

CIRCLE #1

Script for First Community Building Script

Taken verbatim from San Diego Unified District's packet [Teaching Restorative Practices with Classroom Circles](#)

You can use the script in your first circle in class in order to introduce circles and make collective agreements. Collective agreements are an *essential* step in setting the foundation for this practice.

Lesson Plan 1—Introduction to Circles

Purpose and Objectives

Circles have their own set of guidelines that are essential for them to function well. This lesson introduces those guidelines and begins the process by which students will become skillful participants in circles.

□ Objectives

- Understand reasons for being in circle.
- Know a functional definition of the shape of a classroom circle.
- Learn the four circle guidelines.
- Learn how to use a talking piece in the circle.

Preparation and Materials

Figure out in advance how to get your class seated in a circle without tables or desks in the middle.

- You will need a talking piece. Examples include a small, soft toy; a special stick or stone; a rattle or gourd; or some other object that can withstand being passed around the class multiple times.
- Choose something to put in the center of the circle; a piece of decorative fabric placed on the floor or a low table, with flowers or other beautiful objects. The talking piece can rest here until it is used.
- Prepare a poster of the circle guidelines, or write the guidelines on the whiteboard.

Introduction

5 minutes

Before you begin your circle, give a clear, simple and honest explanation, using your own words, about why the class will be meeting in circles. If you are completely transparent about the purpose and goals the students will be more likely to trust the circle.

□ Explain

“We will be meeting in circles to learn ways to better communicate and solve problems we may have with each other. We’ll be talking about restorative justice, which is a way to make things right between people after someone has done something hurtful.”

“The shape of the circle is important. Even if we cannot sit in a perfectly round arrangement, we consider it a circle when everyone is able to see everyone else’s face without having to lean forward.”

□ Move into Circle

Give students step-by-step instructions for how to move into the circle. We do not provide a suggested script for this because it will vary depending upon your situation. Because every class has a unique configuration you will have to develop the sequence of steps that works best for your class. Be especially vigilant about having students move their chairs safely; it may be helpful to discuss this and demonstrate prior to having them move.

Open the Circle (after the circle has formed)

3-5 minutes

- **Explain** “Besides the shape of the circle, we put something in the center. As we do more circles together we’ll decide as a class what we should put in the center to symbolize what we want our community to be.”
- **Set up Center** After students are seated, place something in the center of the circle: a colorful piece of cloth can be placed on the floor or a low table, and decorated with flowers or a small bowl containing water or stones. Do this in a mindful manner, with a touch of ceremony.
- **Dedication** Return to your seat and read an appropriate poem or ring a bell. Announce that the circle has begun.

Check in Round

10 minutes

- **Focusing Question** “Tell about a time you have met in a circle, such as around a dinner table, campfire, for a game, or in other classes or situations. Take turns sharing, going around the circle.”
OPTION: Choose another question from the list of prompts on page 12 or use your own prompt.

Core Activity

25 minutes

- **Circle Guidelines** “Circles work best when we follow important guidelines. We will use the same guidelines every time we meet in circle. The more we use them, the more we will come to understand and appreciate how they support the time we spend together in the circle.”

Describe the following four circle guidelines.
 1. **Speak from the heart:** This means speaking for yourself, talking about what is true for you based on your own experiences. When we speak from the heart we are aiming for eloquence, for choosing words that accurately communicate what we hold to be important.
 2. **Listen from the heart:** We are used to judging other people. Sometimes without even knowing anything about another person we will make assumptions about them. These assumptions can keep us from really hearing what they have to say...and what they have to say may be something important and helpful. Therefore, when we listen from the heart we are trying to set aside any assumptions and judgments we may hold about the person. This opens up the possibility of making wonderful discoveries about each other.
 3. **No need to rehearse:** In circles, we discover we can trust that we will know what to say when it is our turn to speak. We don’t have to mentally rehearse while we are waiting for the talking piece to come our way. When we find we are rehearsing (everyone does) we remind ourselves “no need to rehearse” and gently bring our attention back to the person who is speaking. This guideline is sometimes referred to as “be spontaneous.”
 4. **Without feeling rushed, say just enough,** keeping in mind the limits of time and making room for everyone to speak. This intention is also called “**lean expression.**” It is related to “speak from the heart” because we often find that when we speak carefully we can express ourselves with fewer words than we would normally use, and that when we do our words often have more impact. One way to think about this is, when you are considering what to say, ask, “Does it serve the circle?”

Introduce the Talking Piece

This activity teaches respect for the talking piece. It invites sharing from imagination. Everyone gets to practice silence, and they experience speaking toward the center of the circle. For this activity choose a talking piece that has an interesting shape and textures, such as a piece of driftwood.

□ Explain

- In our circles we will frequently use a talking piece. (Show them the talking piece they will be using in the next activity). Only the person who is holding the talking piece may speak. The person who is holding the talking piece has a responsibility to maintain the integrity of the circle by speaking from the heart.”
- “It is sometimes important to be silent when holding the talking piece; this can help us to listen to our hearts and discover what is true for us.”
- “When we speak, we speak into the center of the circle, adding our voice and our wisdom to the voices and wisdom of everyone else. “
- “Pass the talking piece respectfully from one person to the next.”
- “Sometimes we won’t use the talking piece”
- “Let’s practice passing the talking piece around the circle silently and respectfully.”

□ Activity

Demonstrate passing the talking piece by passing it first with the person sitting next to you, and having them pass it back.

Next, pass it around in silence. As each person receives it, ask them to hold and look at it until they notice something about it...something they see in it, or something that it reminds them of.

Do another round in which each student can share what they saw in the talking piece. Ask them to speak into the center.

□ Agreements

“Besides the guidelines, when we meet in circles we might ask for additional agreements. Anyone can ask for an agreement. Common types of agreements cover things like treating what is said as confidential (not gossiping about what is shared in circle), agreeing not to tease each other later when something serious has been shared, and so on.”

- **Focusing Question** Don’t use a talking piece for this; invite brainstorming. This approach will help to clarify any questions that students hold about agreements.

“Next time we meet in circle we will see if we can come to some agreements. What are some agreements that you think might be good for us to discuss.”

Closing Round

5 minutes

- **Focusing Question** Use the talking piece: “Share three words that describe your experience of the circle today.”

CIRCLE #2 (TEAMBUILDING) EXAMPLE

Community Building Circle on Unity

From YES Prep Northbrook High School, Houston

Mindfulness

We are going to set the tone for circle with a mindful moment. Close your eyes or look at a spot on the floor. Sit as still as possible without talking. Breathe in for 5 (pause for a bit), Breathe out for 5. Breathe in for 5 (pause for a bit), Breathe out for 5. Now on your own, take one last breath in and out. When you are finished, open your eyes.

Review Norms Listen from the heart, Speak from the heart, No need to rehearse, Say just enough. When you have the talking piece, you have the honor to speak; when you don't you have the honor to listen.

Opening Quote: "Unity is strength, division is weakness." - *Swahili Proverb*

Check-in: How are you feeling from 1-10? (1 being the worst, 10 being the best)

Round 1: Things in Common Teambuilder

Ask each participant to find a partner and find three things they have in common. Have each pair find another pair and discover two things they have in common. If the group is large enough, have the groups of four find another group of four and find something they have in common. The exercise is complete when the entire group forms a circle and finds one thing in common.

***Tell the groups to stay away from superficial details, such as commonalities regarding body parts (we both have two eyes), clothing (we all wear jeans), or that we are in the same school.

Debrief Round: What was a lesson you learned from this game?

Closing Quote: "We are each other's harvest; we are each other's business; we are each other's magnitude and bond." – *Gwendolyn Brooks*

CIRCLE #3 EXAMPLE

Community Building Circle on School Discipline

From Restorative Empowerment for Youth

Mindfulness

We are going to set the tone for circle with a mindful moment. Close your eyes or look at a spot on the floor. Sit as still as possible without talking. Breathe in for 5 (pause for a bit), Breathe out for 5. Breathe in for 5 (pause for

a bit), Breathe out for 5. Now on your own, take one last breath in and out. When you are finished, open your eyes.

Review Norms

Opening Quote: “12 percent of Black girls across the country have experienced out of school suspensions compared to 4 percent of Latinas and 2 percent of White girls.” (US Department of Education, 2014)

Check-in: How are you feeling from 1-10? (1 being the worst, 10 being the best)

Today we are going to look at how schools use suspension as a discipline practice. Here is a short film clip that discusses how African American girls are suspended more than any other group in the country. (Show the clip).

Round 1: What are your reactions to the film clip – what stood out to you, and can you relate this to our school?

Debrief Round: What would be some different ways for schools to handle disciplinary matters?

Closing Quote: “*We are each other’s harvest; we are each other’s business; we are each other’s magnitude and bond.*” – Gwendolyn Brooks

COMMUNITY BUILDING CIRCLE TEMPLATE WITH TEAMBUILDER (P. 19)

DIRECTIONS: Map out your third community building circle (plan for a 45 minute circle.) Assume you have already created class agreements and done a teambuilder (Circle #2 in this packet).

What is the unifying topic of this circle? Love? Fear? Generosity? Scroll down to see a script on unity, and observe how the teambuilder, quotes, and rounds relate to the theme.

Mindfulness: What mindfulness activity will you engage in? (i.e. Breathing activity, Guided meditation, Video clip, Yoga pose)

Review Circle Norms: Reiterate the talking piece and the classroom agreements. State them or refer to a poster, and ask everyone to give a thumbs up to confirm they will abide by them.

Opening: How will you open the circle?

Check in: What question will you ask to check the pulse in the room?

Round 1 (or teambuilder):

Round 2:

Debrief Round (If time permits, though this is one of the most essential and *underestimated* rounds in circle) What debrief question will you ask in this community building circle?

Closing: In a way that is intentional—perhaps even a bit theatrical – pick a ritual (CIRCLE ONE):

- A. Read a closing quotation
- B. Put away the centerpiece
- C. Ring a bell, or make some other small gesture to signal moving back from circle time into ordinary time.