

Community Building Circle

Participants will begin to get to know each other and give their input on what they want to talk about and accomplish in these ongoing Circles.

Community Building Circles are designed to deepen relationships and understanding amongst a group. These circles will strengthen bonds and help to develop a community where greater interaction growth and learning can occur.

This circle should be held when enough time is available to utilize all of the activities. Please be aware that each activity is designed to make the circle a complete experience and the exclusion of any activity can lessen the effectiveness of the circle. (2 ½ - 4 hours)

Preparation

1. Select an appropriate location to hold this circle.
2. Select a talking piece and items for the center-piece. Try to select items that will have meaning to circle participants – Items that are culturally relevant to your group or that reflect understanding and respect are ideal.
3. Select an opening and closing for your circle.
4. Collect all materials needed for the activities chosen for the circle and have them at hand.
5. Purchase flowers or bring a live plant.
6. Select appropriate music.
7. Prior to the circle, put chairs in a circle and lay out the center-piece.
8. Have quiet music playing as participants enter the room. This sets the environment and provides a soothing background.
9. Ask participants to sit comfortably and open with music, a poem, a brief quotation. (See Resources)

Opening

When all Circle participants are ready to begin the Circle Keeper speaks:

“Welcome to our community building circle. Today we will begin the process of developing Values and Guidelines for our classroom. The shared values we agree upon we allow us to develop guidelines for how we will treat one another in this class. This is one of the first steps in developing a restorative school community”

“The circle is a process that brings us together. Through this process we will get to know one another better , speak more honestly and respectfully to one another, get support when we need it, make decisions together and build a closer community in.”

“Please be aware that this morning’s circle is also an experiential training and many of your questions about Restorative Practices will be answered through this process.”

“I would like to play a song for our circle opening. I like this song because it’s about supportive, healthy friendships. Feel free to sing along if you know the words” (1 minute)

Lean On Me (3 minutes)

Bill Withers

Sometimes in our lives
We all have pain
We all have sorrow
But if we are wise
We know that there's always tomorrow

Lean on me, when you're not strong
And I'll be your friend
I'll help you carry on
For it won't be long
'Til I'm gonna need
Somebody to lean on

Please swallow your pride
If I have things you need to borrow
For no one can fill those of your needs
That you won't let show

You just call on me brother, when you need a hand (Chorus)
We all need somebody to lean on
I just might have a problem that you'd understand
We all need somebody to lean on

Second Verse
(Chorus)

If there is a load you have to bear
That you can't carry
I'm right up the road
I'll share your load
If you just call me
(Chorus)
Call me (if you need a friend)
Call me (call me)
Call me (if you need a friend)
Call me (if you ever need a friend)
Call me (call me)
Call me
Call me (if you need A friend)

Explain the Centerpiece & Talking Piece

“I’m sure you noticed the center piece in the middle of the room. The centerpiece is used to create a special space where we are safe, can speak from our hearts and listen to one another. For today I chose some things from nature, a couple of things that are important to me and a few things that tells us all that this is our special place.”

Choose a talking piece; hold it in hand while you explain its purpose (the circle keeper will be the first to share on all rounds except the reflections rounds)

“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. (1.5 minutes)

Gaining Agreement to Respect the Talking Piece

“Is everyone willing to agree to respect the talking piece? Yes I am” (pass the talking piece if there are questions or non-agreement, address them show curiosity, ask open ended questions like: What is your objection? How can we answer question?(See Talking Piece and Centerpiece for more detailed information) **(2-5 minutes)**

Ice Breaker

Ice Breakers help participants begin to relate to one another and bond.

MATERIALS: Prepare the rope ahead of time. You will need a piece

of rope that is about 10 feet in length, double it and tie a knot, joining the two ends.

Tips:

Participation:

Remind students that participation is voluntary. Don’t push it, but do share yourself in personal ways. This will help to create an environment of safety and encourage sharing.

Dealing with cross-talk:

For many the circle process is a new way of engaging with one another. It is a way of listening and being heard that ensures mutual respect. Because this is such a different approach to communication than many may be used to it is expected that some will test the strength of the agreements made in circle. Here’s what you might try if cross-talk becomes an issue in circle:

1. Remind students of agreements to respect the talking piece.
2. If necessary re-do the consensus agreement.
3. Use more structured activities as opposed to talking rounds.

Ask all participants to “Please stand up and form a circle and join hands.” Release one of your hands and put your arm through the rope then join hands again. *“The goal is to pass the rope around the full circle continuing to hold hands, not breaking grip.”* Keeper goes first, steps through the rope and passes it to the next person to do the same. This continues until everyone has passed the rope and it is back to the circle keeper.

(for a group of 15, 5-10 minutes)

This activity goes quickly. As people begin to “get it” and help one another it really speeds up. Make sure you set an example by helping the person next to you.

Check In

The check in is an important part of the circle process. This is an opportunity for anyone in the group is having a difficult time or needs additional support Initially check-ins are usually used in established relationships and to build and strengthen them.

Open ended check-in

“Let’s do a check-in. How are you doing today? I’m feeling a bit tired, I was up late grading papers...” (about 3 minutes)

Pass the talking piece

“How did that check-in feel? Is there anything you heard that touched you or that you would like to elaborate on? I would like to say that I share Joe’s feeling of being...”

***Pass the talking piece*(about 3 minutes)**

Concentric Circles Activity

“I would like for us to play a game to get to know one another better before we begin our main activity...”

“We are going to split ourselves into two groups. So let’s count off 1, 2, 1, 2...”

(The circle keeper starts as number 1 and participates in the circle if needed. If uneven number of participants, teacher sits out and can wander around the circle while students are participating)

“Everyone please stand up. I would like for the 1’s to turn and face the 2 standing to your left”.

The group forms pairs arranged in two circles with the inner circle facing a person in the outer circle. The Keeper will ask a question or give them a topic to discuss. Each member of each pair will have a specific amount of time to respond and then the other member will speak to the topic. After each question the circle keeper will ask the participants in the inner circle to take one step to the right so that they are facing a different person at the introduction of each question. The amount of time allowed is based on the time you have for Circle, the size of the group, and the seriousness or lightness of the topic. We usually start with light topics and small time allotments and then move into more thoughtful or serious topics that are relevant to the purpose of the circle and need more time.

“I am going to introduce a series of questions to ask one another. After each question I will ask the participants in the inner circle to take one step to the right so that you are

talking to a different person at the beginning of each round. Please continue your conversation with the person facing you until I ask you to rotate and give you the next question to ask". Use the questions below, if there are more questions provided than the number of people in your circle you can skip up to 6 of the first 10; you can skip and the following AS A UNIT ONLY 11-12; 18-20 or 16-20 **(10-20 minutes depending on group size)**

1. *"What is your favorite TV program?"* (give participants about 30 seconds each- 1 minute total). "Inner circle participants please take one step to the right."
2. *"Your favorite food?"* (give participants about 30 seconds each-1 minute total). "Inner circle participants please take one step to the right."
3. *"If you were an animal, what would you be?"* (give participants about 30 seconds each-1 minute total). Inner circle participants please take one step to the right."
4. *"If you could have a superpower, what power would you choose?"* (give participants about 30 seconds each- 1 minute total). Inner circle participants please take one step to the right."
5. *"If you could meet anyone from history – real or fictional – who would you most like to spend a day with?"* (give participants about 30 seconds each- 1 minute's total). Inner circle participants please take one step to the right."
6. *"What was one favorite thing you did this summer?"* (give participants about 30 seconds each-1 minute total). Inner circle participants please take one step to the right."
7. *"If money wasn't important what kind of shoes (or cell phone) would you buy?"* (give participants about 30 seconds each- 1 minute total). Inner circle participants please take one step to the right."
8. *"When you spend time with your friends what do you do?"* (give participants about 30 seconds each- 1 minute total). Inner circle participants please take one step to the right."
9. *"If you were an animal, what would you be?"* (give each participants about 30 seconds-1 minute total) Inner circle take one step to the right."
10. *"Name one thing that makes you happy about coming back to school."* (give participants about 30 seconds each- 1 minute total). Inner circle participants please take one step to the right."
11. *"What is the best thing about you? Your greatest strength or asset?"* (give participants about 1 minute each- 2 minutes total). "Inner circle participants please take one step to the right."
12. *"What would you like to improve about yourself?"* (give participants about 1 minute each- 2 minutes total). "Inner circle participants please take one step to the right."

13. *"Who was it that you spent time with this summer taught you something and what did you learn from them? Give participants about 1 minute each- 2 minutes total).* Inner circle participants please take one step to the right."
14. *"What learning challenges do you face in school this year?" (for example Math, English, Gym etc.?) (give participants about 1 minute each- 2 minutes total).* Inner circle participants please take one step to the right."
15. *"What could someone at school do that would make those challenge easier? Who could do this?" What do you need?" (give participants about 1 minute each- 2 minutes total).* Inner circle participants please take one step to the right."
16. *"If you were in charge of making changes at school, what problem in your school community would you work on first? " (give each participant about 2 minutes each-4 minutes total) "Inner circle participants please take one step to the right."*
17. *"How does this problem affect you?" (give each participant about 30 seconds- 1 minute total) "Inner circle participants please take one step to the right."*
18. *"How does this problem affect your friends? (give each participant 30 seconds- 1 minute total) Inner circle participants please take one step to the right."*
19. *"How does this problem affect your whole school community? (give each participant 30 seconds- 1 minute total) Inner circle participants please take one step to the right."*
20. *"What are your ideas about working on the problem? (give participants about 1 minute each- 2 minutes total).* Inner circle participants please take one step to the right."
21. *"Who could you go to that would have the power to help you with a problem? What would you say and how would you say it? (give participants about 1 minute each- 2 minutes total). Inner circle participants please take one step to the right."*
22. *"List some of the behaviors you would want to "bring" to a meeting where you are asking someone in power to help you. (give participants about 1 minute each- 2 minutes total).* Inner circle participants please take one step to the right"
23. *"What does respect mean to you? (give participants about 2 minutes each- 4 minutes total).* Inner circle participants please take one step to the right"
24. *"What does disrespect mean to you? (give participants about 2 minutes each- 4 minutes total). "Please return to your seats after you finish your conversations"*

Ask the group what they thought about the activity and if they heard anything that really got their interest. The Circle keeper who facilitated the activity can start first, sharing anything he noticed or heard (like laughter, high energy, specific comments)

“How did that activity feel? Did you hear anything that was particularly interesting to you? Any other observations?”

(2 minutes)

Pass the talking piece

Main Activity-Values and Guideline

For this activity you will need index cards and pens or pencils for each participant and a whiteboard or large sheet of paper for the circle keeper to write on. Hand out the materials before beginning

Discuss what respect means

“Today we will develop agreements on how we will treat one another to help everyone in our class to feel respected. To begin the creation of our Values and Guidelines I would like for each of us to share some of our experiences regarding respect”

“Please share a time you felt respected. Last year I received an award for...”

***Pass the talking piece*(2-3 minutes)**

“Please share a time you felt disrespected. About two months ago I was pulling into my driveway when my neighbor...”

***Pass the talking piece*(2-3 minutes)**

Share your requests for respect

“We are here to develop guidelines on how we will treat one another in. Thinking about your experiences with

What to expect the first time

The circle process invites participants to share openly, speak from their hearts and share their genuine selves. This may be a very welcomed change and feel comfortable for some and the open and honest exchange of ideas and feelings may be very difficult for others. During the first community circles you can expect minimal participation, hesitant, cursory remarks and crosstalk. It is important to have patience and to continue to use circle practice consistently. Participant buy-in and respect for the process will improve over time.

respect please write down three requests on your index card of how you would like to be treated so that you can feel respected."

Allow everyone time to write down their requests **(2-3 minutes)**

"Please share your three requests with the circle. I'll start..."

***Pass the talking piece* (3-4 minutes)**

"Now please consider the three requests that you have made and choose one that you would like to suggest as a guideline for our classroom. Mine is treat people kindly"

***Pass the talking piece (3-4 minutes)**

Write down the requests on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper. Ask participants to restate statements as guidelines when needed. Read the list aloud once everyone has had a chance to share. ***(3-4 minutes)**

"Is there anything on this list that anyone has questions about or would like clarity on?"

***Pass the talking piece* (2-3 minutes)**

(Address questions directly to the person that made the request. Be sure that everyone is clear on all of the requested guidelines)

Check for consensus on shared values and guidelines

"Is this a list of values and guidelines we can agree upon? If you can agree to this list give a thumbs up, if you need more clarity on a guideline hold your thumb in the middle and thumbs down if you cannot agree to a requested guideline for respect on this list"

(pass the talking piece if there are questions or non-agreement, address them show curiosity, ask open ended questions like: What is your objection? How can we answer your question? Pass the talking piece if needed and discuss until the group comes to an agreement.) **(about 5 minutes but can take longer if a number of people have questions or disagree)**

Check-out

"You all did great today" I am wondering if you have observations, feelings or feedback you would like to share as we get ready to end circle?"(2-3 minutes)*

Closing

The Ten Native American Commandments

1. Treat the Earth and all that dwell thereon with respect.
2. Remain close to the Great Spirit, in all that you do.
3. Show great respect for your fellow beings.
(Especially Respect yourself)
4. Work together for the benefit of all Mankind.
5. Give assistance and kindness wherever needed.
6. Do what you know to be right.
(But be careful not to fall into self-righteousness)
7. Look after the wellbeing of mind and body.
8. Dedicate a share of your efforts to the greater good.
9. Be truthful and honest at all times.
(Especially be truthful and honest with yourself)
10. Take full responsibility for your actions (But be careful not to fall into self-righteousness) (1 minute)

“Thank you for coming to circle today”