation Training*. We are delighted that you have decided to take this learning journey with us.

This training was first taught in 2001, and since then the course has continued to be developed, refined and re-designed by some of the most experienced UK and international constellation facilitators and trainers. Teaching topics have been added, and the course structure altered and improved to reflect both the changing needs of learners, and the development of systemic constellation work during this time.

We would like to welcome you specifically to your place in this growing lineage of learners and practitioners of constellation work, and to the CSC professional community.

This training offers you an opportunity to develop a working understanding of the systemic constellation approach. It can be undertaken as a stand-alone course, or as the first part of the Applied Professional Training (or year 2), which takes students on to the level of learning required to run workshops and groups.

### **Learning Objectives of the Foundation Course:**

- To introduce the underpinning principles and practice of the systemic constellation approach, with a particular focus on the family as our primary system.
- To achieve a foundation-level understanding of the core concepts of systemic constellation work, both in group and 1-1 contexts.
- To develop somatic sensitivity to the field through participation in experiential, theoretical and practical learning.
- To begin to establish an understanding of what it means to have a 'systemic lens,' or wider view, with supporting methodology for finding resolution to many personal issues.
- To provide opportunities to constellate (with support) those issues that relate to your professional orientation.

Please bring this training handbook with you to each module. The hand-outs included in this document are designed to accompany the teaching sessions, and are not written as stand-alone teaching material.

We hope that you enjoy this training and find it personally and professionally inspiring and enriching.

Please let us know if there is anything we can do to further support you. Your comments and feedback are always welcome.

*The CSC Faculty*

## Teaching Topics

- Establish the holding framework of the group
- The frame of the personal learning journey
- The primary system – us as parents, partners, siblings, sons, daughters  
– what it means to belong to a family and how families thrive
- The Orders - the organising principles of systems
- The definition of health as wholeness, strength, balance, completeness, hierarchy, presence, bonding, belonging & attachment
- Working with the field & the system
- How does phenomenology help
- The self as part of the system
- Getting in tune with the client - somatic sensing and the development of body based intelligence
- The Orders of Helping - what is asked of us when we help others
- Working with conscience – personal, systemic & the conscience of the greater whole
- The four different types of feelings
- Radical inclusion & the consequences of exclusion
- Identification, entanglement & atonement - the key dynamics revealed in trans-generational work
- Managing balance & reciprocity
- Including fate, the spirit & the soul
- The language of constellations
- Stance & posture in constellation work
- Reading a constellation to illuminate the practice
- Constellation as ritual & ceremony
- Endings and their place in the system

## The Orders

In systemic constellation work we use the term 'orders' to describe the natural underpinning structures and forces that influence family and social life. They are invisible to most people, which can make them difficult to attend to, but they have a profound effect on our wellbeing.

We think of orders as empirically derived observations that seem like principles, but are in fact softer – as there are more exceptions that are not found in orders such as gravity or electro-magnetism. Following systemic orders is enabling, and ignoring them creates consequences. At their most basic they are few and simple, but if you study Love's Hidden Symmetry you will be able to see their many elaborations.

### The Orders are:

- 1) Place
- 2) Time & Space
- 3) Belonging
- 4) Exchange

The following may help orientate you:

- Orders serve love and intimacy. When followed, love can flow, and there is peace and sufficient strength to act.
- At their simplest they describe the power of time and space. They show that what comes before has precedence over what comes after, and they show that inclusion of the whole is what 'peace' means. They emphasise matching exchange, and elaborate the consequence of identifications and entanglements.
- They relate to the human condition and are not culture specific – they work below the level of cultural norms and behaviours. They are not about morality; they have not been invented; they are neither exhortations nor rules.
- They emerged out of our evolutionary biological history, and are not politically correct. They prioritise the group over the individual, biology over mind, and they emphasise our core survival needs - to bond, to exchange and to cohere. They emphasize deep differences between the genders.
- Following them supports modesty, gratitude and respect, which often require us to deflate. They see guilt in some ways as more strengthening than innocence, emphasizing the importance of personal guilt, depending on incompleteness, and focusing on the costs and consequences of actions. They include death as part of life, including the presence of the ancestors.
- They touch the soul and re-establish basic trust.

## **Place**

- Place configures our relationships and shapes our awareness.
- We each have an equal place in the system.
- When one element or person changes then all must change.
- Each person needs to find their right place in the system, a place they can trust, which gives them safety and inner quiet so that they can function at their best.
- When someone is in the right place, this is marked by feelings of innocence, often experienced as conscientiousness.

## **Time**

- Each of us has a history that influences, constrains and makes possible what follows. Recognising this allows for a deep connection to life.
- Time travels one way, so those who came before have a certain priority, since they have made possible what comes after, whether for good or ill.
- Yet present members are the ones to whom current loyalty must be directed.
- We need to connect respectfully to the past without feeling entangled by it.
- Past and present together lead to a realistic energy for the future.

## **Belonging**

- Parents know deep satisfaction when they are 'taken' by their children. Children know peace when they 'take' their parents.
- The bonding love is blind to the details of what parents do or fail to do. Children act as if love could tolerate no difference; there is an urge to bond by being like parents. Out of love, children follow their parents even in suffering as if this demonstrates loyalty.
- The bonding love is so strong it blinds the child - this is known as blind love.
- Children unconsciously aspire to equal their parents in suffering and to care for them by taking on their suffering. Although acting out of love and believing they are doing good, they begin to function as their parents' parents and live out their parents' greatest fears by damaging themselves. Blind love protects bonding, but they reverse the flow of giving and taking and thus inadvertently perpetuate suffering.
- When children say, 'under no circumstances will I ever be like you', they still love their parents blindly and are bound tightly to them.
- Children outwardly follow the more dominant parent, but inwardly they follow the other parent.

- By maintaining loyalty outwardly to one parent and inwardly to the other, children are able to hold the family together. But the system doesn't achieve the kind of balance that members experience as natural and effortless love.

## **Exchange**

- The need to maintain a balance between giving and taking is an order of love of the personal conscience.
- The need for balance is one of our basic needs; it has effects everywhere.
- A person who gives is in a superior position. Because of having given, the person feels the right to receive something in return. The person who takes feels a debt to the one who has given. The only way to feel free of the indebtedness is to give in return. (Entitlement is what innocence feels like in the realm of exchange; guilt feels like indebtedness.)
- When talking about giving and taking in love, what we're talking about is not what it looks like on the outside, but what happens on the inside with respect to one's ability to touch and be touched. When you give with love and that which you have given is taken, you feel wonderful.
- The balance of giving and taking is attended to in the heart.
- Balance cannot be restored by forgiving. Forgiving destroys the exchange and the relationship. 'For the sake of our love, I'm doing something that hurts you, so that our relationship won't be destroyed. But I'll do less to you out of love.' The resolution lies in turning a hurtful exchange back onto a path of a good exchange.
- When a person refuses to return the bad, the relationship is destroyed.
- Also, a rebalancing by atonement (evening things up by suffering) is common but destructive. The person is concentrated on themselves and can't see the other's love. Atonement is easier, even though it doesn't do anyone any good.
- The rule of thumb: the one who has taken more leaves.
- When you work systemically, even though you are working to find a solution for the client, you must serve and protect the wholeness of the system. Therefore, you must connect yourself to those who are excluded.

## The Eight Stages of a Constellation

Before we look at the eight stages of a constellation, it is important to grasp the guiding principles that underpin the process throughout.

These are:

- Always work in the moment, and with presence and awareness
- Remember *everything* is significant
- Focus on both the detail, *and* the widest possible view
- Working phenomenologically requires us to stand on the 'edge of not knowing' at each stage of the process
- Remember that the energy of a constellation is finite – this must be attended to
- Bring respect, without judgement, to the work and acknowledge that everything and everyone has a place.
- Include all in your heart

### The stages of a Constellation

#### 1. Getting in Tune with Yourself

- Find the present, centred and still place inside yourself
- Somatic sensing - body-based knowing, opening to the field of the client from here
- Sit with the client until you are sufficiently open and ready to work

#### 2. Getting in Tune with the Client

- Remember resonance and attunement
- Find the place of the client's deepest longing, and establish their heart's desire
- Feel into the energy field between you, notice your own body-based responses
- Notice what is emerging
- Work with any 'secondary feelings' to bring them to primary immediacy
- Gather necessary factual information
- Interrupt unhelpful information or direction of conversation
- Wait until you know where to start – what and how to set up

#### 3. The Constellation

- Some capacity to see the solution needing awakening before the work can begin
- Diagnosis - Is the issue personal trauma or guilt? Is it systemic?
- Is the issue about 'reaching out' or is it a systemic entanglement?
- Which orders are awry?
- Attend to centring, respect and presence during the set-up process.
- No talking, honour the field
- Work phenomenologically



#### **4. Reading a Constellation**

- Notice everything – the direction of gaze, posture, focus, strength
- Attend regularly to the client – remember it is their process
- Decide whether to move representatives, or simply allow free movement
- Decide who to focus on when gathering data – encourage clean descriptions
- Help representatives state their feelings cleanly, concisely and in very few words
- Manage representatives who stray into personal issues
- Decide who to take care of if the burden is too heavy
- Manage choice points such as the dead - should they lie down or stand?

#### **5. Movements & Possible interventions**

- Use standard configurations
- Notice position shifts that make difference
- Identify what is needed and note the difference between bowing and reaching out
- Bring in support and resource as required
- Amplify entanglement or walking away.
- Standing with the dead and acknowledging their fate

#### **6. Creating & Using Sentences**

- Use simple compressed sentences that touch the soul
- If necessary translate the representative's actual words to reveal & resolve
- State facts, stay with reality, highlight tautologies
- Use sentences to name the key dynamic
- Check a sentence is truly felt by representatives

#### **7. Endings**

- Create a visual image for the client
- Ensure client has a felt experience of being in the 'right place'
- Leave client in good relationship with what they have seen and done
- Know...
  - ... when to leave work incomplete
  - ... when something needs spelling out
  - ... when something is to be encouraged in the outer world
  - ... it is not necessary to have all in a good place
  - ... when energy is draining away
  - ... secrets – when there is no permission to expose them
- Return everyone involved to their primary capacity

#### **8. After the work**

- Attend to the client – what is needed?
- Is the client present? What support do they need?
- Attend to the representatives? Do they need de-rolling?
- Attend to the holding circle of the group
- Attend to the space

## The Initial Interview

- Listen carefully to the first ten words. Capture them. Trust them. They will contain important clues informing the direction of the piece of work, whether it is content or tone (delivery style) that proves significant.
- Aim for the interview to be as short as possible, without padding or filler questions.
- Find out who belongs & what happened (facts); discourage opinions & value judgements.
- Notice whether the issue holder really wants help/seeks change or whether they are recruiting you to support them in staying loyal to the problem. We are loyal to our problems because loyalty protects our belonging and allows us to feel innocent. Ambivalence is easier than action.
- It is crucial not to be seduced by a story. Empathy can lead to a helper joining the system under consideration. If the story were accurate or useful, it would have already led to a solution. Be explicit about this; one way to check is to ask how the situation and/or the person would look and feel differently if the constellation delivered what they want.
- Notice whether the issue holder already knows the answer they claim to be seeking.
- Notice the quality of contact between the issue holder and you, and let that inform the direction you take. Is the eye contact good? (Closing the eyes and 'disappearing' is a clue that someone is not available to be in the present relationship, actively seeking a solution.) Is the issue holder genuinely curious? Are they evasive? Be explicit about how you are experiencing the contact and name what might bring closer cooperation in the service of the solution.
- Use your body to sense where the opening is.
- If the issue holder is describing themselves as powerless, or as a victim, search for the perpetrator energy instead. Encourage them to own and investigate their own part in the problem they are bringing.
- Be alert to characters who are central to the situation and deserving of attention. Seek out entanglements and identifications in the system. Who is being excluded? Who is missing? Who has been left out?
- Listen for upset in the orders; judgement against bosses, founders, elders. Who is too big? Who is too little?

- Listen for resources and strengths that may be drawn on. This is another point at which you might ask the Issue Holder to describe the resolved future. Ask: “How would I know? What would be different?”
- At the latter stage of the interview, allow yourself to go into soft focus. Tune in, in both an active and a passive way. Trust images, songs, any scraps of information that come.
- Double check you have the factual information you need. “*Is there anything else you think I should know?*”
- Decide what to set up. Start small and near, and build from there.

## Sentences in Constellation Work

### Overview

Many of the books and transcripts will show you the basic lexicon of sentences. There are about thirty and they need to be memorised. However, you need to be able to compose them afresh for each new situation. Here are some guidelines:

Make sure that they are delivered calmly, with full eye contact and with the support of breath. Encourage representatives to tell you if the sentence doesn't feel right or true, so you can amend it.

Sentences express truths, but there are always several ways of telling a truth. Go for the one that accentuates the positive - the glass being half full. Turn complaints into wishes, keep the door open for a future hope.

Make sure they are about the speaker rather than the receiver - that they use 'I' rather than 'you'. This way the feelings are owned rather than projected.

Keep them short and blunt without euphemisms or cliché. If your sentences have several parts then create pauses, and encourage them to be spoken in small chunks. Be daring, tread on taboos.

Use tautologies to clear confusions and set boundaries.

Aim to touch the soul rather than the mind. Use the Bible as inspiration!

The most basic resolving sentences are variations on the following:

*Thank you*

*I honour you*

*Please.....*

*Sorry*

*You belong*

*It's mine to carry*

*I give it to you back*

*I withdraw*

## Creating & Using Sentences in Constellation Work

Constellations have their own particular use of language. During a constellation, the facilitator will offer sentences that state the truth, reveal the hidden dynamics or test the situation through the representatives. Sentences open a space, create movement and identify a new image or resolution. What you are seeking is a sentence that is simple, yet has weight and a depth that touch those involved.

In everyday life, a lot of our language tends to be shallow & without weight. Here we are looking to offer words that get to the heart of the matter without fluff, dilution or distraction.

Sentences can be categorised in to four different types:

1. **Words that help to reveal the situation, or entanglement**

*“I will go instead of you”*

*“Out of my love for you, I will remain depressed”*

Sometimes just acknowledging the entangled bond is enough to loosen it. Here we are also testing a hypothesis or highlighting the current dynamic which reveals the bonds of blind love that the child has for the parents.

2. **To move secondary blame into primary capacity**

*“I hurt”* rather than *“I resent you”*

*“Please see me”* rather than *“I reject you”*

*“Thank you”* instead of *“You didn’t give me enough”*

3. **To clarify boundaries, relationships & re-establish systemic order**

*“You are my mother, and I am your daughter”*

*“I am the big one, you are the small one”*

*“You are my wife, not my mother or your daughter”*

4. **Statements of resolution are sentences that resolve the dynamics of the bond.**

These honour the fate of those who are bound, and allow the consequences of fate to remain with those who have the responsibility and capacity to carry it. They restore respect, responsibility and acknowledge losses and gains, clarifying what needs to be handed back or taken on.

*“I honour you and your fate”*

*“What happened between me and your father had nothing to do with you”*

*“I accept my life, exactly as it is”*

*“I took my life through you” “You are the only father for me”*

*“I did it, it’s my responsibility and guilt to carry”*

*“Please look kindly on me if I pull back now, and live my life well”*

Part of the skill of constellating is getting the sentence right. **Representatives will affirm or deny the truth of a sentence in the immediate moment.** A good sentence is like an arrow that needs to go straight into the heart of the matter. They are like a pure note that resonates with the client/representative.

You can see in a representative when the words hit home – the voice has a certain ring, they exhale more deeply and straighten up. This is what we’re looking for and the success of a sentence can only be judged by this effect. The more carefully the facilitator attends to language, the more accurate and appropriate the response to the existing energies will be.

## **Basic Sentence Crib Sheet**

For use in group practice sessions

### **Resolving Sentences**

Thank you

I honour you

Please...

Sorry

You belong

It's mine to carry

I give it back to you

I withdraw

### **Exploring Entanglements**

I wanted to ...

I hurt myself by ...

I've inflated myself by ...

I've judged you by ...

I see you

Now I see ...

I respect your fate

I agree to my own fate

I leave it with you

### **Exploring the Balance of Giving & Taking**

What I received was enough

Thank you

I refuse

The price of receiving is too high

I have no further need, I withdraw

I owe you a great deal

I'll pass it on

### **Exploring Symptoms**

I reject you

I turn away

I see you

I give you your place

## **Exploring Relationships between Parents & Children**

I missed you  
Now I see what happened  
I am only the child  
I accept life at the price that it cost you

## **Exploring Couple Relationships**

Thank you  
I see you  
I let you go  
I made something good of my life  
I feel full  
I respect you fate  
I leave it with you  
I agree to my fate  
I leave your fate with you  
I judged you by...  
I hurt myself by...  
I have no further need. I withdraw  
I leave the burden of your responsibility with you  
The pain of the burdens I took on helped me to find healing /resolution. And now I can leave it with you.  
I'll deal with my own issues and, like you, what I can't deal with I'll pass on.  
You hurt me  
I felt so lonely  
I inflated myself by...  
I refuse

## **Remember ...**

Seeing, bowing, turning away, handing back

## **Notice ...**

What opens and what closes the soul

## The Field & The System

### The Field

The field includes the individual (or group), all the behaviour of the individual (or group), and the psychological environment of the individual (or group). The psychological environment consists of all the facts that have *existence*, that is, demonstrable effects, and excludes those without existence (for the individual or group concerned); these field elements are those present at the same time as, i.e., *contemporaneous* with, the field. The various elements of the field are to some degree *interdependent*. Thus, meaning arises from the whole of the field. A field is particular to each person and each situation.

In constellation work, we regard the field as actual, intelligent and benign.

In addition, there exists the universal field of *energy and information*; the field that is timeless, flowing and constantly transforming itself: the quantum field, of which we are an integral part.

Fields carry both history and potential; they contain morphic, or pattern-related, resonance; they transcend time and space.

Form is contained in the field: invisible energy patterns or "morphogenetic fields" surround and shape all natural, living systems, and individuals can access the thought or behavior patterns of previous system members.

Dual identity: a representative in a constellation is an individual consciousness *and* he/she is connected, via 'morphic resonance', to the collective consciousness of the field. Such fields could be used to describe how, at a meta level, human consciousness is shared - that there is no absolute separation between minds.

### The System

We can define a human system as being a set of people in relation to one another who are organised to jointly create a particular outcome. A system is further defined as having a permeable boundary, defined by a commonality within which a change in one element produces a simultaneous change in the others.

Systems are delineated parts of the field, either nested like Russian dolls, or adjacent. They have boundaries, and these boundaries may overlap; they can change according to the perspective, the need, or the situation.

What determines whether an element is part of the system or not, is whether the presence or absence of that element affects the system. We have a choice about belonging to some systems; our membership in others may not be up to us. We have no choice, however, about our membership in our family system. At a family level these boundaries are set by the orders, and by fate.



## Phenomenology & Constructivism

Phenomenology and constructivism are the underpinning perspectives that we lean in to when using the constellation approach. Although at first glance they may appear paradoxical, when combined they support the stance of the facilitator when working.

### Phenomenology is:

- Tracking and describing our experience (and that of the issue-holder and representatives), rather than evaluating and interpreting; understanding that all phenomena has equal weight
- A way of allowing our perceptions to surface, without making meaning out of anything
- Being open to what may be hidden, which requires holding an attitude of 'not knowing'
- Having no preference, holding no opinions for or against anything. Suspending all judgments of what is right or wrong.
- The capacity to be with *what is*.
- Being aware of the detail – what the client and representatives say and do, as well as being able to step back and 'see' the whole picture, all of the system, including what is hidden or excluded.
- Being without intention.

### The Great Way is not difficult

For those who have no preferences.

When love and hate are both absent

Everything becomes clear and undisguised.

Make the smallest distinction, however,

And heaven and earth are set infinitely apart.

If you wish to see the truth

Then hold no opinions for or against anything.

To set up what you like against what you dislike

Is the disease of the mind.

When the deep meaning of things is not understood

The mind's essential peace is disturbed to no avail.

*1st verse of Hsin hsin ming by Seng-t'san, 3rd Zen patriarch*

Translator: Richard B. Clarke

## **Constructivism is:**

- A philosophy of learning founded on the premise that, by reflecting on our experiences, we construct our own understanding of the world in which we live.
- Recognising that we know our knowing through our language and our perceptions. Both of which are personally and culturally variable.
- A perspective that helps us see that we create lenses that enable us to see some things, but prevent us from seeing others.
- A view point which shows us that we generate our own 'rules' and 'mental models' which we use to make sense of our experiences.
- A process that enables us to see clearly the ways in which we adjust our mental models to accommodate new experiences.

## **Systemic Constellation Approach**

Constellation work rests on the integration of phenomenology and constructivism.

Both influence our choice points at every stage of a piece of work. Together, they help us to create solutions that are *healing images*, rather than an exact representation of a subjective truth.

Each 'next step' in a piece of constellation work is informed by a hypothesis, which is based on our understanding of systemic orders and the known facts about the client's system (constructivism). Having formed this hypothesis, we then let go of it in order to see, or feel into, what is emerging phenomenologically. And this will then inform the next new temporary hypothesis.

## **Stance & Posture**

### **What do we bring to the field?**

- Alertness, courage, decisiveness, responsibility, future orientation, restraint, maturity.
- Lack of intention or fear.
- A (growing) fluency in the natural language of constellations.
- An ability to work deeply and phenomenologically, with the capacity to stand in the place of 'not knowing'.
- A willingness to be guided by what emerges, and to open ourselves to larger contexts.
- A ability to 'see' what's missing, what needs completing, what has a place – and what doesn't, and to sense the resources needed to support movement.
- Holding an inner attitude of (seeing + distance) – judgement = love.
- The ability to bear the weight of fate of the client and their system.
- An inner space capable of holding the whole system, with intention, in our hearts, making particular space for the excluded or disrespected.
- A holistic, inclusive posture that recognises and trusts the benign and healing force of the knowing field.
- An innate understanding of the systemic frame and what is and isn't included in the system.
- Discrimination that recognises the difference between stories, opinions, ideologies, defences and real events.
- A focus that faces the consequences of action.
- An artist and poetic eye that enables us to create an aesthetically complete piece of work that impacts the soul and offers a homoeopathic vision of change.

### **And a capacity to create a balance between...**

- Interventions – the movements and sentences.
- Energy – going to the most painful place, respecting resistance and confusion, sensing the connections, separations, impulses and reactions.
- Knowledge of the Orders – the power of loyalty, bonding, exchange, social order and precedence in time and space.
- Reality – undoing euphemisms, secrets, taboos.
- Clear focus – staying with the client's issue, referencing and checking in with them.
- Language – creating a core language that is respectful, soul-focused and provocative.
- Alertness – to subtle changes in eye contact, breathing, looking, smiling, energy levels and so on.
- Attention to feelings – how they are layered and the shift from secondary feelings towards primary or meta.

## Developing Authority & Trust

When we are aligned with the truth of what is, committed to holding all persons with equal regard and respect, we hold the authority needed to lead systemic work.

Developing authority and trust is part of our ongoing spiritual journey, it is part of our personal quest for the truth.

### **Movements and attitudes that create a secure, safe environment for facilitator and group include:**

- Keeping a firm hold on our own inner critic.
- Being willing to stay with 'not knowing' when feeling unclear how to proceed.
- Trusting in the *living (loving) field*, stepping back and waiting until what is needed appears.
- Watching for assumptions – although the Orders may give us a hypothesis, we mustn't assume that when we see a picture we know what is going on.
- Having your authority reflect your inner stillness and phenomenological stance.
- Listening carefully for judgments, complaints and blame - the victim voice that closes the heart.
- Supporting the speaker to express their desire in a way that reflects self-responsibility.
- Creating a simple ritual before the work begins. For example, calling on your teachers, parents and ancestors to stand with you while you serve.
- Sensing and welcoming to the room the felt presence of the family members and ancestors of the participants and internally bowing to them.

**Remember - A safe environment is created by an absence of judgment.**

## **Balance, Reciprocity & Exchange**

- Balance is one of our basic relational needs. In Systemic Constellation Work the need to maintain a balance between giving and taking is the second Order of Love of the Personal Conscience.
- When a person gives, it puts them in a superior position, as having given they feel the right to receive something in return. In a similar way, the person who takes feels a debt to the one who has given and the only way to feel free of indebtedness is to give in return. In this way, we can see that entitlement creates a feeling of systemic innocence the realm of exchange, and guilt feels like indebtedness.
- The balance of giving and taking is attended to in the heart.
- Balance cannot be restored by forgiving. Forgiveness ends exchange, and eventually the relationship. 'For the sake of our love, I'm doing something that hurts you, so that our relationship won't be destroyed. But I'll do less to you than you have done to me out of love.' The resolution lies in turning a hurtful exchange back onto a path of a good exchange.
- Rebalancing by atonement (evening things up by suffering) is common in family systems, but it is destructive as it does not bring resolution.

### **Balance of Giving & Taking in Couples**

- Giving creates a superior position and a feeling of the right to receive.
- Taking creates a feeling of debt. The only way to feel free is to give in return.
- The need for balance is tied to love and the bond between two people. If the balance remains even, then the relationship stops.
- As a rule, the one who has taken more leaves.
- The dynamic in adult relationships is toward balance through a rhythm of imbalances - otherwise moves into the parent-child dynamic.
- In cases where one person cannot give as much as the other, what helps is if that person takes all that they receive with gratitude, and unlimited openness.
- The woman follows the man as the feminine supports the maturing of masculine strength (she does not follow with subservience), and, in compensation, the masculine serves the feminine as the stronger - we are as men and if we really act as men. The space then opens up for women to get strong too.
- The person with major responsibility for the safety of the family in the world has priority.

## Balance of Giving & Taking Between Parents & Children

- Between parents and children, there are 3 patterns of giving and taking that are injurious to love:
  1. Children refuse to take their parents as they are.
  2. Parents try to give, and children to take, what is harmful.
  3. Parents try to take from children, and children try to give to parents.
- Children feel incomplete and empty and become passive when they exclude one or both parents from their hearts.
- Children, even when hurt by parents, can say,

*“Yes, you are my parent; everything that was in you is in me too. I acknowledge you as my parent and accept the consequences that this has for me. I take the good from what you gave, and I trust you to deal with your fate as you see fit.”*

Or,

*“I take whatever you’ve given me. It’s a lot and it’s enough. Whatever else I need, I’ll take care of myself or get from someone else, and now I’ll leave you in peace”.*
- Then the person is free to set about the often-difficult work of making the best out of what may be a very bad situation.
- All actions have consequences, and these consequences can be felt in subsequent generations.
- Moral justification doesn’t exempt the action from its consequences, and good intentions don’t reduce the consequences of harmful actions.
- Becoming a father or mother has nothing to do with whether the father or mother is good or bad. Conceiving a child fundamentally serves life, and as such it is an action that doesn’t depend on morality.
- Often the search for self-realisation and enlightenment is a search for the not-yet-taken father or mother.

## Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the vital underpinning ingredient of this work.

Without inner stillness, we cannot accurately perceive the nature of the disharmony in the system, nor see in which direction a possible resolution lies.

When leading, or setting up a constellation, our fundamental support is our capacity to be present. The breath is your tool.

The breath is the bridge connecting body and spirit. Each breath happens *only* in the present moment; breathing *with awareness* brings us into our bodies and into direct contact with our experience, here, now.

In the initial interview, a client's anxiety often results in shallow, rapid breathing. Your grounded, even breathing will act magnetically, encouraging them to adjust their pace to yours. You can interrupt the interview to have them breathe and gather themselves.

Developing the capacity to be present, centered and peaceful is a *personal*, lifetime journey.

The essence of support is embodiment

The essence of embodiment is the breath

The essence of the breath is presence

The essence of presence is Being

## Conscience & The Orders

Conscience, as we understand the term in this work, is the dynamic force that supports the survival of the individual or the system.

It is 'conscience' that lies behind the difficulties and the issues that we observe when we work systemically.

There are three types of conscience: personal conscience, systemic conscience and the conscience of the greater whole.

### **The Characteristics of Personal Conscience:**

- We feel it, and are aware of it when we transgress it.
- Personal conscience serves to bind us to our group of reference and is experienced as a sense of guilt or innocence. These feelings are group or system specific.
- The personal conscience guards our bonding and belonging to the group, and guilt feels like exclusion or alienation and innocence feels like inclusion and closeness.
- In relation to the order of giving and taking, or exchange, guilt feels like indebtedness and obligation, and innocence feels like entitlement and freedom. The oscillation between entitlement and obligation is a fundamental dynamic.
- The personal conscience is sensitive to what is allowed, and what must be tolerated.
- It affects the most sensitive, usually the children, most directly.

### *The Orders with respect to the Personal Conscience:*

- The need for bonding or belonging.
- The need to maintain a balance between giving and taking.
- The need for order (safety of social convention and predictability).

### **The Characteristics of the Systemic Conscience:**

- We are not able to feel this form of conscience; we can only see its effects as difficult fates or harm is passed from one generation to the next. Love is an emergent quality of systemic order; it flows and blossoms in an environment of systemic balance. When there is disorder it is often the effect of the systemic conscience.
- Systemic conscience maintains the wholeness or completeness of the group. If someone is excluded in one generation, then someone in a later generation will unconsciously feel a systemic pressure to represent or identify with the excluded person and thereby bring the system back into balance.
- The systemic conscience is not concerned about, and therefore perpetuates, injustice.



*The Orders with respect to the Systemic Conscience:*

- Every member of the system has an equal right to belong.
- Those who come first have priority over those who come later.
- Those who come first give to those who come later.
- Regarding systems, later systems have priority over earlier systems

**The Characteristics of the Conscience of the Greater Whole:**

- This conscience underlies the wholeness of being.
- This conscience responds to a movement of the spirit – the spirit that moves everything in exactly the way it moves, whether we want it to be so or not. We can either submit or resist it.
- Understanding this conscience is a spiritual movement and when we experience ourselves as in harmony with the movements of spirit, we feel good. Most of all, we feel calm and without concern. We know our next steps and have the strength to make them.
- To deal with all concerns about good and evil, we must rise above our membership of our group by transforming our sensitivity to good and evil from beliefs to felt sensations. This movement incurs guilt, and this cannot be avoided if we wish to do good and therefore not remain in our group or family of origin.
- Like the personal conscience, here, too, we are immediately aware if we are in tune. The difference here is that the knowledge is spiritual.

## Conscience - Three Generation Exercise

Take a little time to connect deeply with yourself and see what emerges. Now think of your family – think of the last 3 generations. Include *everyone* in the system in these generations, from both sides of the family. This will include (1) Your Grandparents, (2) Your Parents and (3) You. Then add any big themes from the generations above your grandparents if they are known to you. Use the drawing you did in module 1 if you need to.

1. Consider all that these three generations have lived through – remember to look at the fate of the family, and of the country – the personal *and* social traumas.
2. Register change or major shifts in religious affiliation, sexual orientation.
3. Note war, poverty, unemployment and other impersonal events.

What you have will be a mass of info, things will be jumping out of you – write whatever encapsulates these issues in the two columns for your father and mother’s families. Lastly, give names or headings (in the last row) to the issues of your family that encapsulate the issues that have come down the family lines to you, such as ‘anti-Semitism’ or ‘migration’. This is bigger than the (say) death of my brother. It is about where we come from.

Then get into groups of 3 and feedback your personal discoveries to others in your group.

### Examples

Secrets	Profession/work	Happiness/depression
Death early/late	Rebellion (Social)	Separation
Disability	Abandonment	Poverty
Famine / Starvation	Impact of war/ civil war	Health issues
Success	Town/country	Religious affiliation
Sexuality/orientation	Adoption	Illegitimacy
Oppression	Divorce	Education
Drowning	The Land	Austerity
Duty	Slavery	Natural disasters
Exclusion	Financial collapse / depression	Twins
Migration	Abuse – sexual/emotional/physical	
Previous marriages	Upwardly/downwardly mobile	

	<b>Maternal Side</b>	<b>Paternal Side</b>
<b>The fate of the early generations</b>		
<b>1. Your grand-Parent's fate</b>		
<b>2. Your parent's fate</b>		
<b>3. Your fate</b>		
<b>A summary of the fates that you feel affect you or speak to you personally</b>		

## Types of Feelings

There are four types of feelings that we see with in systemic constellation work:

1. **Primary Feelings**
2. **Secondary Feelings**
3. **Systemic Feelings**
4. **Meta Feelings**

Knowledge of these four different kinds of feelings is essential to this work, particularly during the initial interview, but also in sentence construction. But to begin, we need to take a step back and understand the two types of movement experienced by all human beings.

When a baby is born he or she cannot survive without ‘reaching out’ energy – the ‘yes’ instinct that helps them find the nipple and in doing so, complete their incompleteness. It is through this ‘yes-ness’ that life comes. When we can reach out we have energy for life and there is movement and dynamism in all that we do.

A resolution in constellation work involves restoring ‘basic trust’ to the client, and this, in its most simple form, is about returning the client to the ‘yes’ energy that opens us to everything.

In contrast, ‘no’ energy is created by fear, as when we are not supported we contract. Everything that is part of a ‘no’ movement has an effect on our bodies. Every symptom is a contraction. ‘No’ energy closes our body, it shrinks us, and in time we develop contraction interruptions such as projection, deflection, or we simply don’t open to what is around us.

### What is the Purpose of a Feeling?

Every feeling is a biological support for action. Every feeling has a physical corollary or purpose.

For instance, primary anger has a simplicity and purity – it rises in response to a stimulus, it protects us, defines our boundary, and then it subsides. So, we see that the purpose of feelings is to address something, and then put it right.

However, sometimes we are unable to express our feelings clearly and instead they become stuck – sometimes for years. When this happens, they become known as secondary feelings. Children for instance simply aren’t big enough to hold large feelings and so they often develop secondary feelings to protect themselves.

In this work our aim is to return people to their primary reactions, or capacities, as it is here that we can support action and movement.

## **Primary Feelings**

Primary feelings bring strength to us, and to the situation. Primary feelings promote action; they express a reaching out energy for life.

Primary feelings come in intense, but brief, waves and they resonate with others. Our hearts open to someone in a primary feeling state, we are touched deeply by them and we feel empathetic.

When in grip of a primary feeling you never look back with shame on your actions. However, when we are in the grip of a secondary feeling, we often feel shame later.

Primary shame supports or guards our belonging to the group. When we transgress the group conscience we feel ashamed and then modify our behaviour.

If, having felt shame, we continue to stay in this place rather than take action, then the purpose of the feeling is lost and instead it becomes secondary and we remain in a state that is closed and small and purposeless.

The opposite of shame is connection and this is where constellation work can be so helpful.

## **Secondary Feelings**

Secondary feelings appear when people have given up believing that they will receive a helpful response. These feelings are chronic; they weaken us as they are connected to old injuries.

Secondary feelings don't support action; in fact, they prevent it. They are like the never-ending story, as there is no movement in them and so they will never reach their goal.

For example - blame and anger are often a secondary feeling to disappointment, acknowledgement or gratitude.

Grief can become a badge of honour for a love that was, and in this it is a secondary state. Grief in the primary form takes you from having something/someone to not having it/them.

Worry is an alternative to restorative action.

We don't 'get better' when expressing secondary feelings, the quality of secondary feelings means that they simply go on and on. In a secondary state, you can be very angry about something but the anger never seems to serve its' purpose. Often secondary anger is connected to how much you owe another – frequently a parent.

Many of us have secondary hate, which is bottled up as secondary anger, which is bottled up primary grief or protest. In this way, we see how feelings can become layered.

When we are with someone in secondary feeling we feel bored, irritated and a lack of compassion.

## **Systemic Feelings**

Systemic feelings are different again. There are a huge number of feelings that people feel that don't belong to them. The soul holds the knowing of our family system; it registers this completeness and recognises when there is something or someone missing. Our souls know wholeness, and so in this way they (and us) are in service to the system.

So, systemic feelings are feelings that are appropriate for, or belong to, someone else in the family system. These are feelings that are held by someone who is identified or entangled with another, often unknowingly. Children particularly are hard-wired to be self-sacrificing and if they can carry something to avoid someone they love suffering, they often will.

When working with systemic feelings the question is.... 'For whom would this be a true/appropriate feeling?' This information will emerge in a piece of work and the feeling can then be respectfully returned. To heal you can only separate respectfully – never angrily.

## **Meta Feelings**

Lastly, there are meta or impersonal feelings. These carry pure strength and characterised by very little emotion. We will have all experienced a meta state, often when we have found an unexpected power that was needed to deal with a crisis.

Meta feelings include wisdom, courage, etc. but there is also meta anger, even cruelty. For instance, a surgeon uses meta cruelty when they make the perfect incision. Meta feelings carry pure strength, and to feel a meta feeling we need to be totally gathered, centred, grounded and in the moment.

We cannot live in a meta state, as there is no balance of giving and taking, However, this meta place is the place from which we work as constellations.

In constellation work we aim to resolve entanglement resulting from secondary and systemic feelings, and to bring people back to primary feelings, which provide them with the strength to act.

## Entanglements

- Each family system knows its own completeness and, through the systemic conscience, all family members are unconsciously bound in full participation of the dynamics of their family. By submitting or agreeing to the family dynamics, family members maintain their membership or belonging.
- We can begin to see how the obligations and sufferings of one member of the family are therefore experienced by other members as debts and obligations. We willingly, if unconsciously, agree to partake in the shared fate of our family to ensure that nothing is forgotten and no one is left out. In this way, any family member can become blindly entangled in the debts and privileges, thoughts, cares and feelings, conflicts or goals of another.

### Here is an example...

*After a war, a man was taken to a cave where he was shown the dead bodies of three generations of his townfolk. These were all victims of three different attacks, which took place over many years. The second attack was a result of the reprisal for the first, and the third was the reprisal for the second. The man, who was of the 4<sup>th</sup> generation, said "When we hear the cries of our mothers and see their tears for their murdered sons, how can we know peace? We must avenge their loss". This man was not acting freely, he loved blindly and was caught in a web of tragedy that started before he was born, demanded his obedience and, tragically, will not end until long after his death. This man's love is a child's love and it seduces him into assuming a responsibility inappropriate to his position. His child's love blindly seeks balance in revenge, as if more deaths could heal the emptiness left by past deaths. Peace will not return to the family clan until he manages to listen to, not simply hear, the "cries of our mothers", to see their tears, and to say to them with love, "Yours is a great loss. I pay homage to your suffering. Because I love you, I will not take up this sword, and I do you the greatest honour by entrusting your suffering to you. With you, your suffering is in better hands than with me." In her heart, every grandmother prefers that her grandchildren live in peace. Then the deaths of those who have gone before have a good effect on those who come after. That is the greater love.*

- When the love binding together individual members of a family operates blindly, it demands blind obedience, and unless individual members gain insight into this dynamic and transform it, they unknowingly submit to the laws of blind systemic justice – an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. In this way damage is passed from one generation to the next
- The systemic laws operating within a family don't respond to a child's love. The drive for balance is more fundamental than love, and it readily sacrifices individual love and happiness to maintain the larger family equilibrium. Extracting oneself from this battlefield requires insight into the orders and a willingness to follow them with love. This requires giving up an inflated sense of self-importance and returning to one's designated place in the family order.
- Entanglements can be recognised when situations from the past express themselves in later relationships in the form of impulsive inappropriate actions and/or inappropriately intense feelings. You will hear people say "I was not quite being myself" or "something just got into me". People who are fanatical about being right are often entangled.

## Identification

- Systemic completeness or the wholeness or integrity of a family is frequently maintained by *identification*. This is when a person unconsciously assumes the roles, functions and often feelings of an earlier, excluded family member.
- An excluded person is someone who was cast out for some reason from the family. Perhaps they transgressed, or suffered in an 'unacceptable' way, or even were the victim of injustice. In the eyes of the other family members that person was unable to be seen or given a place and so was excluded from the system, often with moral justification or righteousness.
- The dynamic of identification is an outcome of the activation of the systemic conscience. In this way, the systemic conscience re-members the system. Although identification is a solution for the system, as it is once again complete, this is not a solution for the individual who responds to the pull to identify. Their life energy becomes divided between themselves and the earlier person and as they are entangled in the earlier destiny. It must be remembered that the identification is motivated by blind love. This is a hopeless love as we are unable to set something in order when it doesn't belong to us.
- An identification is the opposite of a relationship. When we are identified with someone, we feel and act as that person did. It is as if we are them, but we can't relate to them because we don't experience them as different from our self. We can only relate to someone that we experience as separate. When we see the separateness of the other in a constellation, and love them in their distinctness, then this love dissolves the identification. The person who is identified-with can then return to his or her appropriate place in the system and we return to ours. In this way, the equilibrium and membership of the system is re-established.
- Because identifications are not experienced consciously, following the feelings of the person who is identified doesn't provide helpful guidelines for resolution, and learning to therapeutically express feelings doesn't resolve the identification either. This means that when an issue relates to an identification, the facilitator cannot expect the client to be able to find a resolution on his or her own.
- An identification can be resolved through awareness. When the client sees, and respects the fate of the earlier family member and steps back, then the fate returns to where it truly belongs. And the client can look at the excluded person, acknowledge their suffering and their place, and they can stand by that person giving them a loving place in their heart instead of joining them in their suffering and repeating their difficulties. This creates a relationship and the excluded person becomes a friend, a guardian angel, a source of support.
- At some point, the past, whether joyful or tragic, must be allowed to be the past for the system to find peace. Excluded members become a source of blessing rather than intimidation when they are reinstated in the family soul.
- A double shift is when the feelings of one person are carried by another, who then directs these feelings to yet another.



## Atonement

- Attempting to restore balance by atoning or suffering is the most destructive kind of entanglement. When there is atonement in the system the person feels wholly justified in their actions and can't see the other's love. Atonement may feel easier than seeing the suffering of another, even though no good is achieved. Instead of one injured person there are now two, or one death is followed by another. Worse still, atonement doubles the damage done to the victim because the victim's suffering becomes the cause of more suffering, e.g. his or her own death results in someone else's taking on the fate.
- Events that were unavoidable and determined by fate are sometimes treated as if they carried a personal guilt that requires atonement. For example, when a mother dies in childbirth, her child often has great difficulty in fulfilling themselves in life. It is as if the child believes that their failure could atone for the mother's sacrifice.
- Many tragedies in a family are caused by someone violating the principles of priority. This is when a person in a later generation takes it upon themselves, either consciously or unconsciously, to pay the price for an injustice that occurred in a previous generation. We see this dynamic in the children and grandchildren of the SS in the Nazi party, or in families whose wealth was generated in industries such as diamond mining or the railways which resulted in huge losses in life. Here, the children often try to atone for their parents' actions, and this is presumptuous on the part of the child.
- So we see that atonement is a blind urge towards balance, an instinctive attempt by the psyche to even out inequalities. When we fail to recognise a client's actions as such, atonement takes its course without the person concerned being able to withstand it.
- To move beyond this instinctual level and achieve balance and compensation, we need to move to a higher level, to the orders. Love makes atonement unnecessary. Seeing and finding a place for the consequences of the actions or fates of previous generations is all that is required. When we can bear to see what happened in the system, we are bound to realise that the damage already suffered cannot be undone, no matter how we may attempt to resolve it. Feelings of guilt in this context are not moral issues, these feelings are a systemic dynamic.
- When parents carry their own guilt, and bear the consequences of their own actions, their children no longer have the compulsive urge to atone.

## The Orders of Helping

- How does psychological disturbance occur? It occurs when we are cut off or in conflict with someone – usually this is with one or both of our parents.
- What is the solution? To join what has been separated, or to separate what has been unhelpfully connected.
- What is required of the helper? A helper needs to be:
  - i. in touch with their own parents and ancestors.
  - ii. in touch with their own fate and personal guilt.
  - iii. in touch with their own mortality.

## What is Helping?

- Helping is an art, it is a skill to be learned and practiced.
- Helping is not possible without insight and perception of what is appropriate.
- Helping is an understanding that goes beyond, into something greater and all-embracing.

## Helping as Balancing Out

- Helping is good for others *and* for the helper.
- Helping tends to be mutual, it balances the relationship. Balancing is not possible between parents and children as parents give and children take - the balancing out in this relationship comes through honouring the gift of life - we can pass on what we have received.

## Giving & Taking

- Giving and taking occurs on two levels:
  - i. between equals - and here it requires mutuality.
  - ii. between parents and children, or those in authority and those over whom the authority is held. This kind of relationship is on a different level, here giving and taking is like a river that carries with it all that is within it. This kind of giving and taking is the greater of the two. A consciousness of the future is inherent.

Helping presupposes that we have first received and taken for ourselves what we need, as only then can we have an altruistic desire and the strength to help others, especially when much is demanded of us. Helping also presupposes that those who we wish to help want and need what we can give. Otherwise our attempts at helping will separate rather than connect us.

## **The Archetype of Helping**

The archetype of helping is the relationship between parent and child, above all the relationship between mother and child. Parents give and children take. In the relationship between parents and children the expectations of children and the willingness of parents to fulfill them are both necessary and in order.

But this works only if the children are small. As they grow up parents begin to set limits by which the children can mature and against which they test themselves. Many children get angry with their parents at this point because they would prefer to maintain the original dependence. But as the parents withdraw little by little, and in this way, also disappoint their children's expectations, they help them to relinquish their dependence and gradually become self-reliant. In this way, they begin to take their place in the adult world and change from people who take into people who give.

### **The First Order of Helping**

We only give what we have and only expect what we need. It is important to recognise the limits to giving and taking. It is part of the art of helping to recognise, acknowledge and respect these limits.

**Disorder:** When we try to give what we don't have or when someone expects or demands what we can't give, for instance when someone tries to take something on for another person that only they can and must carry for themselves.

### **The Second Order of Helping**

Helping furthers both survival and growth. Both are determined by inner and outer circumstances. These must be respected. This is particularly true for inner circumstances, such as tasks that are personal to us. Entanglement in the fate of others and blind love (under the influence of conscience) is in the sway of magical ideas.

Many helpers wish to help not because the person concerned has asked for help but because they cannot stand the situation. The other may then allow this situation nonetheless but the allowing comes from an internal pressure or a desire to help the helper. Thus, helping is transformed into taking, and receiving help becomes giving.

The second order of helping requires that circumstances be respected and interventions only go as far as circumstances permit. This form of helping is restrained and has strength.

**Disorder:** When helping denies circumstances instead of facing them side by side with the client. Helping despite the prevailing situation weakens both the helper and the person who is expecting help.

### **The Third Order of Helping**

Many helpers are in danger of entering in to a parent-child relationship with their clients. Equally, many who look for help expect their helpers to treat them as parents do their children in the hope that they will get something that they are still longing for and expecting from their own parents. Both helpers and clients can get caught in this paradigm. As helpers we have then to slowly withdraw to avoid remaining in a

transference relationship. A relationship based on the parent/child relationship model hinders the development of the helper.

There are situations however when it is appropriate to stand in for the parents for a short time. For instance, when an early interrupted movement must be completed. But, unlike transference, the helper in this case represents the real parents and does not set himself up as an improved substitute mother or father. In this way, the client does not have to free him or herself from the relationship later. The helper leads the client to his or her parent with love. By working with respect for the real parents and being in accord with them and their fate the client can meet his or her parents in the helper. He can no longer avoid them.

The third order of helping is about confronting grown-up clients as adults and assisting them in accepting and respecting their parent's process and how they have lived their lives.

**Disorder:** When an adult is allowed to make demands on the helper in the manner of a child to his parent. When the adult is treated like a child and responsibility for things that he or she needs to shoulder or face alone are taken on by the helper.

#### **The Fourth Order of Helping**

It is important to see the client not as an isolated individual but as part of a family system, which includes his or her ancestors. A helper needs to look at who in the family needs to be seen and acknowledged. The risk here is that the helper's sympathy with the system is seen as harsh by the client, especially if the client has childish expectation. Those who are seeking solutions as adults see the systemic method as liberating.

**Disorder:** When the people essential to the system are overlooked, particularly those who have been excluded. They hold the key for the solution. This may also include someone from outside the system who has suffered at the hands of someone from within a family system.

#### **The Fifth Order of Helping**

Family constellations join what has been separated. They support reconciliation, especially with parents. Distinguishing between good and bad hinders reconciliation. Many helpers, who are influenced by their own conscience and by public opinion, similarly bound up by conscience, come up against this problem. If a client complains about their parents, helpers need to explain that this stance will lead to greater separation and disconnection rather than reconciliation and freedom. Reconciliation is giving every person a place in your heart and loving them as they are, no matter how different they may be from you. True helping is done without judgment.

**Disorder:** Judging others and taking on the superior moral stance that this position presupposes.

## Constellation Work & The Orders of Helping

As helpers, it is necessary to work in a way that is in tune with the soul and fate. It is important not to be pulled by transference, but instead learn to respect all, especially the rejected. Helping requires a shift of perspective from what could be described as '*what I am against*' to '*what love requires*'.

Helping is about doing the least. It is not looking for completion but simply for movement – in this way the gestalt remains open. Helping involves placing a high level of trust in the client to manage what they are given.

Traditional therapy works with the relationship in the room as a resonating chamber – through this therapists merge and take on transferential energies, which they can then reflect on. Therapists become the relevant other. They usurp the parents' role (for a while), which at times can inadvertently insult the parents and undermine the capacity of the client to feel grown up enough to get on with life.

This way of working depends on us being seen as a helpful friend – transitory, impermanent, possibly wise, but mostly available to reveal what else is hidden in the field. We must be detached enough to see and to report on what we see, rather than to build trust that pulls us into conscience group of the family of the client. Love equals seeing plus distance minus judgment.

## **Fate, Soul & The Spirit**

*And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.* Antoine de Saint-Exupery

As human beings, we have a habit of constraining our consciousness so that eventually we limit it to the shape of our bodies. We believe in boundaries such as the limits of our skin – rather than seeing that what we are is more like a wave, or a current in a vast ocean. And because our experiences are located in what we call ‘me’ or ‘I’, we also believe that our consciousness is constrained too. But this is simply a construct of our mind. In constellation work we can experience the limit-less-ness of the unified field and this changes our perception of reality.

When working with the constellation approach we open to boundary-less-ness and call our edges into question through coming into deep contact with the unified field.

This work is about learning how to develop sufficient capacity to enable us to ‘hold’ or be all of ourselves by melting our barriers and obscurations – and this movement is ultimately about love. When our hearts are open, our boundaries relax and we open. As our hearts open we connect, and through connection we can move beyond our usual sense of bounded-ness, and we are ready to work.

We each have a deep longing for connection and place and, if we open to it, this comes to us in the purest sense through our contact with the unified field. It is here that we find the support needed to work systemically. When we take our own place, we find we are in the right place to help others.

But where do we feel our deepest longing? This is in the soul.

### **The Soul**

Your soul is your experiencing consciousness. It pulls for contact and for wholeness – completeness. It is in the soul that we feel our belonging and our place within the family system.

The soul is the experiencer, *and* it is the location where the experience happens. It is the receiver of impressions.

The human soul is a self-knowing field. We feel disconnected from our self when we rely only on our mind for information. We need to be present to our direct experience to feel nourished, and this requires our heart and soul to be engaged. It is then that we feel our aliveness.

Our soul is pure aliveness. Our consciousness animates our body – not the other way around. The more we are separate from the vitality and aliveness in our soul, the more we are separate from our self.

So we could say that in constellation work we are learning about what really supports our soul, and when we are in step with the movements of our soul, we are in step with the collective soul too. Which is where we need to be to do this work.

It is important to recognize that our soul knows what we can tolerate and what we can't, which is why we need to have great respect for our soul's timing – and in this, comparison with others is pointless. We are on our own journey.

We must honour the movements of the soul, even if the results seem tragic. This is where soul and fate conjoin.

## **Fate**

Fate is what cannot be changed. It is everything that has inescapably happened. As therapists in this work it is our aim to cooperate with fate.

It isn't possible for one person in the family to have a heavy fate and not the others – the whole family carry the fate of that family, although some carry a heavier burden than others.

Collective fate can be carried for 4 or 5 generations, and it is carried with love. We see this through the three key dynamics – atonement, identification and entanglement.

How do we align ourselves with fate?

Bert in his piece on Consenting writes

*“As soon as I have consented to a situation as it is, it changes. It reveals to me new possibilities for action.”*

What we resist, we bind ourselves to more closely. What we accept, shifts and softens. We see fate as something aligned with our soul's journey. And with the collective soul of the family.

Spiritual maturation comes the closer we are to reality *and* in our recognition that we are not as defenseless as we think we are. As we grow and develop we can tolerate more, and as we tolerate more, we find that we *can* handle it, and that we are developing new emotional and spiritual resources. And these resources help us to align with our fate and be sufficiently 'weighty' to be with the heavy fate of another.

## **The Spirit**

What we refer to as the spirit could be described as what animates the soul and the body – it is our essence, our vitality, life force and energy. A spirited horse is one that is full of aliveness.

## Consenting

by Bert Hellinger 2007

As soon as I have consented to other persons as they are,  
They can feel at ease.

As soon as I have consented to a situation as it is,  
It changes.

It reveals to me new possibilities for action.

On an inward journey I may experience that an obstacle stands in my way.

Often it is something that I have not yet consented to.

For instance, a pain or a loss that I have not got over

Or something that must be resolved.

There is something else to which I must agree,

The time I still need.

As soon as I have agreed that I need more time,

Time leaves me in peace.

I may move on.

I experience something similar with my pain.

What happens when I agree to it?

When I no longer try to get rid of it?

When I take it close to my heart,

And I allow it to calm down in me?

When I permit it to take the lead?

Perhaps this pain wants to take me to something

That I have lost sight of?

For instance another person.

Maybe this pain guides me back to something,

That is waiting for recognition and for a solution.

Therefore I stay with this pain,

As it is - the whole time.

With this pain something recollects itself inside me.



Is it that I pause on my inward journeys in the moment  
Exactly here or is this pain leading me on  
To a decisive step because I have agreed to it?  
It takes me by the hand and leads me further and deeper.  
When I simply surrender, what happens to my pain?  
My pain too calms down and finds its peace.  
It closes its eyes as if its work is done.

As soon as I agree to everything as it is, I gain precious time.  
As I stay in peace with myself, something in me and outside of me  
Grows as if of its own accord.  
These inward journeys are movements of life.  
When I have agreed to everything as it is,  
I feel free to engage in the essential aspects of life.  
I may move on in a decisive manner.

The forces of life first collect inside,  
Only then do they turn to the outside.  
Insights are first perceived inside.  
After that they set something in motion outside.  
On our inward journeys we consent  
To everything as it is, first to ourselves,  
Then to our situation, to life as it is,  
And to the lives of other people.  
In this way our inward journeys  
Continue outside as well.

Our journeys to the core  
Open another space for us inside.  
Rilke called this the inner space of the world.  
In this space we relate to life in a more comprehensive way.  
We see it differently and we become different.  
After this we return to our own space - changed,  
And we turn to our everyday life - changed.  
What is the nature of this change?  
We are in its service, aligned with another love.

## Constellations as Ritual & Ceremony

Ritual is central to many ancient wisdom and religious traditions. Ritual is a way of ceremony, a way of prayer. A ritual is an act of power, of manifestation, of intention. When performing a ritual we strike a deal with the universal field, and then we have to keep our side of the bargain.

Constellations can be experienced as a form of ritual and ceremony and in this way, they become a resource to strengthen our soul. The soul has many levels, both horizontally and vertically. We have an individual soul, a family soul and a tribal soul. The soul can be healed through ritual and constellations when healing cannot be reached through the personality.

### Ritual, Prayer & Ceremony

These are closely interwoven and can be used in many ways:

- To summon or manifest our strength
- To create a representation that helps us find our rightful place
- To mark transition or bring completion
- To bring connection
- To reach out to other realms - the spirit realm or realm of our ancestors
- To call upon the sacred
- To open ourselves to resource or help
- To assist integration
- To honour what is
- To pass on the gifts of the spirit, and in this way, keep them alive

### Creating a Ritual

A ritual, like a prayer, must have a clear aim, which is supported by grounded intention, and this, in turn, needs the support of distinct and pre-designed steps or actions. What is most crucial is that once decided upon the stages of a ritual must be adhered to and the outcome, whatever it is, must be honoured.

- Decide on the aim of the ritual and sit until your intention behind the aim is clear and an image of the process required emerges. This maybe through meditation, dreams or deep contemplation.
- As the form of the ritual emerges this form becomes the first pull on the thread, and what supports it, or is needed, also emerges as we hold an openness to the universal energies or systemic forces.
- Name the steps of your ritual and come to it fully prepared with everything that you need
- Carry out the steps with feeling and authority
- Honour each step of the process
- Consciously close the ritual at the end
- Honour and respect the outcome

Rituals can include objects or symbols. This is limitless but may include leaves, stones, earth, cards, chocolate, music, food, light.

### **Personal Gratitude Ritual**

On a walk in silent meditation go out and choose objects from nature to represent the key influences on your life. Acknowledge each of them and then place them around you or in front of you. Take as much time as you need to gather yourself and meditate. Then look at the configuration and open your heart to what is.

If appropriate share with another simply asking them to witness and receive the significance of your objects and your story

### **A Group Ritual to Summon the Ancestors with a Blessing**

Daan van Kampenhout

Find someone with whom you'd like to work. The first person sits on a chair facing the centre of the circle and the other stands one and half metres behind him/her. The person standing looks at the client on the chair and says "There is ... (client's name) on the chair. Here I am standing, I am... (standing person's name). Ancestors of ... (name of client) whoever would like to come to bless (client) please put your blessing in my hand and I'll pass through you with my hands open and I will carry these blessings to him/her.

Meanwhile the client sits quietly and prays to his ancestors and invites them to come.

For the person standing, as the movement takes you move slowly forward, when you reach the client place your hands on his shoulders and say "Ancestors use my hands to bless (name)". No healing, just allow the blessings to pass through you. Then step back and remind yourself who you are. If you sense any ancestors would need healing tell them "We will pray for you later – there will be time for you later". Pray aloud or silently. The person on the chair pulls the blessings into their centre.

## The Wheel & The Four Directions

The wheel is a map of wholeness connected to movement. It was developed and used in the old cultures – particularly in Shamanic traditions.

It can be used in many settings, but principally as a way of gathering insight and body-based information about any issue. When we walk the journey of the wheel, we walk the journey of life.

Central to every question, is the relationship of the question with the circle of life, the cycle of the day, the year, the stage of life... everything is part of a wider system, or circle.

The wheel is about orientation, N,S,E,W. Each direction is connected with essential qualities, psychological and spiritual dimensions.

**EAST** – Yellow – spring, the morning, the sunrise – the family soul  
– The Place of **Those Who Know**

This is the place of those who have the skills you wish for, and who are a few steps ahead of you – the place of your guides. There maybe be a biological connection or not. It is here that the sun rises and energy increases – the sun returns bright friendly heat which is not yet the red fiery heat of the south. The East is the time of beginning, of inspiration, it is the place where things start expanding, the place of curiosity, where structure begins. It is here that we start to create, to make things (but we can't complete or really act here). It is here that we go into the world. As the East is the place of new beginnings – this is the place of childhood, of the new generation, the children

**SOUTH** - red – summer – the afternoon – the tribal soul  
- The Place of the **Body Ancestors**

It is in the south that we reach adulthood. This is where we do our doing, where we have relationships, develop potential, capabilities, fullness, world of senses, this is full summer, the time of harvest. This is the place of the ancestors from our bloodline. (Mythological ancestors from the west can replace biological ancestors in ritual and ceremony). This is the place of Earth Blood where we embody our fullness and energy and strength. Lots happens here as the south is the place of maturity, of the parents.

**WEST** – black – autumn – evening – the individual soul  
- The Place of **Dreaming**

As we do in the evening, this is the place of slowing down, becoming quiet, inward, reflective. It is here that we reflect on what is important? This place is about essence, about harvesting our gifts and learning and then letting go. This is the place of grief, sadness, and the realisation that life will end. The west is the place of old age, the grandparents, of physical death, and the ancestors who have passed over.

**NORTH** – white – winter – night – the universal soul  
- The place of the **Soul and Spirit**

The north is the home of the soul, of the spiritual ancestors – the place of our spiritual lineage – the place of those who understand devotion – the priest or nun, Shaman or Sufi in our ancestry. The north is the place of the winter night, the place to rest. Imagine ice, snow, stillness, endings. But of course, endings prepare us for beginnings, so this is the space for new plans to develop. It is like night-time, but with the white light of the stars. It is purity – the space for pure spirit – where form has gone. It is the place of wisdom and soul. It is the black of our inner world that can fill with dreams and visions. The north allows us space to step back, to take a meta position and see the whole – if we are always in the North then we aren't engaged with life. It is the place for before birth and after death. This is the place of not wanting a child, of choosing not to be a parent.

### **THE CENTRE**

In the centre of the 4 directions is where we find balance - it is called heart or beauty from the tree of life (Kabala).

Green = Earth, most complete physical reality, the essential movement of the whole.  
(below)

Blue = dark blue of evening sky, mysterious depths, heaven (above)

The N, S, E and W represent our horizontal perception of life. And the green and blue are connected to vertical dimension.

### **Reference Books for further reading:**

Daan van Kampenhout  
- Images of the soul  
- The Tears of the Ancestors

Francesca Mason Boring  
- Connecting to our Ancestral Past

## **Requirements for Being an Ethically Impeccable Systemic Constellation Practitioner**

### **Learning**

- A minimum of 30 days of formal training in systemic constellation work
- Participated in more than 6 workshops led by senior trainers (i.e. those with at least 5 years' experience in constellation workshop facilitation)
- Have completed at least two family constellations on own issues
- Familiarity with Hellinger literature, videos and the principle themes and processes described

### **Professional (on-going)**

- A reflective practice is required which includes a form of personal, therapeutic or spiritual work
- Working within the existing Code of Ethics of one's profession
- Membership of professional bodies such as ISCA ([www.isca-netwrok.org](http://www.isca-netwrok.org))
- On-going supervision from a systemic constellation supervisor
- Regular peer support meetings
- CPD – attend a minimum of one training workshop or seminar per year
- Adequate professional insurance in place
- Clear advertising of correct qualifications, making no false claims of proficiency or experience
- Confidentiality maintained around sessions, groups, and any notes taken
- Subscription to The Knowing Field ([www.theknowingfield.com](http://www.theknowingfield.com))
- Member of Constellation Talk ([www.constellationtalk@yahoo.com](http://www.constellationtalk@yahoo.com))

### **Specific to Running Workshops**

- Therapeutic training (particularly important when leading group workshops)
- Any advertising to be appropriate to own level of training and capacity
- Trauma awareness and skills

## **Fitness for Practice**

- Knowing one's own professional ability, and working within this
- Managing referrals, if appropriate, to other therapists
- Self-awareness and humility
- Respect for the client and holding clear boundaries
- Honesty in managing the client's expectations
- Recognising when extra support for the client is needed
- Self-care and energetic hygiene

## **Personal Qualities**

Bert Hellinger talks of the "weight" of the facilitator as a prerequisite for practice. Phenomenologically it is important not to assert more, or less, weight as a facilitator than we actually possess. 'Weight' in this sense is affected by factors such as age and life experience, as well as training and professional experience. In this way, we see that 'weight' might be described as:

- A quality of grounding
- Being in contact with our core or centre
- Having integrated the joys and pains of life
- Being at peace with fate, or at least able to return to peace
- Being able to embrace and to contain the client's fate, the client's family fate, and even the fate of nations
- Being able to bear what comes our way, including being able to face and bear another's pain or the pain of a whole system
- Being able to sit with 'not knowing'
- Compassion

Bert Hellinger calls a life of ease a "light" life, and a life of many difficulties is a life that has weight. We could say that a constellator has as much weight as s/he can carry deeply, and yet, after some integration, also lightly. The heavy part of the weight is about what is experienced and carried, and the light part is when we can stand, open and light, in touch with the source of all fate.

Bert has also said that constellation work is something for the second-half of life, so we can speak and feel from experience.

## **A Brief History of Family Constellation Work**

Depending on one's philosophy of life one might see it as a pure coincidence, an act of grace from above, or a synchronistic development emerging from the evolving morphogenetic field. Irrespective of the interpretation, had not the German psychiatrist Gunthard Weber met with Bert Hellinger at a Conference in 1988 and had he not persuaded him to publish some material about his work, then Hellinger would have followed his plans to retire. He would now be remembered only by a limited number of people whose lives he directly impacted on in his various roles as priest and missionary, teacher, and devoted psychotherapist working in southern Germany. As it is, the book *Zweierlei Glück*, edited by Gunthard Weber and published in 1993, was a breakthrough in getting his work more widely known, and in his seventies Hellinger very quickly rose to eminence in Germany and Austria, increasingly working with larger and larger groups in public settings. He received much media attention and became a prolific author.

If Gunthard Weber was the catalyst for the phenomenal spread of constellation work in the German speaking world, it was Hunter Beaumont, an American psychotherapist living in Germany, who was instrumental in bringing it onto the wider international scene. In 1991 Beaumont first presented constellations to the English-speaking world at a training session for senior therapists at the Gestalt Centre in London. Thereafter he started a six-year collaboration with Hellinger and together they presented public workshops in Britain and the U.S.A., the first being held near London in 1996. Beaumont also translated and re-worked the original *Zweierlei Glück* book and in 1998 *Love's Hidden Symmetry* was published in English followed by many other translations. Since then Hellinger has held workshops across the world, and there are now few countries that have not had some degree of exposure to constellation work. A whole 'industry' of practitioners, workshops, professional trainings, Institutes, books and videos, journals and websites has developed, and in 2000 the English language journal *Systemic Solutions Bulletin* was launched in London for an international readership. Conferences have been held in Germany, Holland, Spain, Mexico, U.S.A. and recently for the first time in Britain.

### **Influences on Bert Hellinger**

An ardent student, Hellinger brings together an impressive number of theoretical stands to the work that has become variously called: Orders of Love, Family Constellations and Movements of the Soul. Ursula Franke looks at the most important influences in his professional development, and traces his experience of group therapy while still working as a priest in S. Africa, then his training in psychoanalysis and Janov's Primal therapy. Other important influences which he integrated into his method included Moreno's psychodrama, NLP, and Virginia Satir's family reconstruction. There are parallels between Hellinger's observations and Boszormenyi-Nagy's work on the unconscious systemic patterns and 'invisible loyalties' operating in families and we see the hand of Milton Erickson's hypnotherapy in his use of stories that speak to the client's unconscious, and Eric Berne's Transactional Analysis in his inter-generational 'life scripts'.

Although informed by these many strands, Hellinger's approach in working with family



systems is uniquely his own and it stands alone as a separate discipline characterised using constellations. And although heavily influenced by psychotherapeutic methods, Hellinger himself maintains that he is at heart an 'applied philosopher' rather than a therapist. Indeed, he frequently takes a radical and critical approach to what he calls the 'therapeutic relationship' which he claims often serves the interests of the therapist

rather than the client. No doubt his study of theology and philosophy, and his work as a missionary among the Zulus in Africa, has underpinned his phenomenological stance and his humanistic and transpersonal orientation. His work is a unique combination of in-depth psychotherapy and soul work, of European philosophy and the wisdom of the more traditional rituals of honouring and healing the ancestors.

## **Methodology**

Hellinger's approach is phenomenological and looks to reveal the truth of 'what is.' His primary tool in working with family systems is the constellation. In a group setting a facilitator helps a client to set-up a family of origin or the present family using representatives for family members. This spatial representation, together with observations from the representatives, provides a remarkably clear diagnostic tool for an insight into the hidden dynamics operating within a system.

Through years of observation, Hellinger identified how in a family there is a certain loyalty, a fellowship of fate that is transmitted down the generations through the operation of an unconscious family conscience. In the first stage of the constellation the facilitator uses the representatives' contributions to identify how the 'family soul' has become entangled and how the flow of love and nourishment has been interrupted. Hellinger has identified several key features or 'orders' that help the flow of love in a system.

When these are transgressed or the system is affected by a trauma, then family members suffer. Often two or three generations after the rupture a child's 'blind love' manifests itself in its willingness to sacrifice itself on behalf of others in the system. The child's soul (often in an adult's body) attempts to intervene in the destiny of others and to alleviate their suffering.

Hellinger observed these trans-generational effects manifesting in a number of ways and he used a poetic form to describe them. So, in the case of a seriously sick child, it is as if her soul is saying to her grandmother who died while giving birth to the child's mother 'I will follow you into death'. Or 'I will go instead of you' when a daughter is anorexic and moves towards death as if she can stop her sick father from dying of cancer and can go in his place. The child's soul also takes on the burden of guilt of previous generations 'I will atone for your sins', something Hellinger clearly identified in post-war Germany in the children and grandchildren of SS officers.

Hellinger also recognized how, through the process of bonding, the family conscience also recruits the child to identify with those who have been excluded from the family soul. In this identification, the child lives its life as if it is the forgotten one in a loyalty to those who have been excluded, whether that be a child who was stillborn, an aunt who was hidden away in a mental institution, or a murderer who has been excommunicated from the family. He conceived these movements as unconscious manifestations of an archaic conscience that seeks balance and compensation in the system and are driven by bonding and a blind and innocent child's love.

## **Hellinger has identified that love flows in a system when:**

- Everybody in a family system is honoured and given their rightful place.
- Those who come later take from those who came earlier (whatever the price). This order of precedence must be honoured.
- Parents give; children take. Parents are 'big, children are 'small'.
- In a relationship between parents, the giving and taking needs to be constantly moving towards a state of equilibrium.
- Guilt and merit belong to those who have earned them and cannot be assumed by anyone else.

The entanglements - that is, the interruptions to this flow of love - are brought to light in the first part of a constellation. Once they have been identified the second stage of a constellation is a search for a resolution that honours the 'orders of love' and opens up the heart to more compassion and understanding – and eventually to appropriate action. When unconscious movements are brought into the conscious mind, then they start to lose their power, freeing the child's soul to mature. This maturation exposes the futility as well as the beauty of the blind love and allows it to be accepted with humility and compassion; the young soul's love that wants to take away the suffering of others develops into a mature love that learns to accept the fate of those it loves and releases them into their own destinies.

The words of the entanglement 'I will follow you' may now be spoken in a more complete and differentiated movement, such as 'Dear mother, you have died and I live. In time, I too will die. While I am here I take the gift of life you gave me and I will use it well'. Or 'I will go instead of you' may become 'I stand in humility in front of your heavy fate. I am but a child and you are my parent. Please take me as your child and I will take you as my mother/father.' Or the blind love that makes the child take on the sins of the fathers may become 'I leave this with you. Please forgive me for even wanting to take it from you. It was presumptuous of me - a loving child's presumptuousness. Now I will look at my own guilt and deal with it as best I can. Please give me your blessing in this task'. The more mature love can now look with gentle compassion and without judgement at 'the other' that has been excluded from the family soul and it can also feel itself looked **upon** by 'the other'. When a relationship between the two is established then the unconscious identification starts to fade. Instead, the forgotten can now be remembered and held in the heart and the child is freer to live its own life.

## **Evaluation**

It is clear that constellations can be a powerful and very moving experience for many who set up their systems, and that they often give an insight into the family dynamic that offers a resolution to what previously have seemed intractable problems. There are many examples reported where the whole dynamic in a family starts to change. So, for example, a woman who 'reconciled' with her mother in a constellation in London received a totally unexpected phone call from her mother in Germany after many years of silence. A man recovering from alcohol addiction wrote after his participation in a constellation workshop:

'What was to follow I can only describe as an awakening. I felt I was seeing things as they really are and not what I'd like them to be – specifically regarding my ex-wife. I can't fully remember the conclusion of the constellation, other than to say that what I

experienced was something far greater than I imagined. When I look back, as I often do, it is as if another small window opened, allowing me to deal with yet another issue marked 'Unresolved'.

A few days after the workshop my middle son who had not spoken to me for over a year came up to me in the street, totally out of the blue, and said: 'Hallo Dad.'

Such stories abound in the constellation world. In addition many people report how a constellation they have witnessed or facilitated, or in which they have served as a representative, has had a lasting influence on them. A woman who represented a donor for someone waiting for a kidney transplant reported on how it impacted on her in the weeks following the constellation as she started to release the trauma of a road accident she had been involved in twenty-five years before:

'I think of the man who was waiting for his transplant. In choosing me to represent his donor

he gave me a gift. He helped me towards letting go of the past, another release. During the constellation I felt nothing for him, but now I feel a connection to him and I hope that he too may have found some succor for his soul.'

In contrast, of course, there is also a body of opinion that is critical of constellation work. Like any radical new way, it has been greeted with a degree of suspicion by some and outright hostility by others in the psychotherapy world. In addition, in Germany Hellinger has received much media attention, and while in the early days it was rather adulatory, latterly it has become more critical, sometimes vitriolic. Within the constellating community itself there is also much lively debate about a number of topics: concerns that as the work spreads there will be some who will copy the Hellinger style without his brilliance as a clinician; questions about Hellinger's style itself; the need for more research into the long-term benefits of constellations; the appropriateness of working with people in a public setting in workshops format with no prior knowledge of the client and with no follow-up; the legitimacy of using constellations with certain vulnerable clients and the danger of re-traumatisation, and much more. These discussions are in my view a healthy development in constellation work and represent a more mature and expansive phase of the growth of this discipline.

It is only thirteen years since the first book about Hellinger's work was published in 1993 and within this short time his method has become internationally known and is fast moving from being a stand-alone methodology on the fringes of the psychotherapeutic world, to becoming increasingly integrated into many branches of psychotherapy. Alongside those running constellation workshops

**Article written by Barbara Stones** who is a Gestalt psychotherapist, supervisor and trainer of many years standing. She is one of the foremost practitioners and teachers of the Hellinger approach in Britain and has been specialising in this approach since 1991. An author of several articles about constellations work she has contributed to making the work more widely known through the international journal Systemic Solutions Bulletin of which she was the founding Editor in 2000. She also co-founded The Hellinger Institute of Britain.

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## Guidelines for Transcribing a Constellation

Observing & Transcribing a Constellation is Valuable Because:

- Through it the issue holder has an opportunity to revisit the situation at some later time, which often helps to embed the resolving energy.
- The transcriber can take their understanding to a deeper level by detailed study. A constellation that isn't fully understood doesn't 'read' well.
- And a collection of constellations, held in confidence, will support the research and development of this field.

So, what to notice? What to write down? What to miss out or summarise? How important are diagrams? First, set up a three-column document. In the first column write the transcript, alongside in column two list the professional interventions with your analysis and understanding of them and finally in the third column record your personal responses to the work.

### **The Initial Situation**

The opening conversation is critically important. You need to provide the relevant information that the facilitator is given, but also relevant data on the relationship between the two of them, including key moments within the conversation. It is helpful to note the quality of eye contact, the tone of voice, the amount of support needed by the issue holder to maintain focus. If the issue is about a complex system, make sure you have detailed the information – the history, the people involved, the need expressed, the hierarchy and so on.

### **The Choosing of Representatives**

Note how and in which order the representatives are chosen and with what sort of care they are placed. Watch for their initial reactions and interactions. Before they begin to give feedback, see what you make of the configuration yourself.

### **The Constellation**

From then on you will be writing a something like a film script. There will be stage directions, including pauses, tone of voice, emotional responses and so on. There will be the words of the representatives, the words given to the representatives and how they deliver them, and the words of the constellator directed to the issue holder or the group. You need to specify which is which. It will also be important to specify whether it is a representative speaking or the issue holder, whether their words are chosen by the constellator or spontaneously generated and what impact they seem to create. You will need to indicate movements and gestures, and how the constellation shifts through the session. Some mapping is helpful, including the direction faced by the representatives. This can be done visually or verbally.

## **The Resolution**

There will often be conversation, including later comments from the group, which is part of the whole and shouldn't be omitted. You need to describe how it seems to affect the issue holder. And how the group is affected.

## **Later**

- See if you can provide a brief summary of the work that will sit at the front of your transcript, taking it from issue to resolution in a language that illuminates your understanding of the orders.
- Add a commentary about your own process - what impact it had on you, what it illuminated, how else you think it might have gone, your concerns and delights – a personal response that comes from your heart and your truth.
- And lastly, your estimation about what sort of further support, coaching or other work the issue holder might benefit from.

## Guidelines for Small Group Exercises & Practice Sessions

Experiential work, small group exercises, and peer practice groups are an essential part of the learning process for constellation work. To make the most of your experiences in small groups it is advisable to establish protocols, and an agreed code of conduct, for each practice group. In this way everyone feels sufficiently safe and supported to take courageous and creative steps of experimentation and exploration, and also of course to feel free to make the mistakes that are a part of any learning process.

As a constellation student group, you accompany each other and are essential to each other's process. We develop our skills through mutual support and collaboration – in this way we build confidence and expertise. It is also inevitable that competition, judgement and envy will arise at times – this happens in all groups, but what is important is that this is not hidden in the shadow of the group process, but addressed and included with openness and kindness.

### Suggested Practice Group Guidelines

1. Decide who wishes to be the facilitator.
2. The facilitator then names the kind of support (if any) that they might like from the group. This could include a co-facilitator, a consultancy panel, or the use of the 'Stop Button' within the group. The Stop Button enables you to stop the work for a moment and ask an individual or the group for suggestions. Once the 'button' is released no further advice is offered – this lack of uninvited interference allows the facilitator to hold their own authority.
3. The facilitator also establishes what kind of feedback and supervision they would like from the group when the work is complete. This might include requests for feedback on specific areas of practice, or a request for particular care around inner sensitivities.
4. The facilitator then invites an issue holder /client to step forward and volunteer themselves for a piece of work. It is agreed with the group that the issue holder can stop the piece of work at any time.
5. The facilitator holds time but may ask for support with this if specific timing is needed i.e. if there is a given time (say 15 minutes only) for the piece of work. It is worth including ample time for feedback from the outset, even if the constellation has to be cut short.

### The Feedback Process

In all groups the practice of learning to *give* constructive feedback is as important as learning to *receive* it.

It is important that all feedback focuses on the facilitation and not on the client issue or unpacking the constellation.

1. First the group invites the facilitator to give feedback on their facilitation experience.  
**Ask: *How are you feeling right now? What do you feel went well? What would you do differently another time?*** This is not about criticism, but more an invitation to include reflections on other ways of working in order to broaden learning possibilities. ***What gifts of insight will you keep from this experience?***

The courage so often required to step forward and constellate needs respect, so the facilitator becomes the holder of the feedback process from here.

2. The facilitator invites the client to comment on their process.  
**Ask: *How are you feeling now? How was the experience for you? What appreciation/s might you like to express? What might have made things easier for you in relation to your experience?***
3. The facilitator then invites the representatives to comment.
4. And then lastly the holding circle.

### **Suggested Feedback Guidelines**

- First ask for permission to give feedback, if you haven't already been asked for it. Check your motives for speaking, remind yourself why you are offering it. We offer feedback to support the learner and our collective learning experience, not to meet our own needs. If we speak harshly, critically or offensively then no one learns
- Own your feedback. Use 'I' statements rather than 'You ...'
- Limit your focus to what you have noticed – don't overwhelm with too much information
- Be Specific. ... use examples to explain and back up what you're offering
- Be positive, as well as offering areas for growth
- Focus on the intervention or behaviour, not the person
- Be timely... speak only of what has just occurred rather than previous events

### **Remember...**

- First ask for permission to give feedback, if you haven't already been asked for it
- Speak with kindness
- Respect other's timing – we learn at our own speed
- No judgement – just curiosity
- Respect vulnerability

## An Image Representing Seven Generations of a Family

