



– EARTH EXCHANGE –

A GUIDE FOR HOSTS

Together we are blazing a new path of earth activism by finding and making beauty in and for the Earth's wounded places.

Each Earth Exchange is shaped by the people who create it, the place where it's held, the culture of the community, and even by unpredictable circumstances like the weather and the condition of the place.

The Earth Exchange is part storytelling, part community action, part healing work, part artistic expression, part ceremony, and part play. We call it an Earth *Exchange* because in the process of enacting it, an exchange is made between people and place. People receive meaning and beauty from a place they might previously have seen as spoiled or even worthless, and the place receives compassion and creativity from the people who care about it.

About These Guidelines...

These guidelines describe the primary steps of the Earth Exchange and offer suggestions that you may use for your event. The Basic Guidelines are for all hosts and participants. We encourage you to follow these four simple steps in your own Earth Exchange, while using your imagination, creativity, and spiritual and community traditions. For those who would like more details and suggestions we offer an extended perspective on the four steps in the section "Additional Tips and Suggestions."

The Basic Guidelines...

The Earth Exchange consists of four steps:

- 1. Meet with friends at a wounded place**
- 2. Sit a while and share your stories**

3. **Get to know the place as it is now**
4. **Give back an “Act of Beauty”**

The most important considerations to keep in mind as you conduct your Earth Exchange are:

- Protect the safety and health of yourself and your group
- Respect the community, including the non-human community, where you do your event
- Welcome all who wish to participate

The Earth Exchange usually lasts about 1-1/2 to 3 hours.

ADDITIONAL TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS

The Four Steps of an Earth Exchange...

1. MEET WITH FRIENDS AT A WOUNDED PLACE

Perhaps you've already chosen a site for your **EARTH EXCHANGE**. If not, you probably won't have to look far. Unfortunately, this beautiful planet is filled with possibilities: forests damaged by beetles, polluted rivers, landfills, industrial sites, and mountaintops flattened for mining. Wounded places are not just lands and waters either, but also places where animals, birds, and insects once thrived and now are missing. For example, an apple orchard could be considered a wounded place because so few honeybees are visiting it. A wounded place is in the eye of the beholder.

In planning your event, it is essential that you insure the health and safety of yourself and the other members of the group. Avoid places where the land is unstable, such the sites of explosions, earthquakes, or rock slides. Do not expose yourself and your group to toxic waste or pollution. (If you want to do an **EARTH EXCHANGE** for a toxic place, contact us for some options that will be safe.) Do not break laws or trespass. At **EARTH EXCHANGES** we do not judge, blame, or protest. We practice mindfulness, connection, compassion, and creativity.

After you have determined the site for your Earth Exchange and scheduled a date, time, and meeting place, let your friends, neighbors, and colleagues know about the event and ask them to join you. An **EARTH EXCHANGE** is meaningful and effective whether you have two people in attendance or two hundred.

When you and the group first arrive at the place you've chosen for your **EARTH EXCHANGE**, you might tell something about the circumstances that brought this

wounded place or species to its current predicament. Sometimes people invite a teacher, scientist, or environmentalist to give this explanation. The description doesn't have to be long and detailed. The point is simply to give people some background on what has happened to the place.

2. SIT AWHILE AND SHARE YOUR STORIES

A circle is an ideal shape for a group, because it puts every person on the same level and allows everyone to see and hear one another. When the people in your group have gathered, ask each person to introduce themselves and talk briefly about their relationship to this place or species, both before and after it came to be in its present condition. Every one of us has a personal connection with the natural world we live in. Sometimes we are connected to places because their beauty (or former beauty) has touched us. Sometimes we have memories of special experiences in a place. These feelings of love, awe, delight, and wonder continue to affect us, even after the place has been radically changed.

As participants share their feelings, grief may arise. Anger may flare up. Some people may feel guilt because they were unable to save the place or species. Let each person speak from the heart, one at a time, without interruption or feedback.

3. GET TO KNOW THE PLACE AS IT IS NOW

Everyone now has some time to spend alone, getting to know the place. In this part of the **EARTH EXCHANGE**, people walk or sit as they reflect on what they see around them and how they react to what they encounter. This is a kind of dialogue with the world that we all carry on unconsciously every single day. In any encounter with any landscape—including any cityscape—outer impressions and events interweave with our own personal histories, interests, and imaginations. The world around us reflects our inner self, and the inner self responds, which then affects how our perception of the outer world shifts. It is an ongoing, usually unconscious process. With the Earth Exchange, we simply bring it into awareness.

This part of the **EARTH EXCHANGE** could last anywhere between twenty minutes and two or more hours. Here are some suggestions to enhance your exploration of your wounded place:

- **PAY ATTENTION** in a relaxed way to what you see, hear, smell.
- **KEEP YOUR CURIOSITY OPEN** and your senses active. Give your rational, thinking mind a little rest.
- **WHICH FEATURES OF THE PLACE ATTRACT YOUR ATTENTION?** What moves you? What upsets you? What do you find curious? What are you drawn toward?

● **WHAT ARE YOUR EMOTIONS?** Grief, anger, hope, nostalgia, curiosity, fear, humor? Let your feelings blend with what you see and experience. Perhaps you will notice after a while that you feel inspired to respond in a certain way: to hug a tree, weep over a polluted stream, lie down in the sand, make an offering. Pay attention to these inclinations and respond if you can.

In this wounded place there is some gift of beauty waiting to reveal itself to you. It could be something you see or hear in the land around you. It might be a surge of pity or compassion for the people who have played a part, however large or small, in causing the damage to this place. It could be a flash of insight or a memory. Keep a sharp lookout for it! This moment of beauty could be a great treasure. It will also remind you that, even in the darkest of circumstances, you can always find beauty.

Many **EARTH EXCHANGE** groups conclude this portion of the event with another opportunity for everyone to gather again in the circle and tell the stories of what happened during their time on the land. Some people may be reluctant to tell their story, but when each person participates, the experience is greatly enhanced for all. The reasons:

● Sometimes people feel that “nothing happened” to them. By telling their story, they realize that something always happens when a person interacts with a place. Let people know that if something feels too private to share, they may keep that part to themselves.

● Stories bring new life, energy, and meaning to the place.

● Each person’s story feeds and deepens the experience of the other participants.

Remember that everyone’s story is valid exactly as it is. You as the host and the other participants need not (should not) interpret, comfort, or give feedback; simply listen.

4. GIVE BACK AN ACT OF BEAUTY

EACH EARTH EXCHANGE gives something back to the wounded place in a real, tangible way. This is the Act of Beauty. The Act of Beauty is a living work of art made of and for one place on earth by one particular group of people at one particular moment in time. It is a unique work, representing both the condition of the place and the response of the people who love it. It requires no outside materials.

There are many simple, beautiful ways to make beauty. Be sure that one of your acts of beauty is making the RadJoy bird out of found materials. A bird is a symbol of transcendence. It sings through the more dire conditions. It reminds us of the

power of life to prevail with beauty. People have made the bird out of stones, plastic bottles, sand, trash, rocks, paper, and their own uplifted arms. Use your imagination!

Here are few additional ways to make beauty for your place:

- dance
- sing
- feed the birds
- water a plant
- plant a tree
- hug a tree
- say a prayer
- make an altar
- make an offering
- drum
- hold hands
- walk a boundary
- make art out of trash
- turn a cartwheel

Let the act of beauty emerge until it feels right instead of forcing something, even if the process is slow to get started. Think of this act as a gift to a place that has long been abused and neglected. You are reversing that pattern. You are giving beauty where it is sorely needed. In the process you usher yourself and your fellow journeyers into new territory, where you become creators, adventurers, takers of risk, and givers of beauty. And you are bringing one of the wounded places of the Earth back into the circle of life.

The act must be simple enough to be enacted by all participants, no matter what their age, level of physical ability, or any other consideration.

The effect of this Act of Beauty on the participants is often very powerful. People comment that a place that felt dead to them when they arrived now feels full of life. Many people remark, with some amazement, that they feel love for a place they may have been avoiding for months or even years. “The land felt dead when we arrived,” said one woman. “Afterwards, it felt alive. In fact, we were sad to leave.”

Sometimes the **RADICAL JOY FOR HARD TIMES EARTH EXCHANGE** concludes with participants focusing on how they can bring their experience at the wounded place out into the larger world. You might want to ask people to take a moment to consider how they will use what has happened to them as a catalyst for something they can give back to their community.

Perhaps there is some ecological organization, project, or goal that has long attracted them but they haven't made time to join. Maybe they would like to continue visiting and caring for this particular wounded place—or finding others where they can hold Earth Exchanges. Maybe they can bring mindfulness about nature, including wounded nature, to their work, their school, their church.

Encourage people to stretch their imaginations and have fun with this visionary process. Before the group disbands, ask a few people to announce what their particular action will be.

Send Us News of Your Earth Exchange!

Finally, have the group pose with your Act of Beauty and take a picture. Send it to: trebbe@radicaljoyforhardtimes.org. You can also go to our website, radicaljoyforhardtimes.org and join our interactive **EARTH EXCHANGE NETWORK**. There you can tell the story of your **EARTH EXCHANGE**, post photos and video, and join discussion groups. Post your news on our Facebook page as well.

Thanks for becoming part of **RADICAL JOY FOR HARD TIMES!** With your **EARTH EXCHANGE** you are helping to transform people's relationship with the Earth to one of compassion, attention, and even joy.