

## Check-in Circle

A Check-in is the initial component of Restorative meetings and group experiences.

Check-in circles are used to build and strengthen relationships, assess the “temperature” of the group, reinforce agreements, *identify issues*, and support reflective thought processes and follow up.

They should be used on a continuing basis either scheduled or as the need arises. Regularly held check-in circles help to deepen trust and strengthen communication. Check-ins can provide information on how people are feeling so that the community can support, be aware and engage sensitively.

Check-in circles may be brief, **but be aware that issues may come up that will require deeper involvement.**

We use “I-messages” in Check-Ins. The language and approach used in Check-in Circles should be welcoming, personal, and encourage the initial stages of sharing.

## Welcome Back Check-in Circle Template

This circle is most effective in groups no larger than 12 with 1-2 circle keepers. Allow enough time to ensure that all of the circle participants will have enough time to tell their stories, hear one another, and offer support when needed.

### Open Ended Check-In:

“I would like to take this time to welcome you back from winter break. *How are you doing since we were last here at school? What’s been happening with you?*”

Circle Keeper starts this round. The Keeper’s check in should be real, personal, and relevant. The Circle Keeper’s check-in will set the focus for other circle participants to be aware of the length and content of their statements.

### **\*Pass the talking piece**

Open-ended check-ins invite stories which have the potential to be lengthy and to change the course of the circle or planned activity. If someone reveals a personal crisis, a problem – some distress – that requires acknowledgement and response, you may feel derailed. General community and relationship check-in circles often

can handle these changes of course, and in doing so have immense impact for the participants. On the other hand circles and meetings convened for specific purposes: learning circles, planning circles, conflict resolution circles, may want to use a more controlled and directive check-in.

### Short Check-ins (directive, time-manageable)

1. *“Welcome back from Winter break. Please share one word that describes how you are feeling this morning”*

#### **\*Pass the talking piece**

2. *“Welcome back from Winter break. Please share one good thing that happened over break and one bad thing that happened”*

Or

*“Welcome back from Winter break. Please share one thing that you are happy about and one thing you are worried about”*

#### **\*Pass the talking piece**

Once everyone has had a chance to share pass the talking piece around again to allow everyone a chance to acknowledge what was shared. The circle keeper will again set the tone:

*“Johnny I’m so glad to hear that you had such a nice Christmas. I’m sorry to hear that you are worried that you may be moving away soon. Can you tell us what we can do to support you?”*

*“Melissa It makes me so sad to hear that your bicycle was stolen. Is there anything we can do to help you feel safe here at school?”*

*“Jamal it’s so good to have you back. Is there anything else you would like to share with the circle?”*

#### **\*Pass the talking piece**

Allow the talking piece to go around enough times that participants are able share, offer support and show appreciation as needed.

## Closing

“Thank you all for participating in circle today. How did you like this process? Is there anything else you would like to talk about next time we meet? Anything else you’d like to add”

Be sure to document concerns, issues and agreements that are made in the circle so that follow ups can be made as needed.