



Staff Listening Circles

For Western North Carolina

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

- To allow participants to share about personal losses and the impact on their lives.
- To create a space for naming a community trauma, its impact, and for expressing emotions.
- To access the healing effects of connection with others to cope with the trauma.

MATERIALS NEEDED

1. Talking piece (optional, recommended, can be any object with positive or neutral associations, or can be pretend if the circle is virtual)
2. A list of values/agreements from first circle(s) (directions on page 3 to create these)
3. Optional items to help start or end the process, like a bell sound or a brief quote or saying (these help people transition in and out and help set the experience apart)

PREPARATION

Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs. Gather any materials needed.

PROCESS

- **Opening.** The facilitator welcomes everyone to the circle and leads a brief mindfulness moment (for example, everyone breathes slowly and deeply while they listen for the moment that they can no longer hear the sound of the bell, or simply a moment of silence to slow down and take a few deep breaths)
- **Agreements.** The facilitator reminds everyone of the previous agreements and confirms if everyone feels comfortable following them or if anyone wants to change them.
- **Set up.** The facilitator explains that they will invite participants to share their feelings, thoughts and experiences related to a recent traumatic event in the community. The facilitator then explains/reminds participants of the “rounds” process below. For the circle, facilitators can choose one or more questions under each round on the next page or create their own. (Note: Rounds can be mixed with other activities like games; just make sure the rounds aren’t interrupted in the middle.)
- **Rounds.** Everyone takes turns talking in a series of “rounds” where the co/facilitator asks one question to the group, answers it themselves first as a participant, and then passes the question (and/or talking piece) to their right or left around the circle for each person to answer, or pass, in turn. *If someone passes and wants to speak at the end, you may return to them before the beginning of the next round.

ROUND #1 EXAMPLES: OPENING ROUND

- “Please share one, two, or three feelings you have right now in one sentence.”
- “What strength do you bring to the circle today?”
- “Tell us about something you are grateful for in your life.”
- “In one sentence, name the trauma that has occurred in your life or the life of your community.”

ROUND #2 EXAMPLES: INVITATIONS TO SHARING

- “What feelings do you have about what happened?”
- “What has been the hardest thing for you because of what happened?”
- “What fears about the future do you have because of what has happened?”
- “What will you miss most about how things were before this event?”

ROUND #3 EXAMPLES: INVITATIONS TO REFLECTION AND RESPONSE

- “What strengths have you seen in yourself and in others as people get through this difficult time?”
- “What gives you hope at difficult times?”
- “What do you need most right now?”
- “What’s something you value about how things were before, and how might you carry that forward in your life?”

ROUND #4 EXAMPLES: CLOSING ROUND

- “What has been named during this circle that you had not named before?”
- “How will you take care of yourself this week?”
- “How have you grown in compassion for yourself and the other participants in this group during this circle time?”
- “How was this circle for you?”

CLOSING

Close the circle with a brief quote, saying, or encouraging statement. Thank everyone for coming.

SUGGESTIONS & EXPLANATIONS:

- **FIRST CIRCLES:** For a circle routine to be effective, it's recommended that you spend the first circle or two setting up and introducing the circle process.
- The circle structure, as described above, stays the same. Below is an example of how you might use the "Rounds" portion to introduce the circle process to staff and help them create agreements for future circles.

PROCESS for First Circle

- **OPENING:**
 - The facilitator welcomes everyone to the circle and explains that listening circles can help strengthen community resilience. The facilitator leads a brief mindfulness moment (for example, everyone breathes slowly and deeply while they listen for the moment that they can no longer hear the sound of the bell or simply a moment of silence to slow down and take a few deep breaths)
- **EXPLAIN ROUNDS:**
 - Definition: A "round" is passing the talking piece (or question) around the circle.
 - Explain the talking piece being used and any story or meaning it has/what it represents. Explain that the talking piece helps make sure each person gets a chance to speak uninterrupted and reminds everyone to listen fully when someone is speaking.
 - Explain that in a circle, questions are answered in turn, with the facilitator also participating. If the circle is new or has new members, the facilitator may invite introductions at the start. Participants can always choose to pass on any question.
- **AGREEMENTS:**
 - The facilitator explains they will come up with agreements for how they want to be together in circle.
 - **Round #1/Opening Round:** What's something you like to do for fun?
 - **Round #2:** What's a value you bring to your work and want to model for your students—why do you feel this value is important? (*The facilitator writes down values as they are shared or hands out paper and writing utensils and asks participants to write down their value and place it in the middle.*)
 - **Round #3:** The facilitator highlights that discussing our values helps us remember how we want to "show up" and then asks: What's one way we need to act in circle to show these values while we're gathered together? (*The facilitator writes these down and reviews them with the group at the end of the round. The facilitator then asks if these agreements are enough to help everyone feel safe and supported in circle, or if anyone would like to see agreements changed or added. If agreements don't already include "what's shared in circle stays in circle," "speak only for yourself," and "share only what you feel comfortable sharing," then suggest adding them. Once agreements are finalized, confirm if everyone is willing to agree to them for this and future circles.*)

- **Round #4/Closing Round:**
 - What was it like for you to be a part of this circle today?

MOVEMENT IDEAS FOR CIRCLES:

- **NAME WAVE**
 - The first person begins by stating his/her name and making a motion. One by one, around the circle, the other members say that name and make the motion like a wave. The wave ends with the person who started it. The next person in the circle says their name and makes a motion. The name and motion move around the circle in a wave. Continue around the circle with each person saying their name and making a motion until everyone has introduced themselves. *The facilitator first models the activity and creates a practice round.
- **RAINSTORM**
 - The facilitator starts by alternately snapping his/her fingers. The next person joins in the motion, and then the next and the next all around the circle. When the motion returns to the facilitator, the facilitator stops snapping and begins rubbing his/her hands together briskly. The next person follows the facilitator's change. One by one around the circle, each person follows the change of movement of the person before them. When the movement returns to the facilitator, the facilitator stops the hand motion and starts slapping his/her hands alternately on his/her thighs. This movement is followed one by one around the circle. The facilitator once again rubs his/her hands briskly together. When that motion comes back to the facilitator, the facilitator returns to snapping his/her fingers. When that motion comes back to the facilitator, then the facilitator sits still. One by one, each person in the circle follows the person before them in stopping, until all are quiet.
- **DRUMMING CIRCLE**
 - Invite everyone to take a drum or percussion instrument (they could use hands or pens, anything available). Invite everyone to create whatever beat they wish with their instrument simultaneously. (It may be coordinated, or each person may do his/her own thing.) Allow the activity to continue until it seems to end on its own accord.

References:

1. Boyes-Watson, Carolyn and Pranis, Kay. *Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community*.
2. [Edsurge article](#) by Christina Cipriano and Marc Brackett