

# Conscientious Objection to War Workshop

## Purpose

This workshop will help you understand conscientious objection to war and discern whether or not you are a conscientious objector. It will help you clarify your beliefs about war, write a CO statement, initiate a CO file, articulate your convictions to others and take a stand against war. We will close with an invitation to join an alternative conscientious service that increases peace and security in the world. This workshop is appropriate for people exploring these ideas as well as serious long-term war tax resisters.

## Facilitation

One to three people may facilitate this workshop; it is best to facilitate with a team. Facilitators should have already written a statement, established a file and practiced before a review board. In preparation, the team should have a team-building session that includes: names, get-to-know you activities, strengths, weaknesses and goals as a facilitator of this workshop, review of each others' files and responds to questions from the review boards, then agree on who takes lead on each of the following activities.

## Preparation

This workshop has been done in two to twelve hours.

Prior to the event: Post posters and hand out flyers for the training

In the room:

1. Post (see handouts below): Title of the workshop, agenda, conscience definition, three CO statement questions, dos and don'ts for writing statements, Universal Declaration of Human Rights quote, U.S. law on Rights of Conscience
2. Set under each chair: three sheets of paper, a pencil and a CO and the Draft
3. Spread the Words of Conscience around the rows
4. On a table on the side of the room place: quotes, flyers, extra resources, paper and pencils
5. Masking tape an area in the center to use later for the fishbowl

Mentally: In a training, the less we speak the better, the more they do the better, focus on limiting comments and information, focus on what is the essential information for each exercise.

## Materials

1. Three **CO statement areas** – printed on poster size 3 sheets
2. Sheets to post (see below)
3. Loose lined **paper** – 500 sheets and **pencils** – 120 – 150
4. **CO and the Draft** pamphlet from CCW (see resource list) – 120 – 150 copies
5. **Computer, printer** and paper to type statements of conscience – 1-2
6. **Questions from a review board** (in handouts below)– 120 – 150 copies
7. **Words of Conscience** from CCW – 25 or more
8. **CO quotes** – printed in large print
9. **Flyers** on CCW and on Connecting Communities of Conscience
10. **Flyers** of the training to hand out – 100 copies on quarter sheets
11. **Posters** to put up on the workshop – 6 – 12 for posting
12. **Opportunities for Action** handout – 150 copies

## Agenda

Welcome

Introductions

Agenda Preview

Conscience & Conscientious Objection to War

Getting in Touch with My Conscience

Am I a CO to War?

Establishing a CO File

Preparing for a Review Board

Planning Service & Action

### Welcome and Introductions

Welcome to a workshop on conscientious objection to war.

We are all “conscripted” for military support every day in this country:

- For some people military service feels like the only way out of a bad situation, to pay for an education, or, to travel and see the world, but once they’re in they discover it violates their conscience so severely they must get out.
- For eighteen year old men, they must confront the complexities of draft registration.
- A reinstated draft would not just focus on 18 year old men, however, it would probably focus on both men and women and on needed professional skills.
- Most people either do or will pay taxes of which nearly half goes to the military; wars are fought as much with our money as with our lives.
- Some people are attracted to employment, intellectual and technological opportunities from financially flush military contractors in markets with few or poorer options.
- Some people either have or will have investments, many of which go to support lucrative military enterprises.
- The things we buy and consume are produced under the control and threat of war; illegal drug use often directly funds arms dealing, but war is commonly used to protect corporate interests in fruits, coffee, oil, textiles and eventually much of what is available on the market.

Conscientious objection to war affects every aspect of our lives.

### Introductions

*Go around the circle and introduce the team:*

Name, affiliation and brief background with conscientious objection to war.

*Go around again and everyone (including team members) introduce themselves:*

Name, where you’re from and one thing you bring to or want out of this workshop

### Agenda Preview

In this training, we will:

- Offer some definitions to begin.
- Explore our consciences by responding to several questions one-on-one with others.
- Explore whether or not we are COs by beginning to draft a CO statement.
- Briefly outline the steps you need to take to establish a CO file.
- Conduct a mock review board session in a fish bowl fashion.
- Suggest opportunities for action to declare and secure our legal rights to conscience.

## **Conscience and Conscientious Objection to War**

Conscience is an inward knowledge of right and wrong with a compulsion to do what's right.

Sometimes conscience appears in an instant of clarity, but often it does not spring forth fully formed; it grows as we pay attention to it—powerful even in its stillest, smallest form.

One has a conscientious objection to war when one's inner sense of right would be violated if one were to participate in the premeditated use of systematic killing for political ends. Being a conscientious objector does not abdicate one's right to self-defense.

To publicly discuss how service in the world builds peace and security and to engage in that service in some way is incumbent on each and every conscientious objector to war.

## **Concentric Circle Sharing in Pairs Getting in Touch with My Conscience**

*Remember good listening skills (review list posted or brainstorm with the group):*

Face and look at your partner, have an open rather than a closed posture, hear and try to follow what they are saying, do not interrupt, wait your turn to share your thoughts or experiences, don't fidget with things in your hand, ...

Form two concentric circles; one facing in and one facing out forming partners.

Get with a partner you do not know and decide who will speak first.

Each of you will be given two or three minutes to respond to each question.

We will read the question twice, then say begin.... switch... stop.

We will ask you to move to a new partner and repeat this for the each question.

Any questions?

*Facilitator reads 3 or more of these questions:*

1. Who is a conscientious objector to war that I respect and why?
2. What are the highest ideals within myself to which I aspire?
3. What truths are working within me now regardless of whether they seem inadequate or overwhelming?
- \*4. Am I a conscientious objector to war? Why or why not?
- \*5. Who has influenced my conscience? With whom do I share my conscience?
- \*6. How does conscience affect my life?

*You may use one or all of the first three or go straight to questions 4-6, which are mandatory and should be the last three they do to lead into the next activity.*

## Am I a CO to War?

We're going to move on to the question of "Am I a CO to war?" This is not just a general sense of what my conscience says, but specifically pertaining to participation in war. One of the best ways to explore this question is to attempt to put together a statement that would be used at a review board or a court if you had to make a formal, legal claim because of a draft, if one were to make a public witness before a court, or if conscientious objection to paying for war becomes recognized and a review process became necessary.

A claim as a CO is a legal claim to which one must make a legal case, currently only available for conscientious objectors to military service and training. We are basing our work here on this law, which is not currently available for conscientious objection to military taxation. We are assuming that if law recognized such status, the same or a similar process would be put in place.

The basis of a legal case is the CO statement usually a one-page statement, folded in thirds, addressed to oneself, and notarized or stamped with a hand-imprinted (legibly dated) postmark, mailed to oneself. Please pick up the pamphlet "CO and the Draft" and turn to page 18 to follow along. This statement must cover three areas:

1. Describe your beliefs that are the reasons for you claiming conscientious objection to all military training and service (or combatant military training and service)?
2. Describe how and when you acquired these beliefs, such as family members, other persons, training, personal experiences, memberships in organizations, or influences from books, readings or films.
3. Explain what most clearly shows that your beliefs are deeply held and the way that your beliefs affect the way you live.

At the end of the statement, list names of individuals from whom you will ask for letters of recommendation to testify to your sincerity (not that they agree with you, but that they see that your beliefs are sincerely held) and list organizations from which you have documents to make your case (membership in organizations or a religious group, training certificates, employment records, and so forth). Remember, this case to the board or court does not have to establish that you are right, but rather that you are sincere.

Dos to keep in mind are:

- Be concise yet sufficient. Use your own words.
- Stay focused on the point—your belief about not participating in war.
- Be detailed enough to show your ideas are personal—be autobiographical and sincere.
- If applicable, say enough about religious faith or principles to show how it makes you a CO.
- Mention commandments of God or Allah or teachings that affect your conduct—to not kill, love and respect others, and treat others as you wish to be treated. Quote chapter and verse.
- OR write about values of love, compassion, sacredness, dignity, brotherhood or sisterhood of all human beings, or duty to pursue peace. Relate this to opposition to participation in war.
- Be specific about family members, religious education, or people, books, films or events that significantly influenced you.
- Be sympathetic to review board members who are often motivated by patriotism, positive personal experiences of military service, and commitment to community service and peace.

Don'ts to keep in mind are:

- Don't say things you don't really believe; don't lie.
- Don't copy others unless it is a direct teaching to which you are referring.
- Don't antagonize or put down others to make your point.
- Don't use political, sociological or philosophical arguments.

Notice that page 23 of "CO and the Draft" gives more detailed information about each question. Also, copies of Words of Conscience are available with statements supporting COs from a wide variety of religious faiths; you may wish to look up statements from religious groups you are a member of or that influential family or friends are members of. There are religious texts on the table if you wish to look up any quotes. You may also need to look up quotes or references on your own later.

There is paper and pencil under your chair and additional on the side table. We will be available here at this table to answer your questions. If you have a statement you would like us to read and comment on or to type, you may type it yourself or we can assist you with that. You may work alone or with others, but please keep your voices low and don't engage in other side conversations so as to stay focused and not to disturb others. Please begin quietly.

### **Establishing a CO File**

Please take a moment now to clean up around the room.

Please take a moment now to write a card to each person from whom you will be asking for a letter of recommendation.

Example of a note requesting a letter of recommendation is on the wall:

*Dear friends,*

*I have updated my statement of conscience against war. I would appreciate any feedback on the statement and, if you clear to do so and have the time, I would like to ask if you would write a letter of recommendation to go with my statement. The recommendation attests to the sincerity with which my beliefs are held, not particularly to their veracity. Any case review of these records will be judging whether this is a matter of conscience for me, not whether or not I am correct. I hope to deliver this file to my representatives and to use them at a review board or in court if I need to in the future.*

*Thank you for your consideration, (signature)*

Please list the organizations or documents you can include to substantiate your claim. Raise your hand if you have any questions about this. *Deal with the questions individually unless you think it will help the group, then ask the group to stop a minute and talk to the whole group.*

## Preparing for a Review Board

*A mock draft can be used here or you can jump ahead to the mock review board and just present one or two that were determined prior to the workshop with time for discussion after each.*

*Hand out envelopes to each participant with a number*

At this point we would like for you to move your chairs out side the masking tape line.  
*Carry the table and chairs into the **center of the circle** (not at one end of the room) and set up 3-4 chairs on one side of the table and one chair on the other side of the table.*

Please make yourself comfortable to watch a mock review board hearing.

Our mock review board members are: names... They have all gone before review boards themselves and today will serve as reviewers.

For your information there are a few things that may be inappropriate for review boards to ask, but they may anyway and how you respond can affect your claim.

Hypothetical things, such as would you have served in WWII, or do you adhere to other religious practices of your faith community and self-defense and defense of loved ones.

The person going before the review board is: name... (while escorting them to masking tape. Standing next to him or her) Are you ready? Okay, proceed. (Point to the chair; they have to walk to the chair alone.)

The board will ask him or her to state his or her name and case (3 min).

The board will then ask questions (15 - 20 min).

The board will ask the person to wait in the "hall" while they confer about the judgment (3 min).

The board will call the person back to the table and announce their verdict and reason (3 min).

***Opportunities for Action to...***  
***Pursue My Legal Right to Conscientious Objection to War***

- Write a statement of conscience, tri-fold and mail to myself with a postmark. Collect letters of recommendation and documents to establish a CO file; not more than a review board will read nor less than makes the case.
- Learn about and chose a way to approach war tax resistance. Review your investments and move them to non-military purposes.
- Form a local support group to listen, ask questions, and help you decide what you need to do to live in accordance with your conscience.
- Ask your religious group, if applicable, to write a formal statement against paying for war; many have a statement against conscription, but few have a statement against paying for war. (The US government says it cannot accommodate individuals, but it is supposed to accommodate religious bodies.)
- Engage yourself, or directly support someone who is engaged, in unarmed, nonviolent service in the world, especially in war or former war zones to increase global security—building friendships, making connections, sharing resources and doing the hard work of human development.
- Send your statement to your local newsletter; refer to your representatives and senators by name so they get an automatic copy.
- Take your file to share with your legislators and notify them that you consider it their job to represent your need for legal accommodation of conscience.
- Take legal action to partition the government for the legal right to conscientious objection to paying for war.

***Universal Declaration of Human Rights***  
***Article 18***

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

***New York Yearly Meeting, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)***  
***April 2006***

The Living Spirit works in the world to give life, joy, peace and prosperity through love, integrity and compassionate justice among people. We are united in this Power. We acknowledge that paying for war violates our religious conviction. We will seek ways to witness to this religious conviction in each of our communities.

***Center on Conscience and War***

*1830 Connecticut Ave, N.W., Wash., DC 20002 202-483-2220 or 800-379-2679*

***Connecting Communities of Conscience***

*90 West University St., Alfred, NY 14802 607-587-9111*

***National War Tax Resistance Coordinating Committee***

*PO Box 150553, Brooklyn, NY 11215 718-768-3420 or 800-269-7464*

***National Campaign for a Peace Tax Fund***

*2121 Decatur Place, N.W., Washington, DC 20008 202-483-3751 or 888-peacetax*

***Conscience and Peace Tax International***

*C/O National Campaign for a Peace Tax Fund (in US) or  
Bruineveld 11, 3010 Leuven, Belgium*

***Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors***

*1515 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA 19102 215-563-8787  
405 14<sup>th</sup> St. 3205, Oakland, CA 94612 510-465-1617*