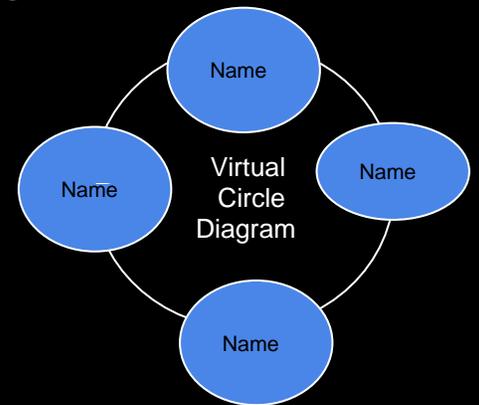


## 17 Tips for Youth-Led Virtual Circles<sup>1</sup>

1. **Guidelines.** Go over these guidelines and make sure everyone agrees from the outset.
2. **Set up a diagram and screenshare it:** This will make it organized to keep track of who is talking. (Ex: Picture on right)  
*Credit to Dr. Kathy Evans of Eastern Mennonite University for the idea.*
3. **Factor in time.** It takes at least 10 minutes for everyone to get on, locate themselves on the diagram, and make sure sound/video works.
4. **Talking piece.** You can use your own talking piece and pretend to pass it through the screen. Or have an imaginary one.
5. **Plan on multiple facilitators.** Prep with more than one facilitator who can step up if the sound goes out on someone.
6. **Be reasonable about how many people can participate.** If you have scheduled an hour-long circle and there are 30 people on the call, the sharing will likely be surface level.
7. **Communicate who is next.** When you are done speaking, say, "Now I'll pass the piece to ..." and say the person's name so we remember who is next.
8. **Snaps of affirmation.** Put your snaps up so the speaker can see them, even though they are muted.



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<sup>1</sup> By Leslie Lux (12th Grade) and REY Founders Anita Wadhwa and Udoro Gatewood. This is a working document.



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9. **Respect by having your camera on:** You should be visible with your whole face the entire time.
10. **Simplify background:** On Zoom don't get distracted by playing with the virtual backgrounds.
11. **Mute your microphone:** Mute the sound so there won't be any background noises when someone is speaking.
12. **Be a firm facilitator.** Don't be afraid to enforce these guidelines or tell people to speak louder.
13. **Be focused on the speaker when you do not have the piece:** Do not look at other apps, your e-mail, check your phone etc., and do not engage in private chats with people in the circle.
14. **Use laptops to do the virtual circle:** We recommend not doing a virtual circle on the phone (if possible) because you are limited to the amount of people you can see on the screen.
15. **No leaving the circle:** The same expectations as in a face to face circle are placed, but we understand if you need to leave the circle to answer an important phone call, email, meeting, etc.
16. **Vegas rule:** The same expectations are placed, what is said in the circle stays in the circle.
17. **Games:** Playing games can be difficult, but a game you can play is the number game (Credit to Heather Manchester of Oakland Unified Independent School District for the idea). Set a number goal (Ex:10). The goal is to count up to that number without people interrupting each other and everyone has to participate. You cannot go twice in a row. This teaches students to actively listen and engage in the circle.

***Here are some testimonials from REY youth and young people in Austin and Oakland who have participated in youth-led virtual circles.***

"Moving traditional circles online is just part of exercising our muscle memory on keeping circle. We need to adapt to change in order to be able to uphold these practices we value so much." - Ana Mendez, RJ Student Advisor, Oakland Unified School District



“Youth can stand up for ourselves and each other. We can see each other’s perspectives in circle.” -  
Nirali Bhakta, 8th Grade RJ Leader, Oakland

“Being able to participate in a virtual circle is definitely the highlight of my week. In the circle I get to talk to other people outside of my home which in itself is very eventful. In addition to the communication that I have with my classmates. I enjoy that we still make sure we follow the talking piece, and by that I mean having turns in which we speak and when we listen. It definitely ensures that we give our full attention” - America Martinez, 10th grade, Houston, TX

“The difference between an adult being on an online call is that when...the adult isn't there some pressure disappears. Unless the adult and the students are somewhat comfortable with each other.” -  
Juan Jimenez, 10th grade, Houston, TX

“The virtual serves the purpose of helping me stay connected to my community, without it I believe social distancing would be very difficult. I believe that we need to become more proficient with the use of the Zoom platform. I think that we will continue to get more creative as we continue to use it.” -  
Sherwynn Patton, Founder, Life Anew, Austin

“Virtual circles is a new and changing experience because it is a way to not just connect and share opinions with people you know, but also to learn about things going on around the world and meeting new people.” - Beatriz Macareno, 11th grade, Houston, TX



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“We can continue to build community during the circles by proceeding to voice our thoughts, feelings, and opinions towards issues and come together to support one another through hard times such as this. I feel that right now more than ever, being in isolation and all, we need a community because we are social beings.” – Cal, Life Anew, Austin

“At first I thought that using Zoom or Teams would be weird because now you’re going to see others outside of school where you’re not used to seeing them. But soon after I realize that it’s even easier to connect with others from far places and it’s good that we can come together at a time of need and just remind everyone that even though it’s hard to believe there is a silver lining in all this.” - Maleah Ceballos, 10th grade, Houston