

Welcome Circle

Welcome Circles help newcomers get to know each other. The welcoming students can be looked to for information that new students may not necessarily find in a student handbook. It also helps to create community that is inclusive of new students.

Preparation

1. Select an appropriate location to hold this circle.
2. Select a talking piece. Try to select items that will have meaning to circle participants – Items that are culturally relevant to your group or that reflect an open and welcoming environment are ideal.
3. Select an opening and closing for your circle.
4. Collect all materials needed for the circle activities and have them at hand.
5. Select appropriate music.
6. Ask participants to sit comfortably and open with music, a poem, a brief quotation. (See Resources)

“Welcome to our school community (or class) welcome circle. 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. I want to share something to open our circle. This is meaningful to me because it talks about a way of being with one another, with ourselves and with our environment.”

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

(about 1 minute to here)

Open Ended Check-In:

“I would like to take this time to welcome you. We are new to each other, so let’s each tell a bit about ourselves and how we are doing today.”

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 tone for other participants, so pay attention to the length and content of your check-in.

***Pass the talking piece (about 3 - 5 minutes for a group of 16)**

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, or a distressing problem 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 (like learning circles, planning circles, conflict resolution circles) or circles which are time-limited, may want to use a more controlled and directive check-in and schedule follow-ups individually with students who are struggling.

Short Check-ins (directive, time-manageable)

“Welcome to our circle, and for those who are new, welcome to our school. Please share one word that describes how you are feeling this morning”

OR

“Welcome to our circle, and for those who are new, welcome to our school. Please share one thing that you are happy about and one thing you are worried about”

***Pass the talking piece*(Either option will take about 2 to 3 minutes for a group of 16)**

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

Examples of responses: *“John, I’m sorry to hear that you are worried that you are behind in subjects because your old school did things differently. Can you tell us what we can do to support you?”*

“Melissa, it makes me so happy to see you here! I am glad you didn’t let the shyness you talked about keep you from being here.

“Jamal, it’s so good to see you as well! I know you know your way around the school and I’m looking forward to hearing all the info you have to share.”

***Pass the talking piece*(3 -5 minutes for a group of 16)**

Main Activity

“Let’s begin our welcome. What does a student here need to know that isn’t in the student handbook and no one will tell you? I know that Mrs. Jones will give you an extension to complete homework if you just ask her. However, she will set a due date with you and she EXPECTS it done by that due date! She has a great memory and will not give you a break next time if you are late on an extension.”

“As a student that is new to our school, please start this round by asking a question you have about things here. And then we will take some of the time for students who have been here to answer. So, let’s start with Andy, Jamal and Mikael, our new school community members.”

****Pass the talking piece*(5 minutes or less)***

“Who do you go to for support and help here at school?”

****Pass the talking piece* (2 minutes or less)***

“Is there any support either of you as new students to this school need? Can we as a circle help you with anything?”

****Pass the talking piece*(5 minutes or less)***

Closing

“Thank you all for participating in circle today. How did you like this process? Anything else you’d like to add? Let’s finish this circle of welcome by having some fun.”

Rainmakers:

Explain the activity by asking the person to the right of you to begin to slap the top of their thighs. When the first person has begun, the person to their right begins to slap their thighs; after the second person begins the third begins and so on around the circle. When everyone is participating the sound is like that of a rainstorm. **(About 2-3 minutes for a group of 16)**

“Thanks for coming to circle”