

Walk the Talk: Work Together in New Ways

A strong neighborhood is a place where children and families get the support they need to realize their dreams. Making your neighborhood a better place to live is about the results you want and the path you use for reaching those results. *It's about both the ends and the means.*

This section will help you get started on a new path. It will help you discover:

1. What values you want to put into practice--how you want to live and work together as a neighborhood.
2. What skills you need to bring out the best in each other.
3. How to get things done in positive ways – the nuts and bolts for working together.

"You must be the change you wish to see in the world."
-Mahatma Gandhi

One way for accomplishing changes in the lives of people in the neighborhood is to change the way you interact. You'll probably find that people want to live and work together in ways that helps them feel good about themselves and each other. *To bring out the best in our neighborhood, we want to bring out the best in ourselves.*

Most of us have not been taught the skills that it takes to work together in ways that both make us feel good about each other and accomplish results. But there are many steps that will start your neighborhood on a new path.

1. What Values Do You Want to Put to Work?

Most parents recognize that no matter how many times they tell their children to behave a certain way, youngsters learn most by watching the people around them. Adults in the neighborhood are models for the young people. Teens are models for younger children. In strong, nurturing neighborhoods, people work at the way they treat each other. Individuals try to behave in ways that make them feel good about each other and in the ways that they want their children to grow.

Talk About How You Want to Treat Each Other

Along with finding out what results your neighborhood want as a neighborhood, people need to discuss how they want to treat each other and to be treated. Individuals often have certain values and principles in mind as they interact – even if they are unspoken. Talking about these values is an important way for people to better understand each other and to start acting differently. It can help you begin developing more positive neighborhood relationships.

Getting people together who represent all aspects of the neighborhood enriches discussion and in the end makes for better decisions. At the same time, working together can be a challenge. The trick is to find ways to work together that stay true to your values and to the results you want. Neighborhoods are developing exciting new ways of working that help individual residents as well as the community as a whole.

Questions to Talk About

- How do we want to live and work together?
- How do we want to treat others and to be treated?
- How do we want neighborhood leaders to act?
- What are our neighborhood's values?

Look for new ways to live and work together that have big payoffs for everybody.

***How do your neighbors want to work together?
Here are priorities that some neighborhoods have identified.***

Everybody's a Leader

Instead of having only one person or a small group who hold most of the power and influence, everyone has a part in making decisions. *Sharing leadership allows everyone's voice to be heard and allows everybody to develop leadership skills.*

We're All In This Together

When everyone is a leader, responsibility is also shared. People are willing to take responsibility for their actions instead of blaming others. *No one person can take all the blame or all the credit.*

Working as a Team

Everyone is a full partner. People are willing to give up some of their personal choices to support the plans and decisions made by the entire neighborhood and benefiting everyone. *Instead of blaming and pointing fingers, people are willing to support each other and work as a team.*

Making Well-Informed Decisions

People want to be sure that the actions they take are the result of careful thought and good information – not on a whim, driven by someone's hunch, or based a few personal experiences. Using information is *an important way that neighbors are responsible to each other.* Many types of information can help in making decisions, including:

- The views and experiences of people who live and work in the neighborhood,
- Facts and figures about the neighborhood,
- Information about what works in other places.

Willing to Risk Getting Real

It may take a lot of talking to understand others' viewpoints and complicated issues. At some point though, people *need to be willing to move ahead – even if it means stepping outside their comfort zones --* and try new approaches. You can avoid hype with honesty about neighborhood problems, successes and progress.

Taking Time to Get on the Same Page

Working together to achieve common hopes and dreams is a powerful way for people to learn to accept and value each other. *The more diverse your neighborhood, the more time and effort it's likely to take and the richer the experience is likely to be.*

Here's how people in some neighborhoods describe the leaders they want:

- ❑ Communicating in a way that makes people feel welcome and respected.
- ❑ Listening with appreciation to each person – whether we agree or not.
- ❑ Helping to identify problems and concerns in ways that different people can understand.
- ❑ Creating an atmosphere where people feel safe to express themselves and to float ideas.
- ❑ Relating to and accepting where people are coming from.

- ❑ Sharing power, knowledge and resources.
- ❑ Setting priorities and not wasting people’s time.
- ❑ Helping neighborhood members solve disagreements in ways that benefit everybody.
- ❑ Encouraging people to follow-through on their agreements and promises.

New Orleans’ St. Thomas

Members of the community want to get rid of racism and oppression. They want every individual to be treated with respect and fairness. Drawing on Afro-American traditions of community and individual responsibility to the community, they want everyone to have a voice in decisions that affect the neighborhood.

The San Diego “Bronze Triangle”

Residents want to control their own destinies. They are working to increase their involvement in decision-making, their individual skills and their community’s support.

Denver’s Making Connections Neighborhoods

The philosophy here is that children do better when their families do well, and families do better when they live in supportive neighborhoods. Making Connections Denver is “connecting and supporting residents to organize and work together to create an agenda for families and children in their neighborhoods.”

Oakland’s Lower San Antonio

A culturally diverse coalition of individuals and organization came together “to celebrate the strengths of the Lower San Antonio community, promoting empowerment so that families can live with peace, dignity, and opportunity.”

**Alliance for Building Community - Windham County, Vermont
Community Principles**

- To promote positive change and conditions of well-being
- To be actively inclusive
- To foster collaboration
- To identify community strengths and needs objectively
- To support community actions around identified needs.

2. What Skills Do You Need?

People trying to improve their lives and their neighborhoods struggle unless they develop the skills they need for working together. Certain behaviors make a difference, but they require skills that we don't just automatically know. We all must learn and practice new ways of working together.

Using these skills can help you and others accomplish your shared goals. They also can have big payoffs in other aspects of your lives.

Active Listening

We've all had the feeling that a person we're trying to communicate with isn't listening. We are likely to feel that our views are not considered important, and if it continues over time our trust for the other person dwindles. On the other hand, listening to each other with attention and appreciation can:

- Build trust,
- Help us understand each other and make decisions together,
- Help folks with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds build relationships.

Listening Tips

- ❑ Imagine the other person's viewpoint. Think about how the individual might have come to his or her conclusions.
- ❑ Think about what the speaker is saying instead of thinking about what you will say next.
- ❑ Ask questions to be sure you understand, to clarify the speaker's views and to get more information.

Building Trust

Unless we trust each other, we can't work together to change our lives. Especially when people have very different backgrounds and life experiences, it may be hard to tell where they are coming from. Sometimes it takes time and a lot of interaction to build trust.

Tips for Building Trust

Do's	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Be honest and let people know what you think or believe. ❑ Do what you say you're going to do – when you say you'll do it. ❑ If you find that you can't do something you said you'd do, let people who are depending on you know. ❑ Let people know that it's safe to toss around ideas. Nobody will be put down because of their opinions, and individuals' privacy will be respected. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Say one thing to one group and say something else outside the group. ✗ Fail to follow through when you make a commitment to do something. ✗ Try to influence others for your own personal gain. ✗ Personally blame an individual when something doesn't work. ✗ Be part of "backroom" decisions that deliberately exclude people.

Showing Respect

To work together, we need to appreciate each other as unique and equal. You can show respect by trying to involve everyone in the neighborhood and by listening with appreciation for their views.

Tips for Showing Respect

- ❑ Get individually acquainted with as many members of the neighborhood as possible.
- ❑ Encourage people to share their differences in thinking and opinions.
- ❑ Acknowledge and show appreciation for different beliefs, values and experiences.
- ❑ Arrange opportunities to get to know, understand and celebrate the cultural backgrounds and practices of people in your neighborhood.
- ❑ Make sure that information is available in all the languages of your neighbors. Print written materials in all languages and be sure to have an interpreter when talking or meeting with residents who don't share your language.
- ❑ Respect others' time and needs. For example, make arrangements for food if a meeting is scheduled at mealtime, consider arrangements for child care and transportation, make sure that the elderly and people with disabilities have full access to meetings.

A Safe Place to Deal With Sensitive Topics

To reduce the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases in New Orleans' St.

Thomas housing development, ten residents were trained to be "Walkers and Talkers." These folks organized home health parties to provide information about sexuality. Just as important, the parties helped adults learn to talk to each other about sensitive topics and to talk with young people so they would listen. The idea was to create a "safe space" where residents could ask questions and talk with other adults without fear or embarrassment. The home health parties reached 800 people – 62 percent of the neighborhood's adults.

3. How Can You Get Things Done in Positive Ways? The Nuts and Bolts

Holding Effective Meetings

As everyone who has sat through an unproductive or unpleasant gathering knows, conducting an effective meeting requires know-how. Done well, meetings can accomplish goals, encourage people to share responsibilities, and foster mutual respect.

<p>Planning a Meeting That Works</p> <p><i>The meeting agenda lists the things you want to do and a schedule.</i></p>	<p><i>Everyone Contributes</i></p> <p>The Leelanau County Family Coordinating Council in Michigan plans community meetings in a way that gives everyone the chance to be heard. It also keeps meeting length reasonable and makes sure that no one person dominates or de-rails the meeting. Before each community meeting, a planning group gets together to plan the agenda. Anyone who wants to make a proposal for the meeting shows up at the planning meeting or contacts a member of the planning group in advance. The group sorts out issues that do not concern the entire community and puts together the agenda. They help keep meetings focused on solving problems that are important to people.</p>
	<p><i>Results-Focused Meetings</i></p> <p>Some neighborhoods figure out the results they want from a meeting and work backwards from there to put together a plan. They identify steps, discussion, or actions that will help achieve meeting results. Then they put aside time on the agenda that corresponds to the importance of each step and the type of work it requires. They figure out what information participants will need and find people or materials to provide the information. They also try to anticipate possible conflict among participants and identify ways to deal with disagreements.</p>
<p>Participants' Roles</p> <p><i>Sharing leadership gives more people responsibility. It takes the load off any single individual.</i></p>	<p>The person who facilitates the meeting has two jobs: determining who talks when and encouraging discussion.</p> <p>Here are three common ways to facilitate neighborhood meetings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A chairperson runs the meeting, 2. A specially trained facilitator runs the meeting, or 3. Neighborhood members rotate responsibilities.

Sharing Meeting Responsibilities

The Leelanau County Family Coordinating Council redesigned meeting roles to spread responsibilities among more individuals. Residents fill these positions for each meeting.

- **Facilitator** – A rotating position. Responsible for moving through the agenda that has been planned and for guiding discussion.
- **Notetaker** – Records discussions and keeps meeting minutes.
- **Timekeeper** – Keeps track of the time that has been planned for discussions and lets the facilitator know when time is running out.
- **Scribe** – Records ideas and proposals for everyone to see -- for example, on an easel pad or whiteboard.
- **Doorkeeper** – Greets people as they enter and helps latecomers find the place on the agenda.
- **Peacekeeper** – Reminds people of their common goals and commitment to cooperation if tempers flare. Celebrates and encourages people when things are going well.
- **Advocate** – Removes individuals for one-on-one discussion if emotions get out of control. Helps to diffuse situations privately and respectfully.

Family Circles: Discussions That Work

In Indianapolis, Family Circles connect people with each other to identify solutions and strategies that will strengthen their families and neighborhoods. For each circle, eight to ten participants work together to help one or more families deal with difficult situations. A neighborhood organization convenes each circle and a trained facilitator is on hand. Here a single parent describes how a family circle helped her and her kids.

“The Mom and Dad Patrol (a group of neighborhood volunteers) is helping me along. With a job change, I have to be at work early now. I wouldn’t have been able to take the job because it would have meant my kids being alone in the mornings. I didn’t want that. Now, my two girls stay with the Patrol each morning. The Patrol makes sure they get on the bus. I don’t have to worry and I know they’re safe. Now, I’m home from work before the bus gets here and everything is working out great.”

Reaching Consensus: Finding Pathways That Everybody Can Live With

Consensus means finding a proposal or solution that everyone can support, even though some folks may not agree. This way of working together is different from the decision-making that many people are accustomed to – where a single leader decides for an entire

group, a handful of people make the decisions, or residents vote and abide by the decision that gets the majority of votes.

Looking for Common Ground

Many cultures, groups, and even families use consensus to reach agreement. It requires that people leave their personal issues at the door and consider instead the good of the entire group. Consensus is *not* a unanimous vote. *Consensus is reached when each person can support and live with a decision, even if it is not exactly what he or she wants.*

Instead of people who make up the majority of the community making the decision, everyone has an opportunity to be heard. Everyone must be OK with the decision. The majority cannot force solutions on the rest of the group.

When you're trying to reach consensus, conflict is actually positive. Exploring different views brings the strengths and weaknesses of proposals into focus and uncovers underlying attitudes and thinking. It might take longer to reach a decision, but you're able to thoroughly explore issues, concerns and viewpoints. Individuals feel that their views are heard and valued, and it helps people understand and accept each other.

The Switch to Consensus

One community in Georgia was accustomed to using majority rule. People realized that they were stuck. They were working together in ways that were familiar but not necessarily fulfilling. They began exploring consensus decision-making.

The community did not make a quick switch. Instead they arranged for training on consensus decision-making for residents. Then they compared it with their majority-rule approach and reached agreement about making the change. They planned the steps they would take and made the switch over several months. Neighbors report a number of differences:

- The community is more energized as a whole.
- Individuals speak up at meetings and get more involved.
- Some people say they feel like they have more at stake and are more interested in improving their neighborhood.
- People who represent all groups of the community are actively working together.

Negotiating: Finding Solutions Where Everybody Wins

As neighbors work together, more and more are using win-win negotiation to reach agreements. It's a way to set priorities and solve disagreements that encourages everyone to participate. It helps the entire neighborhood "own" the resulting plan or agreement.

Negotiation skills take practice and time to develop. But don't worry -- training is available. And it might change more than your neighborhood. It might change your life.

The Winning Steps

1. **Ask people to identify what's important to them.** While talking about what they need and care about, folks need to communicate as specifically as possible and to acknowledge each others' interests. Through discussion, people note which interests they have in common and where they have differences of opinion.
2. **Help people avoid taking stands.** Often when people try to make decisions together, individuals feel like they have to take a stand to protect what's important to them. For example, a neighbor may feel like she needs to issue an ultimatum – what she will or will not put up with in the neighborhood. When folks take positions like this, disputes can turn personal and the neighborhood can become splintered. When people feel like they have to choose sides, differences seem a lot more important than all the hopes and dreams they have in common. We can spend a lot of energy defending the stands we've taken instead of working together.

An alternative is to explore our shared interests as well as our differences – without taking stands. By focusing on what people want – what's most important to them – you can avoid situations where individuals feel that they need to defend their positions at all costs.

3. **Identify conflicts.** At the same time, the idea is not to sweep disagreements under the rug. Calmly exploring areas of disagreement and conflict helps you make good decisions and prevents friction and misunderstanding later.
4. **Be open to possibilities and opportunities.** Being willing to consider all possibilities puts a lot of options on the table for people to think about and can lead to creative agreements. Often people reach consensus about a course of action that no one anticipated at the beginning of the discussion.
5. **Create “win-win” solutions.** Look for options that everybody can live with – that meet everyone's minimum needs. Even better, see if you can find options that will benefit everybody. Then fine-tune the strategy until everyone agrees it will work.

This kind of negotiation has several things going for it:

- The goal is for everybody to gain.
- Everybody who participates has an equal say.
- Everybody has something to offer -- ideas, opinions, knowledge, or personal experience.
- It works well with consensus-building and other new ways of working together.

Time Dollars: A Win-Win For Everyone

Time dollars are a new kind of exchange that people can use to convert their time into purchasing power. No money changes hands. Instead, people trade their time helping each other. An hour helping another earns one time dollar. And time dollars are not taxed.

Many neighborhoods are using time dollars. In San Antonio, Time Dollar Community Connections is creating a computer system for banking neighbors' time dollars. Not only will the computer bank keep track of the hours people earn and spend, it will match the kind of work that individuals are available to do with the requests for help needed.

Here's a story that San Antonio Time Dollar Community Connections created to show how time dollars work. The story is posted on a neighborhood website along with notices about upcoming information sessions and registration to participate in the local Time Dollar program.



Javier, a single father, and his son Raul grew pumpkins in the community garden one Summer.



In exchange for the Time Dollars Javier received, he hired their neighbor Susana, a poet, to write a poem for his friend Rosemary. Raul saved his Time Dollars.



Susana used Time Dollars from writing poetry to hire Rosemary to help her organize her writing and files.



Meanwhile, Rosemary received the poem from Javier. She was so pleased that she used her Time Dollars to hire Marcos to build a bookshelf for Javier.



Marcos now had Time Dollars for pet sitting with Emma while he and his friend Susana, the poet, went camping.



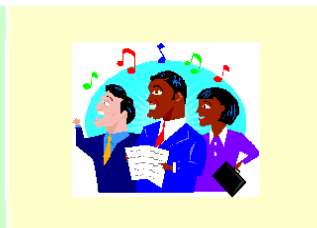
Emma earned enough Time Dollars to get help repairing her car.



Meanwhile, Javier and Rosemary were volunteering together and earning Time Dollars while they ran errands for new parents and those who were ill. They cooked and cleaned and did home repairs for neighbors. Sometimes Raul helped them.



One day, they told Raul they had a surprise for him. His father and their friend Rosemary were planning to get married, and they would have a double reception with their neighbor Susana and her fiancé Marcos. Raul knew it was time to spend his Time Dollars. He hired Vincent, Mario and Evette to sing for the reception.



What will Vincent, Mario and Evette do with their Time Dollars? What exciting events will follow their Time Bank investments? You can write your own story as you make Time Dollars in your neighborhood.