

# **Community Building Circle Planning Guide**

## **Purpose of a Circle:**

- Teaching empathy and self-reflection.
- Create a sense of belonging through sharing stories and active listening.
- Build and strengthen relationships and connections.

## **Role of Circle Keeper:**

Circle keepers are the caretaker of the circle process. As a keeper, it is your job to ensure that everyone takes responsibility for making the circle a welcoming, safe place for open dialogue.

- Do not control the circle but help participants uphold its integrity.
- Help to hold a space that is clear, open, respectful, and free. This means knowing when/how to interrupt when to open and close the circle, when to take a break, and how to remind people to adhere to the agreed-upon guidelines.
- Don't need to be a mediator or group facilitator in the usual sense; it's not a position of power, but it is a responsibility to others to keep to the values of the circle.

## **Community Circle Check List**

Before the circle:

- Circle Guidelines/ Agreement
- Logistics (Time/ Location, Room setup)
- Taking Piece
- Met with teacher/staff
- Planning Sheet Filled Out

During the circle:

- Participants are sitting in a circle
- Opening
- Intro to Talking Piece
- Check-In
- Guidelines/ Values
- Discussion Rounds
- Check out
- Closing

After the circle:

- If strong emotions are shared, affected individuals need to be contacted
- Circle Keeper Reflection Sheet

## **Common Community Circle Guidelines**

- Respect the talking peace
- Speak from the heart – look, and sound
- Listen from the heart- look, and sound

Adapted from: Oakland Unified School District, LAUSD, International Institute for Restorative Practices Graduate School (IIRP), and Circle Forward by Carolyn Boyes- Weston & Kay Pranis

- Bring your best self
- Say just enough
- Honor Privacy
- Confidentiality – be very clear of the issues you are mandated to report

### **Talking Piece**

Circles use a talking piece to regulate the dialogue of the participants. The talking piece is passed from person to person around the circle. Only the person holding the talking piece may speak. The talking piece allows the holder to speak without interruption and allows the listeners to focus on listening and not be distracted by thinking about a response to the speaker. The use of the talking piece allows for the full expression of emotions, thoughtful reflection, and an unhurried pace. Participants are allowed to pass the talking piece if they are not ready to share.

# **Community Building Circle Planning Sheet**

Participants are sitting in a circle

1. Opening
2. Intro to Talking Piece
3. Check-In
4. Guidelines/ Values
5. Discussion Rounds
6. Check out
7. Closing

1. What is the purpose or goal of your circle? (ex. Community building, check-in, address specific classroom issue, curriculum/content...etc.)

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2. Circle Introduction: [How will you introduce and convey the reason for the circle to the participants?]

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3. Opening (How will you open the circle? A poem, quote, song, breathing, story...?)

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4. Introduction of Talking Piece. [What object are you using and Why?]

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5. Check-In [What question will you ask for the initial check-in round? (an ice breaker)]

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6. Establish core guidelines: (What are the core guidelines you would like to introduce to the participants? What additional questions will you ask to create shared guidelines and values? Do you have them written on a poster board for all to see?)

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7. Discussion Rounds [What needs to be addressed in the circle? What questions will you ask? How many rounds will you facilitate?

To consider:

- Are the questions you are asking high or low risk?
- Does the question directly or indirectly address the goal and purpose of the circle?
- What are some potential challenges that may surface? How will you handle them?

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8. Check out [What question do you want to present to bring closure to the circle? ex. how are people feeling right now?]

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9. Closing [How will you close the circle, praise and celebrate the participation of the circle members? poem, quote, song, breathing, story...?]

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## **Circle Keep Reflection Sheet**

After completing a circle, it can be helpful to reflect on the process with your co- circle keepers or just with yourself.

1. Was the preparation work sufficient?
2. Were all the necessary people present?
3. Were you able to improvise effectively?
4. How did the co-keepers work together?
5. Did the participants feel safe?
6. Was the space appropriate?
7. Did you space the timing well? (Did you have enough time?)
8. Did the questions asked encourage open, honest and constructive answers?
9. Now that the circle is over, what questions do you think would have been good to ask?
10. What kind of follow up needs to happen?

## **Common Challenges in a Community Building Circle**

1. It takes too long for participants to get in a circle
  - a. Practice getting in and out of a circle before hold an actual community building circle
  - b. Figure out possible alternate furniture or room arrangements
  - c. Use a timer and build an incentive for meeting the time expectation
  - d. Consider holding the circle outside, or the MPR room
  - e. Ask the participants to come up with suggestions
2. The circle process takes too long
  - a. You can do a check in a circle in a few minutes with 32 participants
  - b. Time spent upfront building relationships and coming up with shared values and guidelines will save time in the long run dealing with problem behavior
3. No one is talking, or English may be a second language for my students, and they are hesitant to speak
  - a. Use alternative methods of expressions such as drawing, freestyle poetry, journaling, movement, activities with no words
  - b. It is okay not to share as long as everyone participates by being present in the circle
  - c. Use a partner share so every student can have a chance to talk without speaking to the whole class
  - d. Ask students to brainstorm why they or others aren't talking and some suggestion to encourage it
  - e. Ask questions students are more likely to want to answer like "what is it you want adults to understand about youth?"
4. There are specific misbehaviors that derail the circle
  - a. Revisit the shared guidelines and values you created together
  - b. Try to determine the possible function of each misbehavior and focus on that rather than the behavior itself
  - c. Engage the students that are misbehavior as circle keeps or ask them to think of questions for the circle

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- d. Have one on one restorative conversations at another time with the students that are misbehaving to get to the root of the issue
  - e. Give students an option to step outside of the circle- but must continue to follow the guidelines- and when they are ready to rejoin the circle to do so.
  - f. Consult with colleagues for ideas.
5. Students make rude or mean facial expressions
- a. Clarify unacceptable non-verbal behaviors as not following the shared guidelines
  - b. Acknowledged kind respectful non-verbal behaviors
6. Students talk about private family issues, abuse, suicide, drugs or alcohol
- a. When you start facilitating circle be very clear as to what types of issues you are mandated to report
  - b. Be sure to explain the limitations of confidentiality is anything related to danger to self and others
  - c. Consult with your mental health support staff about how to pre-plan for this possibility and discuss in an age-appropriate way
  - d. Follow up with school-based mental health counselors/ social workers immediately and make a mandated report as necessary. You may even need to walk the student to a school mental health professional personally