

Different types of circles

There are many kinds of Circles. The three common Circles are Celebration, Healing and Grief.

1.

Celebration Circle:

A gathering of loved ones or community members that encourages us to celebrate the past, present and future. For example, a Circle created to come together to acknowledge the yearly accomplishments of a successful school year.

2.

Healing Circle:

A safe space where people can come together and speak openly about their experience. It is intended to support an individual or collective journey towards healing.

3.

Grief Circle:

An intentional space created to hold stories of loss and/or change that feel heavy to process alone. Grief Circles are intended to have a group of people come together through shared or similar experiences.

In **RESTORATIVE JUSTICE CIRCLES**, the objective is never to get anyone to forgive someone else. The objective is to create a space for open communication and for the person(s) who caused harm to have a space to share and take responsibility for the harm caused. Circle Process always honors choice, and the harm doer(s) and the recipient(s) of the harm must always choose to participate in the Circle Process.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE:

A philosophy that emphasizes healing and accountability to repair harm and wrongdoing, build community and strengthen relationships.

THREE KEY PRINCIPLES OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE (RJ):

1.

ENCOUNTER

2.

REPAIR

3.

TRANSFORM

These three key principles work together to repair harm to the victim (survivor), address the root cause of the crime, and ideally, transform unjust systems and structures in order to reduce or prevent future crime.

Circle Process for young adults

Learn how to bring people together as equals to have open conversations about difficult issues, painful experiences or experiences of celebration in a safe environment that centers on respect and concern for everyone.

A GUIDE FOR BUILDING DEEPER COMMUNITY



EXAMPLE PROMPTS FOR CIRCLE PROCESS

- What are the good things in your life that you want the adults in your life to know about and understand?
- What are the hard things in your life that you want the adults in your life to understand?
- Tell us a story about a time you experienced deep loss. Share to your level of comfort.
- How do you view conflict? How were you taught to respond to conflict through your family systems?
- What are three things you need to feel safe or valued?
- What are your personal areas of growth in this season?
- Tell us a story about a time you felt empowered.
- Tell us one value you want to guide your life in the future.
- Think of two values that are important when you are learning about another person's culture. Please share the values and tell us why they are important.
- Is your cultural identity an important part of who you are?
- Do you feel your culture is generally respected by others?
- Where do you find motivation when you face difficulties?
- What are you taking from this Circle that is of use to you?



Circle Process for young adults



A GUIDE FOR BUILDING DEEPER COMMUNITY

What is Circle Process?

The process is a story sharing process which brings people together as equals to have open conversations about difficult issues, painful experiences or experiences of celebration in a safe environment that centers on respect and concern for everyone. It is called "circle" because everyone sits in a circle.

WHAT MAKES CIRCLE PROCESS IMPACTFUL:

1. We are all equal; there is shared power in a circle, irrespective to what power dynamics are present in the space.
2. Everyone gets an opportunity to share and each person's presence is acknowledged by them touching the talking piece.
3. Each person can share without interruption.
4. All participants appreciate the importance of their relationships and connection with one another.
5. We honor everyone's choice. Each person can choose to share or pass. For those who choose to pass, we always come back around to them in case they choose to share later.

WHAT MAKES UP A CIRCLE:

- Everyone sits in the same type of chair in a circle. No one should be higher or lower than anyone else in seating. We want everyone to look and feel equal.
- There is a facilitator or a Keeper of the Circle, but this person is only there to facilitate the prompts or questions and to maintain the integrity of the space. If applicable, the Keeper should participate in the Circle prompt as well. If helpful, there can be more than one Keeper/facilitator.
- There is a centerpiece on the floor in the middle of the Circle. If sharing objects or symbols through storytelling, at the end of each person's sharing, place the object in the middle of the centerpiece.
- When the Circle Process is complete, as a collective, participants can visually honor all the stories shared by looking at the centerpiece. For example, a centerpiece can be a quilt or a Kitembe (African material).
- There is a small talking piece. Typically, the talking piece can be a symbol of a shared story among everyone in the Circle. For example, participants who attend the same church and value the dove as a symbol of peace might use a small dove object. Participants may only speak or share when they are holding the talking piece. The talking piece must touch the hand of everyone in the Circle, even if a person chooses to pass, until it returns to the person who began sharing first. If anyone chose to pass, the talking piece goes back around, touching everyone's hand until it reaches the person(s) who passed. It then makes it around again to the starting person.
- Anyone can choose to start in the Circle and can pass the talking piece to their left or right. Once a direction is chosen, the talking piece must continue to be passed in that direction. Recommendation: If there is power imbalance in the Circle due to roles, allow someone else to share first.
- The Keeper of the Circle facilitates questions, prompts or topics for everyone in the Circle to respond to. In large groups, try to remain mindful of time. It can be helpful to include a timeframe for sharing. For example, "You have 3 minutes per person" or "You have 4-5 minutes to share this round."

Trauma-informed lens: Include a tissue box in the centerpiece in case someone needs a tissue. The centerpiece also provides a place for people to look as they are sharing in case it is uncomfortable to look at others.



LEARN MORE ABOUT EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES TO BUILD PEACE
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YOU ARE ON NATIVE LAND

Honoring Indigenous roots

Indigenous: A people inhabiting or existing in a land from the earliest times or before the arrival of colonists.

PURPOSE OF LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The purpose of a Land Acknowledgement is to recognize, honor and show respect of Indigenous peoples: past, present and future. Land Acknowledgements help deepen our understanding around the relationship of particular lands and the relationship we as current inhabitants have with those lands. Similar to the heart of Circle Process with the intentions to acknowledge, repair and center relationships, Land Acknowledgements are a stepping stone to honoring broken treaty relationships and the harm caused to Indigenous communities due to colonization.

"MCC East Coast respectfully acknowledges that we live and work on the lands of many Native American and First Nations communities stretching from Maine to Puerto Rico. These Indigenous communities have lived harmoniously with the lands and waters for countless generations before the violence of colonization. Like Indigenous Peoples across the Americas and most of the world, they experienced genocide, ethnic cleansing, theft of their land and waters and forced removal. Our ability to live, work and enjoy this area is connected to their deep loss. We ask all in our community to be intentional about learning the true history of the lands on which we reside and continue to work towards being in right relationship and building a shared, sustainable future for all."

To learn more about the Indigenous communities in your area, visit Native-Land.ca

Where is Circle Process used?

Historically, within Indigenous communities across the world, Circle Process was a common tool of communication and community building. In the present day, Circle Process is used in many settings, including neighborhoods, schools, prisons, workplaces, families and marriages.

Trauma-informed lens

Trauma can be any experience that causes a significant amount of distress (emotionally or physically) which causes one to have a very heightened response. Being trauma-informed means understanding that there can be significant events in an individual's life that have developmentally and physically caused changes in their behavior, how they connect with others and how they believe their needs can be met. We do not always know what someone's experiences are, so a trauma-informed lens invites us to be intentional about creating safe spaces for everyone invited into the Circle.



CREATING A TRAUMA-INFORMED PROCESS

- **Begin the Circle by inviting each person to share their values to feel safe or respected in your Circle space.** Example prompt: "As we are co-creating this Circle of trust, what are some things you need to feel safe to share in a community or work environment?" or "We invite you to bring a small object that represents a time you felt safe or immense joy."
- **Use scaffolding questions,** creating tiers of safety through the questions asked. Each round of questions invites participants to journey deeper with their story sharing.
- **Give forewarning of the intentions of the Circle.** Why are we here together? What is the intentional outcome of our Circle together? (To build deeper relationships and trust? To create a space for collective healing? To learn how to listen to each other better? To celebrate an achievement?)
- **Share the questions in advance, if possible.** We want everyone to feel safe and comfortable in the Circle. Some people may need some additional time to prepare to share their stories. Some people may feel nervous to speak in front of others. To mitigate anxiety, email participants the questions in advance.
- **Provide a timeframe for each story.** For example, "You have 3 minutes per person" or "You have 4-5 minutes to share this round."
- Circle Keepers should **remember the power dynamics that might be present in the Circle,** including their positionality and presence in the Circle.
- **What might Circle Process look like virtually for a community?** It is best if ALL participants meet in person. However, if this is not possible, participants should connect either in-person or online and not in hybrid form. Use creativity to imagine what Circle Process could look like virtually.
- As the Circle Keeper, consider **how to intentionally prepare to close out the Circle** so that everyone who is a part of the Circle feels honored and emotionally prepared to leave.

Create your own Circle Process

ACTIVITY:

Create three guiding questions for a group of young adults, scaffolding each round of questions in a way that invites participants to share a little bit deeper (more personally). Your first question **MUST** be about personal safety.

CIRCLE PROCESS RULES

1. Use the bathroom before Circle Process begins. We do not want to leave the Circle while others are sharing.
2. No eating or drinking during Circle Process.
3. No cell phone use during Circle Process and have cell phones placed on silent or turned off.
4. If you do not have the talking piece, do not speak to others while people are sharing.
5. Do not respond to the stories or give advice to other participants during or after the Circle Process. The intent of Circle is to focus on your own story and experience, while deeply listening to others.
6. What happens in the Circle is confidential and we respect the stories and privacy of one another.

THINGS TO REMAIN MINDFUL AND INTENTIONAL OF AS THE CIRCLE KEEPER:

- Who is invited to the Circle Process?
- What is the talking piece?
- What is the centerpiece?
- Would it be helpful to have participants decide some of the questions for the Circle in advance?
- Are there any power dynamics in the group?
- How are you going to inform participants in advance about the questions and intentions of the Circle?
- According to your guiding questions, do participants need to bring an object to share in the Circle?
- How can you notify participants in advance to bring the object?
- If you want to have a co-facilitator, who would be the best person for that role?
- Begin the Circle with sharing the rules of the Circle with participants so they are aware of how to show up in the space. These rules are intended to support the safety and trust we are co-creating as a group.
- How are you intentionally closing out the Circle?

