

The “Talking Stick”  
by Judith Fraser

“She never listens to me...”  
“But you don’t say anything.”  
“See, there you go again.”  
“What are you talking about?”

The “talking stick” doesn’t really talk. It is a tool, a symbol that demands respect. Its ‘voice’ asks that: one person speak at a time while the other is to remain silent. It can be made out of a small stick, feathers, crystals, beads, or other ornaments. Each “talking stick” is an individual work of art.

REASONS FOR USING THE “TALKING STICK”

- A family crises may call out for individual thoughts on one subject.
- A difficult decision may have opposing possibilities.
- The loss of a loved one may involve unresolved grief.
- A divorce may have unexpressed anger.
- A child may need special help to express feelings.
- A group may want to explore ideas about a specific topic.

One way that I’ve used the “talking stick” has been to further explore “animal Images,” while presenting an experiential workshop. Through the use of Guided Imagery, each participant took time to slow down and follow their breath in a mindful manner. As they focused on their heart area I suggested they allow an animal image to emerge. An animal that wanted to add something to their life, or a present difficulty.

We then divided into groups to make our “talking sticks” and focus on expanding our awareness of the gifts that the “animal” image wanted to bring to each individual. Each person, held their “stick” and spoke individually for her image using specific questions, as:

- I am (description of the animal.)
- I want (what does the animal want?)
- I need (what does the animal need?)
- Don’t ever call me (what does the animal not want to be called?)

Then, the rest of the group, one at a time, added their thoughts and feelings about the animal image. We slowly took time to allow each member time for exploration of their image and time to receive thoughts from others in their group. The thoughts of others sometimes added information and sometimes didn't.

An image I received once while working in this way was a PEST. I didn't want it. I really wanted to receive something more significant like an Eagle, or Lion. But, trusting the image, I listened. Pest gave me a gift I will never forget. She wanted me to not give up so easily. I still walk with that sense of awareness in my heart. It encourages me to continue in areas that are difficult for me.

A healer I know worked with some schoolchildren making a "talking stick". She took sticks, feathers, beads and ribbons into the classroom. Each child added something to one stick. At the end, a little girl remarked, "Look we have red, brown, white and beige feathers. Colors just like all of us and they look so b-e-a-u-t-i-f-u-l all together."

#### WHEN SPEAKING

One person speaks at a time.

Choose a subject everyone involved would like to discuss.

Speak for yourself, not others, not anyone or anything else.

Communicate freely and openly.

Be true to yourself.

Sometimes silence is what seems correct.

When you feel complete or have used the allotted time, you may choose to use the word "Ho" and place the "talking stick" in the middle of the circle or in front of you for the next person to take a turn.

#### WHEN LISTENING

Remain silent.

Hear the words and listen without judgment.

Don't assume that you know what the speaker wants to communicate.

Remain in the unknown.

Honor silence. It too has a voice.

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR MAKING THE "TALKING STICK"

The "talking stick" is one of the earliest tools man used to express him/herself in a positive, clear, loving way. It is created by using a small stick, 12" to 36" long. It can be made by an individual or a group. The decorations are generally beads, feathers, and ribbons or pieces of leather. Once it is created,

use it with respect. It's gifts will empower you to speak your truth in a caring way.

Good luck with your "talking stick". I leave you with these words:

May you have the ability to turn thunder into clear skies  
To See beyond the mist  
To walk the path of mighty warriors  
Turning obstacles  
Into new Hunting Grounds.  
Ho. Judith