

Facilitation Difficulty: 

 5-15 min.

 Groups of 20 or fewer

 No preconference

Purpose – To start meetings, class periods, or other gatherings and help participants set aside distractions before beginning the work at hand. There are three perspectives on how to “do” this activity: one is to speak thoughts so we may release them and feel more connected to the here-and-now. Another is to share a current feeling, insight, or question in the context of the work we are about to do. A third is for individuals to sit in silence and mentally and emotionally release distractions privately.

Preparations – Copies of the appropriate Transitions Activity Starters, if desired. Bring a timer with an audible chime, although you may choose to stop the activity before the timer rings.

Facilitation tips – If you are trying this out with a group for the first time, it can be helpful to frontload that people are sometimes reluctant to break the silence at first. Encourage people to be the first one to speak, if they’d like to. Once someone breaks the ice, others are much more comfortable sharing. Additionally, people new to this activity can become very uncomfortable with long silences. If a silence extends for more than a ninety seconds or two minutes, you may want to jump to step 4. Once people become used to this activity, long silences either disappear or people grow more comfortable with them. You might also want to use this at the end of a full day as a closing activity.

Steps:

1. **Setup** – Ask one or two people in your meeting or classroom to read aloud sections A and B below.
 - a. *“This activity is designed to help you more fully transition and be here now with us, so we can work efficiently and collaboratively. It is also designed to alert us to any important issues that may be distracting you today. Within this activity, you have these options:*
 - *“You may speak a thought or a feeling that has your attention, that you wish to release or temporarily ‘park’ for now so you can practice being fully ‘with us’ in this group.*
 - *“You may speak to connect a feeling, insight, or question to the work you are about to do.*
 - *“You may choose to write silently, think, or simply sit. Some people value quiet, reflective time to help them be here now. If your preference is silence, feel free.*
 - *“If anyone brings up an issue that you’d like to address, please refrain from responding until this activity is over and the group can decide whether to make time for a discussion around it.”*
 - b. *“The “rules” for this activity are quite simple:*
 - *“Speak if you want to.*
 - *“Don’t speak if you don’t want to.*
 - *“Speak only once until the coach lets us know that only two minutes remain. At that point, people may speak a second time if they wish.*
 - *“Listen and, if you like, silently react to what people say, but do not respond verbally. This is not the time to engage in a discussion.”*

2. **Handout** – You may pass out the Transitions Starters handout, which provides helpful prompts for those who are not familiar with the activity. If you do this, allow a minute for people to review the handout.
3. **Begin** – When ready, set your timer, let the group know how many minutes you’re setting aside for the activity, and say, *‘We will begin now.’*

We recommend about seven minutes for a group of 15 the first time they try this activity. If the group has done this activity more than a couple of times, you may set the timer for a reasonable amount of time based on the number and preferences of people in the group. This activity should never last more than twenty minutes.

4. **Invite** – When there are about two minutes left, announce that fact to the group, and add, *“If you haven’t yet spoken but would like to, now is the time.”* Give everyone a few seconds, and then if no one fills the silence, say, *“If you have already spoken once, you may speak again now if you like.”*
5. **Close** – At the end of the time allotted, say, *“Thank you, everyone.”*
6. **Debrief and reflect** – (2 min.) If the group has not used this activity before, consider debriefing. Some questions might be:

- *What did you think of this activity? How did it feel?*
- *Did you think this activity was helpful today? Why or why not?*
- *How did you feel about the silences? Another variation on this activity is for everyone to agree to be silent for sixty seconds. At some future meeting, would you like to try the “One Good Minute” variation?*
- *Did anything that anyone said cause you to think differently about our work here today?*
- *If we had not done this activity, what might you have assumed about the expressions on others’ faces or any other signs of distractions?*
- *How might you use this activity outside this group?*

Options –

- Ask if anyone would like to comment on someone else’s remark. (Limit this step to only a minute or two.)
- The first time, you might want to do a round of sharing. Each person should be given the opportunity to “pass” if desired.
- You can have participants respond to any “starter” as a prompt for the whole group. For example, *“Something that’s taking a lot of my attention right now is...”*