

Community Building Circle Tips and Prompts

Community Circles should occur on a regular basis for 4-6 weeks in order to help students understand the format and gain confidence in participating. Student voice is the best measure in determining when a group displays a need to discuss topics more in-depth and/or sensitive in nature. Educators can tailor discussion topics for talking circles based on the information students are sharing in previous circles and/or need to deliver curriculum. Students/staff who have participated in Community Circles on a regular basis for 4-6 weeks are prepared to engage in medium risk topics, restorative circles and/or conversations in response to Tier 2 or 3 issues. As noted in Module 5, one of the ground rules states, "What is said in the circle, stays in the circle." This norm is a reminder for participants, but does not negate educators' responsibilities as mandatory reporters. Educators can communicate this information in an age-appropriate way to students when ground rules/norms are being established.

Community Building Circle Tips

1. Post ground rules/norms and make them visual during every circle
2. Review ground rules/norms on a consistent basis
3. Use the norms to problem solve any issues that may arise during circle
4. Revise norms as necessary in order to meet the changing needs of the group
5. For students transitioning in/out of the class consider revisiting norms for equitable input

The following are low-level (Tier 1) talking circle prompts/questions that any learner can access:

- When it's cold outside, I like to....
- If I traveled into space, I would...
- If I were a kangaroo, I would.....
- For my birthday I want...
- I would like to invent.....
- My favorite piece of clothing is...
- My favorite book....
- My favorite type of weather is....
- If I ate an entire pizza, I would.....
- My favorite season is....
- I was proud when I accomplished...
- The best toy I have ever played with is...
- I would like to visit....
- When I am older, I want to
- If I could be any character in a book or movie for one day, I would be...
- My favorite game to play is....
- The best room in my house is.....
- The best gift I ever received was.....
- The nicest thing someone said to me was...
- The best gift I ever gave was.....
- When it is really hot outside, I like to....
- If I had to talk like an animal, I would pick....
- The worst thing someone could make me eat would be.....
- The funniest thing I have ever seen is....
- Five of my favorite things are.....

- If I could ask a dolphin a question, I would....
- I wish I knew more about.....
- When it is raining, I like to.....
- The first thing I would buy if I had one million dollars is.....
- My day starts by....
- If I could make any animal tame, I would want...
- My favorite month of the year is..
- The worst chore is.....
- If I could ride on the back on an animal, it would be....
- I am happiest when....
- My favorite movie is...
- What quality do you like best in a friend?
- What makes you a good friend?
- Can you swim? Who taught you?
- Where would you like to go on a field trip?
- What is your favorite lunch or dinner?
- What or who makes you smile the most?
- What is your full name?
- Where were you born?
- What is your favorite activity to do with a friend?
- What quality do you like best in a teacher?
- What do you hope to do better tomorrow?
- Tell when you let someone else go first.
- What has made you laugh today?
- Name someone you said thank you to.
- Name one way you showed responsibility.

COMMUNITY BUILDING CIRCLES TO CO-CREATE NORMS FOR CLASSROOM

Welcome to this Community Building Circle. I am the Facilitator of the Circle. In this Community Circle we will create norms for our classroom community.

MINDFULNESS MOMENT

AGREEMENTS

The following agreements are used at Community Building Circles, upon “agreement” of everyone:

1. Listen when others speak (use the talking piece),
2. Speak with honesty and from the heart,
3. Use words that are respectful and not offensive,
4. While everyone is encouraged to speak, no one is required to speak, and
5. What is said in the circle stays in the circle.

Does anyone want to change or add to these agreements? Does everyone agree to these agreements?

OPEN THE CIRCLE

I will now open the circle. We will begin by talking about our thoughts and feelings related to what we need to bring our best self to this class.

In order for us to have a successful year together, what are some things we can agree on related to how we will all behave and treat each other?

What do you need in order to feel brave and to be successful?

*****Now that you have heard everyone speak, what connections are you making?**

Tip: Ask for clarification around vague and culturally relevant terms like “respect” or “participate.”

“What does respect look like to you?” “How do we know when someone is participating?” This helps us be explicit about agreements as well as receptive to cultural views around these agreements.

Tip: Frame agreements positively and toward the desired behavior

“No running in the hallway” becomes “Please walk when in the hallway”

“Don’t judge other people” becomes “Place judgments aside and remain open-minded”

AFTER AGREEMENT STATEMENTS ARE CREATED BY THE GROUP, CONSIDER DOING A SECOND CIRCLE WITH THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS:

What can you do to get help if you are having a bad day and do not feel that you can follow our agreements?

How should we respond if someone fails to keep these agreements?

CLOSING

Summarize thoughts of group, reframe to positive actions. Choose a closing quote or activity for the group.

This script is meant to assist in facilitating a Community Circle co-creating classroom norms. Please adapt the script for your purposes.

ACADEMIC CIRCLE EXAMPLE #1

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

Circle Intention

Welcome to this “Checking For Understanding” Circle. In this circle, we will check in on how your learning is going in _____ unit of study.

Mindfulness moment

Anyone who is practicing understanding and compassion can exemplify true power -Nhat Hanh

Circle Guidelines

In this circle process, community agreements are offered so we can create a space to talk authentically.

- Listen when others speak, which means **only the person holding the talking piece is talking** and others are listening.
- Speak with from the heart.
- Use words that are respectful and not offensive.
- While everyone is encouraged to speak, no one is required to speak; you can simply pass the talking piece on to the next person.
- Honor privacy.

Does anyone want to add to these agreements? Does everyone agree to them?

Check In:

We are going to do a quick check-in round to assess how well you understand the material we have been studying. If you put up all of your fingers - a full hand - you feel completely clear on pretty much everything we have covered so far. No fingers or your fist means just the opposite: you are feeling really lost and confused. One finger means you still have lots and lots of questions; two means fewer questions, and so forth. Let's hold up our fingers all at once. (Facilitator also participates) Thank you for sharing this helps me get a better understanding of the work we need to do together.

CIRCLE ROUNDS

Round 1: Now we are going to go a bit deeper. If you put your full hand up, can you tell us what you think you understand best? If you kept some or all of your fingers down, can you share what you feel most unclear or confused by?

Round 2: What do you think would help you personally to get a full hand of understanding? What do you think we can do as a class to have all students have a better understanding of this unit?

Check Out: How did you like the discussion today? Was it helpful? If not, what could help?

Close the circle and acknowledge everyone's participation: Choose a quote, passage, or simply clap.

ACADEMIC CIRCLE EXAMPLE #2

BUILDING VOCABULARY

Circle Intention

Welcome to this “Building Vocabulary” Circle. In this circle, we will define several vocabulary words that will help us with our unit of study.

Mindfulness moment

“Vocabulary is the glue that holds stories, ideas, content together.” - Rupley, Logan & Nichols

“The more words you know, the more, the more clearly and more powerfully you will think.... and the more ideas you will invite into your mind.” - Wilfred Funk

Circle Guidelines

In this circle process, community agreements are offered so we can create a space to talk authentically.

- Listen when others speak, which means **only the person holding the talking piece is talking** and others are listening.
- Speak with from the heart.
- Use words that are respectful and not offensive.
- While everyone is encouraged to speak, no one is required to speak; you can simply pass the talking piece on to the next person.
- Honor privacy.

Does anyone want to add to these agreements? Does everyone agree to them?

Check In: What is your personal weather today and why?

CIRCLE ROUNDS: ONLY THE PERSON HOLDING THE TALKING PIECE CAN SPEAK

In some form (index cards, Google doc, white board, etc.), present the vocabulary words for the lesson. Ask each student to write down a definition of what they think each word means. Encourage them to make their best guess even if they are unsure or have no idea.

Round 1: On a scale from 1 to 5, how are you doing? One is not feeling great and five is on the positive end of the spectrum. Let’s all hold our hands up and show our numbers at the same time. Okay great – if you’re on the lower end of the spectrum, please feel free to come see me throughout the day – I’m here to support you. (Facilitator holds up their hand, too)

Round 2: (Facilitator chooses one vocabulary word, then reads the correct definition of the vocabulary). Please share whether your guess of the word was correct or not. What strategy could you use to help remember this definition? ***Repeat Question 2 for all vocabulary words.*

Check Out: How was your understanding of vocabulary shaped by the circle today?

Close the circle and acknowledge everyone’s participation: Choose a quote, passage, or simply clap.

RESTORATIVE CONVERSATION

This restorative practice is used with 2 or 3 people. Generally, it is used before an issue becomes serious.

The mantra that is the foundation of this restorative practice is **“The person is not the problem; the problem is the problem.”** The meaning is that the focus needs to be on the problem rather than the person.

The four questions that need to be asked should be framed in a manner similar this and in this order:

Question	Guiding Questions	Description
1.What is the problem?	<p><i>Tell me your story.</i></p> <p><i>What were you thinking at the time?</i></p> <p><i>What do you think is the problem?</i></p>	Coming to agreement about what is the problem among the participants in this restorative practice is often the hardest part of the conversation. However, it is critical that consensus be reached among the participants as to what the problem is by coming to agreement as to how to name the problem.
2.What are the effects of the problem, on the persons involved and the community as a whole?	<p><i>Who do you think has affected? In what ways?</i></p> <p><i>What do you think if might have been like for them?</i></p> <p><i>After reflection, is this a choice you would make again? Tell me more about that?</i></p>	The answers to this question need to be framed as “I” statements. These answers need to include emotional, psychological, and/or physical effects.
What is it like when the problem does not exist?		The response to this question is meant to explore the ideal situation, when the problem no longer exists.
What can I/we do to move from this being a problem to that more ideal place where the problem does not exist, reconciliation occurs, and harmony returns to the community?	<p><i>What can you do to make things right?</i></p> <p><i>How will this help?</i></p> <p><i>How can I support you?</i></p> <p><i>When will this happen?</i></p>	In this answer a plan of action is agreed to and perhaps written down so it can be referred to later.

RESTORATIVE ASSESSMENT

The Restorative Assessment helps determine the level of care needed to address an incident of harm. The assessment is designed to help the person facilitating this conversation to evaluate, first, if the student is willing to accept responsibility for their behavior. If they are, then the facilitator can then recommend what is the appropriate level (tier) of care (the specific restorative practice) that provides the best response under the circumstances.

REFLECTING

- What happened?
- What's the story?
- What was going on for you?
- What were you thinking at the time?
- What have you thought about since?
- Who do you think has been harmed and in what ways?
- What, if anything, do you accept responsibility for?

CONNECTING

- What do you think needs to be done to repair the harm?
- How will this help repair the harm? (If an apology is offered)
- What are you apologizing for?

DOING

- How can you make sure this doesn't happen again?
- What can you do differently next time?

Please adapt the language recommended in this script to be age-appropriate

Restorative Circles

The Restorative Circle process combines the 4 questions asked in the restorative conversation with the circle process.

Restorative Circle Script

Welcome to this Restorative Circle. I am the facilitator of the circle. The co-facilitator is ____.
Restorative Circle is the name given to a process based on the philosophy of restorative practice which is focused on healing the harm to relationships resulting from conflict or wrongdoing.

Mindfulness Moment or Grounding Quote

Circle Agreements

In this Restorative Circle process agreements are established so we can create a safe place where we can come together to discuss the behavior(s) that is creating a problem, the impact of the behavior(s) and mutually agree on how to:

- (1) heal the harm resulting from the behavior(s),
- (2) restore the group, and
- (3) reintegrate the persons affected back into the group.

The following **circle agreements** are used at the Restorative Circle, upon agreement of everyone:

- listen when others speak (use the talking stick);
- speak with honesty and from the heart;
- use words that are respectful and not offensive;
- while everyone is encouraged to speak, no one is required to speak; and
- what is said in the circle stays in the circle (except for the written report and mandated reporting).
- What else would you like to change or add to these ground rules?
- Does everyone agree to these ground rules?

Open the Circle

I will now open the circle. We will begin by talking about the problem and our thoughts and feelings that resulted from the problem. The co-facilitator of the restorative circle will keep notes of our conversation. Let's begin passing the talking stick.

(The four questions that need to be asked should be framed in a manner similar to this and in this order.)

1. What is the problem? Coming to agreement about what is the problem among the participants in this restorative practice is often the hardest part of the conversation. However, it is critical that consensus be reached among the participants as to what the problem is by coming to agreement as to how to name the problem.

2. What are the effects of the problem, on the persons involved and **the** community as a whole? The answers to this question need to be framed as "I" statements. These answers need to include emotional, psychological, and/or physical effects.

3. What is it like when the problem does not exist? The response to this question is meant to explore the ideal situation, when the problem no longer exists.

4. What can I/we do to move from this being a problem to that more ideal place where the problem does not exist, reconciliation occurs, and harmony returns to the community? In this answer a plan of action is agreed to and perhaps written down so it can be referred to later.

Agreement

We will now work on an agreement that is acceptable to all of us. Let's begin by having the co-facilitator of this Classroom Restorative Circle summarize the notes made during this circle, emphasizing any possible solutions to the problem that were discussed. Let's now pass the talking piece and talk about solutions to the problem, particularly related to healing the harm to relationships resulting from the problem. The co-facilitator of the Restorative Circle will write those on the tablet, and everyone will be asked to sign the agreement.

Closing

Now that we have an agreement, let's reflect on this process.

How do you feel about the Restorative Circle process?

Are you satisfied with the outcome?

This script is meant to assist in facilitating a Restorative Circle. Please adapt the script for your purposes.

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