

## [Handout 5] **“Joining” a pathway to empathy and connection across differences**

Use joining to slow things WAY down.

**PP to Both:** **“Can I stop you a moment? I have the sense that you’ve had this conversation before, am I right?”**

*“My sense is that this is an important conversation, right? I’d like to help you have it better. Interested?”*

*“I’m guessing that each of you is longing to be understood. But neither of you feels very heard, am I right? I’d like to teach you something that I think will help. It’s called ‘joining.’” “Who wants to go first?”*

**PP to Claire:** **“Can you start with just a sentence or two? The nub of what you most want Gary to get.”**

**PP to Gary:** **“Before you respond, I’d like you to take a breath. Find your heart. Remember that you love this person! Now, look for what you DO understand about what Claire just said. Not what you agree with, just what you DO understand.”** *“Great! Can you tell her?”* Stay with Gary’s ‘joining’ until Claire gives a nod that he’s “got it.”

**PP to Gary:** **“OK! Gary, now add a sentence or two of your own. What you most want Claire to get.”**

**PP back to Claire:** **“Your turn! Before you respond, take a breath. Find your heart. Look for what you DO**

**understand.”** Stay with that until you get that little nod. If you need to help: *“Gary, I think you wanted Claire to understand how painful it is when you feel you have to choose. Just how awful that feels? Right? Claire, can you get that? Can you tell him?”*

**Go back and forth, back and forth. Sloooowwwing things down. Helping each feel heard before responding.**

### Some Tips:

- **If someone launches into a long paragraph:**

*“I know you lots to say. But, it turns out that listening is a bit like eating. We can take in just so much at a time! So, it turns out, if you want to be heard, best to stick to 1 or 2 sentences.”*

- **One or both may need reassurance that “joining” is not agreeing.**

*It’s just what you do understand. It’s helping the other guy feel “gotten.” If joining is impossible, ask them to “mirror”—“Can you just say what you heard, as closely as possible?”*

- **Keep a firm hand. You may need to interrupt. Actively guide. But lead with eyour mpathy.**

*“I know this feels awkward. But I know you want to be heard. And you want to feel connected! So I’m gonna ask you to stop, take a breath. See if you can tell Claire what you DO understand.”*

**As each feels more fully heard, look for tiny little signs of relaxation** -- A deep breath, face softens, shoulders drop a

bit. When you see that, after 3 or 4 rounds, help them to notice: **“I wonder, Claire, how that felt inside, when Gary let you know that he got how it feels to be left out?”** (“A relief!”) PP: **“Can you tell him that? Can you tell him how much it helps you inside when he just lets you know that he got it?”** To Gary: **“Does that surprise you? Does it surprise you that ‘just’ empathizing is what she needs most?”** *“Can you tell her?”*

**Help them to feel this in their bodies:** **“Can you sense? There is a channel of connection under your differences. It doesn’t come from agreeing. It comes from fully hearing each other.”**