

# 6 Conversations to Build Community

## Week 1

An OLLI Discussion class based on Peter Block's  
Community, the Structure of Belonging

Anne Brack, Spring 2026

# Class Outcomes and Expectations

- By the end of the class:
  - Understand ways to use Peter Block's conversations in your life.
  - Learn Constructed Conversations technique to convene small group discussions.
  - Build relationships with each other and get a deeper sense of community.
  - Learn something about yourself.
  - Attempt to use an example about convening a community discussion.
- In Class:
  - Be prepared to talk candidly.
  - Use something from your life to talk about, you don't have to come in as a Community Organizer.
  - Maintain confidentiality. What is shared in here needs to stay in here.

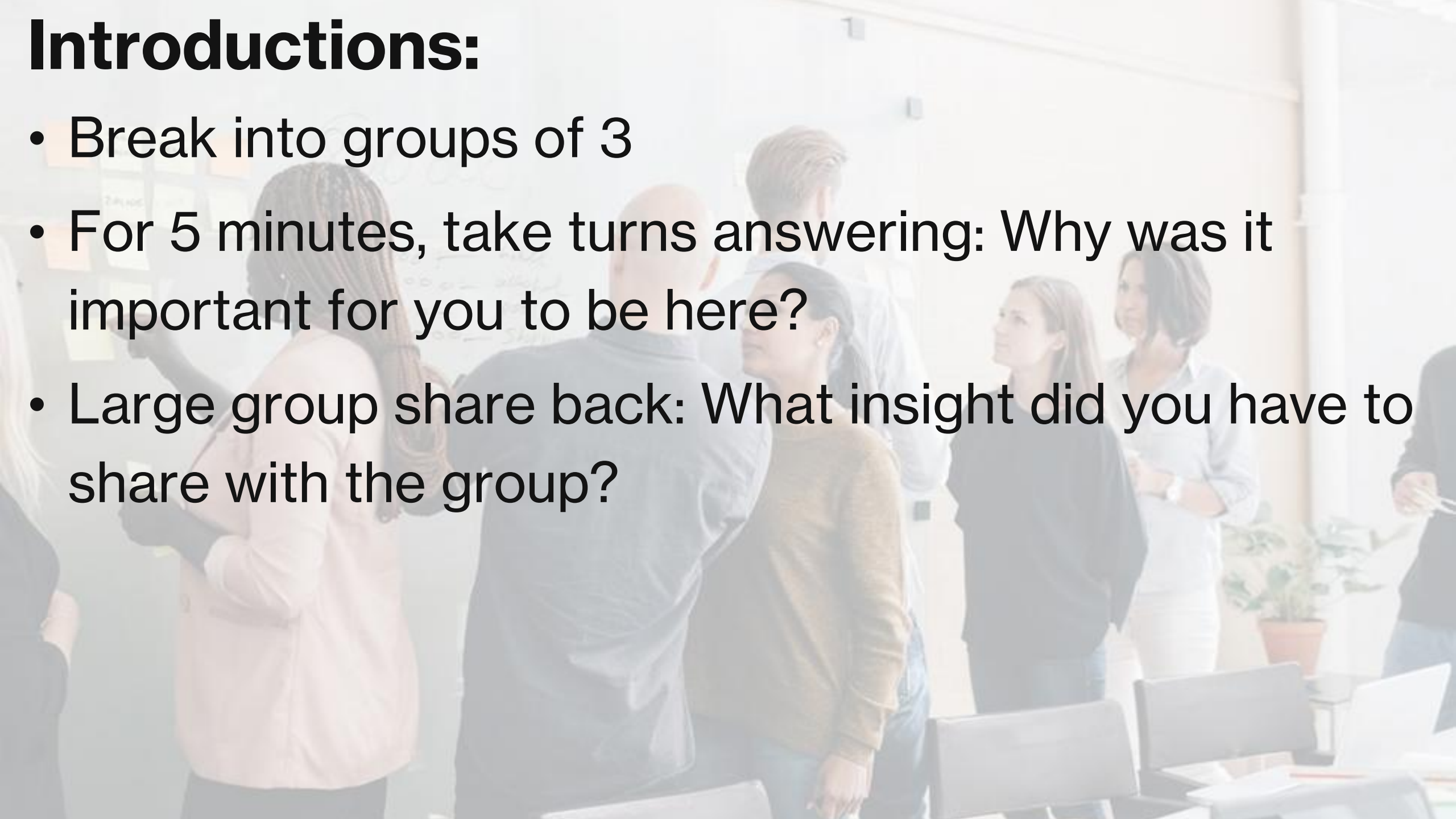
# Class Flow



- Class 1:
- Class outcomes
- Introductions and check in
- Book at a Glance
- Practicing Community: Small Group Exercises and Sharing
  
- Classes 2-6
  - 2:15-2:25 – Opening Reflection & Check-in
  - 2:25-2:35 – Book at a Glance plus – 1-2 Conversations
  - 2:35–3:20 – Guided Practices in Groups of three, with large group share
  - 3:20–3:30 – Takeaways and Close

# Introductions:

- Break into groups of 3
- For 5 minutes, take turns answering: Why was it important for you to be here?
- Large group share back: What insight did you have to share with the group?



# Each week, we will cover topics on this list

- **Book at a Glance (The Alchemy of Belonging, Part II):**
  - Overall Premise, Operating Guidelines
  - Context of Restorative Community.
  - The Inversion of Cause and Accountability
  - Leadership and Transformation.
  - Power of a small group: unit of transformation.
  - Questions are more transforming than answers.
  - Hospitality and Physical Space
- **Six Conversations:** Invitation, Possibility, Ownership, Dissent, Commitment, Gifts.

“Social fabric is created one room at a time. It is formed from small steps that ask, “Who do we want in the room?” And ‘What is the new conversation that we want to occur?’ In community building, we choose the people and the conversation that will produce the accountability to build relatedness, structure belonging, and move the action forward.”

**Peter Block,**

**Community the Structure of Belonging**

**The Fabric of Community, Part 1 p11**

# The Small Group is the unit of transformation (Constructed conversation):

- In each class, we will start with Large group topic and prompt
- Small group practice (Each class, try to be with someone new)
- Large group share back
- Repeat
- Small group conversation practices:
  - Groups of 3 – speaker, listener, witness.
  - One person speaks at a time until they are complete, avoid crosstalk and conversations.
  - Role of Speaker: When you speak, speak from your heart about what has meaning for you. Use I statements. It's ok to pass.
  - Role of Listener: Hold the space for the other person to be seen, heard, and valued. Respect their story. Make eye contact and affirming gestures without interrupting. Breathe.
  - Role of Witness: Pay attention to verbal and physical cues. Keep an eye on time.
  - Notice how you engage with curiosity. If you feel prompted to respond or reply immediately, wait!
  - Replace certainty and judgement with curiosity.
    - “Why is that important to you?”
    - “Tell me more?” Listen until the speaker is complete.

# Let's Practice

Process:


- Break into groups of 3 (speaker, listener, witness)
- Be conscious about time while in class to give each person equal airtime
- Speaker: Choose one question to answer in 2-3 minutes
- Listener: Use open questions like Why was that important to you? Tell me more?
- Switch roles so each person has a turn
- In last minute: give tips to each other
- Be ready to share out what you noticed

## Choose a question to answer with your group

- How valuable of an experience do you plan for this class to be?
- How much risk are you willing to take in sharing?
- How participative do you plan to be?
- What is the commitment you hold that brought you into this room?

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- Roles: Speaker, Listener, Witness
  - It is not our job to fix, advise, rescue or save another adult without their consent. Probe with, “Why is that important to you?” and “Tell me more.”
  - The speaker is the expert in their experiences.

Share Back –  
What stood out  
for you in this  
conversation?



Relationship and connectedness are the pre-condition for change. Every meeting, every process, every training program has to get people connected first. Otherwise the content falls on deaf ears. So small groups are an essential building block to any future you want to create.

Peter Block

quote fancy

# Questions Are More Transforming Than Answers

- Questions alone are not enough. Context matters
- Use Powerful/Generous questions
  - Open ended (not a yes or no)
  - Is ambiguous (you don't know the answer)
  - Personal (talking about your own experience, not someone else)
  - Evoke a choice for accountability and commitment, may evoke anxiety
- Examples: On Being with Krista Tippett, Wild Card with Rachel Martin

## Questions Are More Transforming Than Answers (from BaaG)

- The skill is getting the questions right.
- The traditional conversations that seek to explain, study, analyze, define tools, and express the desire to change others are interesting but not powerful.
- Questions open the door to the future and are more powerful than answers in that they demand engagement. Engagement in the right questions is what creates accountability.
- How we frame the questions is decisive. They need to be ambiguous, personal, and stirring.
- Introduce the questions by defining the distinction the question addresses, namely what is different and unique about this conversation.
- We need to inoculate people against advice and help. Advice is replaced by curiosity.

# Community and The Conversation of Possibility

The First Conversation in our OLLI course!

The important thing about these questions is that they name the agenda that can shift the nature of the future....The power is in the asking, not in the answers. And we do not have to get it right.

**Peter Block,**

**Community the Structure of Belonging**

**The Fabric of Community, Part 1 p143**

## **Community and The Conversation of Possibility, cont.**

- . Shifting from problem-solving to vision. What are the elements of community?
- . The power of naming possibility without needing to know how.
- . Share and listen to each other's possibilities for community or personal contribution.

# Possibility Conversations

Process:

- Break into groups of 3 (speaker, listener, witness)
- Be conscious about time while in class to give each person equal airtime
- Speaker: Choose one question to answer in 3-5 minutes
- Listener: Use open questions like Why was that important to you? Tell me more?
- Switch roles after 3-5 minutes
- Wrap up – what did you notice and/or feel?

## Possibility Questions – choose one to answer

- What is the crossroads where you find yourself at this stage of your life (or work around which we are assembled)?
- What do we want to create together that would make the difference?
- What can we create together that we cannot create alone?
- What possibility do you see for yourself or this group?

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- Roles: Speaker, Listener, Witness
  - It is not our job to fix, advise, rescue or save another adult without their consent. Probe with, “Why is that important to you?” and “Tell me more.”
  - The speaker is the expert in their experiences.

Share Back –  
What stood out for  
you in this  
conversation this  
time?

**The power of generous listening...**

**"Serve as a mirror  
Answers already exist  
Inside the seeker  
---Amy Neal"**

## Gifts Conversation (3 minutes – one minute each)

- What has someone in your group done, in this gathering, that has touched you?
- Accept the gift, respond with “Thank you, I like hearing that”
- Share back in the large group how you felt or what you noticed.

Questions/Feedback?

Final thought

**“A healer does not heal you. A healer is someone who holds space for you while you awaken your inner healer, so that you may heal yourself.” ~Maryam Hasnaa**

