

Circles of Support for Students

Community developed plans for success

The circle process creates and fosters a structured and safe forum for those most impacted by a student's success to dialogue, express how they envision the student's success and collectively develop a plan for achieving it. The process will, hopefully, create an effective, doable plan that empowers individuals and strengthens supportive relationships in schools. This circle may also be used to address student's emerging behavioral or academic problems. With slight modification to the initial framing comments, this circle process may be used to help students re-enter (reintegrate) the campus after suspension or upon return from an alternative school or juvenile justice facility.

Addressing the Issue

"We are meeting today to help _____ create a plan for success. I would like to invite everyone to speak from their heart, share their insights and to be open to the ideas and perspectives that are shared in circle. Please be honest when sharing the challenge _____ faces and resources available to assist in addressing them. I welcome you to offer your support and experience to _____ as we partner together with them on their journey to success."

Introduce the talking piece

"The talking piece is a critical element of creating a space in which all participants can both speak from a deep place of truth. The holder has the opportunity to talk while others have the opportunity to listen without the need to respond. It is a powerful equalizer as it allows every participant the choice to speak or not and weaves a connecting thread among members of the Circle as it passes physically from hand to hand around the Circle."

Preparation

1. Perform a restorative inquiry with the student and invite them to participate in the circle process to create a plan for their success.
2. Invite affected community members to participate in the circle. This could include parents, teachers, administrators, safety staff, peers and other members of the community.
3. Select an appropriate location and time to hold this circle.
4. Gather a talking piece, blank Restorative Action Plans and any others materials needed for your circle.
5. Prior to the circle, put chairs in a circle and set up the room.
6. Ask participants to sit comfortably and open with a description of the process:

Order of speakers

The subject of the circle should be seated in such a way that the talking piece comes to them first from the circle keeper. The circle keeper will introduce the question to the circle and share out first and pass the talking piece. The content and length of the circle keeper's statements will help to set the tone for the circle.

Round 1: What are the strengths?

Hear what the student's strengths are in their own words. Feel free to share how the student has impacted yourself and others in a positive way. Acknowledge achievement and improvement.

Round 2: What are the challenges?

Offer your perspective on the student's challenges and struggles. Use "I" statements to share your concerns. **Be honest.**

Round 3: What is needed to succeed?

Where does the student stand? What are the expectations for students in your school and how is success defined? What would you like to see the student accomplish?

Round 4: What is the plan?

What does the student need to do to succeed at this school? What supports are needed? Document agreements and offers of support in the Restorative Action Plan. You may want to remove the talking piece for this round and have an open discussion about where to go from here.