

## **What is a 'Womb Surround' Process Workshop?**

*(adapted from Ray Castellino's description at <http://www.castellinotraining.com/process/>)*

A 'Womb Surround' Process Workshop is a small group format, based on that developed and refined by Raymond Castellino since 1992. It creates a safe, welcoming environment in which to explore early imprinting from preverbal life that is affecting your present life. Typically there are 3- 4 participants in a workshop, along with Cherionna Menzam-Sills as facilitator, and usually 1-2 assistants.

Dr. Castellino created his format because he found that complete and lasting transformations most often happen in a small group setting like this. This 3-day format allows for spaciously establishing a safe relational field, exploration of the early material presenting, and time to integrate. Cherionna has added to this format additional somatic and mindfulness-based resourcing activities, including the mindful movement practice, Continuum, as part of the workshop.

Each workshop begins by reviewing basic interactive, empathy and contact skills so that participants are actively able to support each other during the workshop with the intention of creating a safe and nurturing "womb surround." Each participant receives a 1.5 - 2.5 hour session with Cherionna with group support during which he or she explores physical and emotional patterns of prenatal, birth or other early origin. Each session is followed by individual and group debriefing, integrative processing and discussion. Tools used include group interactive processes, energy awareness, Craniosacral work and/or other touch, movement, mindfulness and empathy skills.

The purpose is to enhance awareness and resolve early trauma, creating more options for current behavior and ways of being in relationship. In addition to healing prenatal, birth and other early trauma, this process has the principle impact of encouraging loving bonding within primary relationships. Participants commonly state that the process is transformational on a deep level, apparently involving cellular re-patterning.

## **The Format of the 'Womb Surround' Process Workshop**

The actual format is as follows: The first segment of the workshop (approximately 3 to 4 hours) is spent with participants sharing intentions and Cherionna establishing the principles and structure

that will make it possible to share and receive at a deeply safe and resourced level. Cherionna will guide the group in settling into a heart-centered receptive witnessing state, as well as deepening into a resourced, fluidic state of being through some gentle breaths, sounds, movement and awareness of Continuum. Then, over the course of the workshop, each person has a turn, one at a time, during which the whole group, led by Cherionna, focuses on supporting the participant to explore some aspect of preverbal life. Each step is taken with consciousness, permission from the turn person and with a goal of supporting the turn person's intention in exploring this early material. In this format, Cherionna is facilitating not only the individual turn person, but also the other members of the group and interactions between everyone present.

The methods used to facilitate each turn are determined by the intention and needs of the turn person. Here is what is consistent: First there is a group process to determine who will be the turn person. The rest of the group will be the surround. The whole group is involved in this decision in order to insure that everyone is on board to support the turn person. Once the turn person is determined, Cherionna rereads the turn person's history form and the turn person affirms his or her turn. Cherionna and the group then listen to the turn person's story in a guided, resourced and relational way. Cherionna asks questions pertinent to the person's exploration, coaches the person through slow movement patterns, uses gentle touch and makes suggestions to the turn person and the group for interactive exercises.

During sessions Cherionna coaches the surround members to support each other and the turn person. She guides surround members in applying the same kind of attention that they would as if they were holding a newborn baby.

In this process, Cherionna guides the turn person and the group to interact at a very slow tempo so that each person present and especially the turn person are supported to integrate or make sense of the early body memories. For example, the turn person's body may begin to move in the unique movement patterns that the person actually moved through during his or her birth. The group quietly and gently holds the turn person so that he or she can move through the birth pattern in a very conscious and integrated way. Doing this at a slow tempo, with warmth, contact and support, re-patterns the experience for the turn person. The whole group is working together as a team in a very respectful gentle atmosphere as if they were at a birth.

In facilitating this process, Cherionna draws on over 20 years experience in studying and practicing prenatal and birth therapy, including 6 years intensive study with William Emerson, whom she has assisted in seminars, and 4 years intensive study with Ray Castellino, whom she also assisted in his clinic, training and countless process workshops. Her background as a therapist for almost 40 years also includes Occupational Therapist in both physical medicine and mental health settings, Somatic Dance/Movement psychotherapist, massage and bodywork therapist, and Biodynamic Craniosacral therapist. All of these, as well as her many years of mindfulness, meditation, Continuum and other mindful movement practices contribute to her ability to be present with each person and the whole group as potentially intense processes emerge for healing.

As the turn person reveals his or her history, Cherionna uses this knowledge to help the turn person develop a plausible and coherent story out of his or her history. As this happens, Cherionna helps the turn person realize how these early imprints led to adaptive behaviors that have affected him or her throughout his or her life and how these adaptations to the original trauma have been useful. Participants often discover the limitation of their adaptive behaviors. The process itself opens new possibilities for a broader spectrum of choices in their lives.

Not all participants explore their birth process. Some explore an aspect of ancestral influences, conception, pregnancy, hospitalization after birth, twin experience, family dynamics of their birth family, adoption or any other events or family patterns that affected them strongly.

At the end of each turn, the surround members are asked to share a brief essence statement of how the turn person's work touched them.

It is usual for the sessions to end with the whole group in awe and reverence for the sanctity of the turn person's journey and for life itself.

Each morning there is a group check-in and a debriefing of the previous day's session by Cherionna. (The last day's sessions are debriefed during closure). The purpose of these discussions is to facilitate the integration of the sessions. When the group is in session, the participants are in experiential right-brain mode. During the debriefing following the sessions, participants are in more of a cognitive left-brain mode.

During closure, Cherionna recommends specific activities for the

next month to support the participants in the integration of their experiences from the workshop. These include contact with other members of the group, professional support, and suggestions for ways to integrate their new perceptions, needs and ways of being with their families and communities.

### **Who Attends a 'Womb Surround' Process Workshop?**

Anyone who is ready for or who has experience with group process work is welcome to attend.

This workshop is also recommended for professionals as a means to personally experience the profound changes possible with this approach. Those who come with particular skills may be encouraged to use them in the group setting. Participants leave with deeper levels of awareness, directly related to prenatal and birth processes, applicable to any professional practice. Many report using their new perceptions and skills in their practices.

This workshop is equally valuable to persons who chose to take it primarily for personal growth and healing.

Couples, pregnant mothers, mothers/fathers and their adult children often take this workshop as well as professionals.

Individuals who are not ready for group process work are best served by individual sessions with Cherionna, therapy in another setting or both.

For upcoming workshop dates please visit [www.birthingyourlife.org](http://www.birthingyourlife.org).

Cherionna is also available to facilitate private groups of 3 or less.

Please contact her through the website for more information or to set up a private group.