

Facilitating Circles 101

WHY CIRCLES?

Circles help people connect by providing a facilitated space for all to share their feelings and opinions about a specific topic. Circles can be used to build community, ask questions, and address conflict or harm.

STEPS TO EFFECTIVE FACILITATION:

STEP 1: KNOW YOUR PURPOSE Be clear about your goals. Set intentions for the circle and design your prompt(s) around them. (Prompts may be questions, statements, fill-in-the-blanks, etc.)

STEP 2: CREATE THE SPACE Arrange seats in a circle (preferably without tables in the middle).



STEP 3: CLARIFY CIRCLE VALUES

- Circles give everyone a chance to *share & listen* to one another. We will go around 1 by 1.
- Each of you has the *responsibility to participate, but the right to pass*.
- One voice at a time. Introduce the “Talking Piece”.
- Refrain from asking questions or commenting until everyone has had their turn.
- If you connect with someone’s sharing you can show them with this sign from American Sign Language.



STEP 4: INTRODUCE CIRCLE PROMPT Slowly and clearly tell participants the question or statement you want them to respond to. Repeat the prompt several times. Write the prompt for participants to see.

*****With your thumb pointed at yourself and your pinky toward the speaker, motion back and forth to show that you connect with what they’re saying.**

STEP 5: ASK FOR A VOLUNTEER Pass the volunteer the talking piece. Before they begin, ask the volunteer which direction they will pass when they are done (right or left). The Facilitator can go first if no volunteer wants to, or for modelling purposes, especially when a prompt invites vulnerability.

STEP 6: SHARE With the exception of Restorative Justice Conferences, Facilitators should always share alongside participants. (BE AWARE—a facilitator’s answer may influence what others share. Going last can be strategic with certain prompts.)

STEP 7: RETURN TO THOSE WHO PASSED Once the prompt has gone all the way around the circle, give those who passed another chance. Tell them how important their voice is, however, DO NOT FORCE anyone to share.

STEP 8: DEBRIEF CIRCLE If time, ask a few participants “*what struck them about listening to each other’s responses?*” Summarize (in one or two sentences) the take-away of the circle. Thank everyone for sharing.