

# General Circle Format Prep Sheet

## Description of General Circle Format:

This format can be amended depending on the amount of time or topic. While it can be tempting to skip the guidelines and values round, it is important that you do not unless you are in a group that has been meeting in a circle for awhile and have covered values in previous circles. A reoccurring group should always revisit the guidelines and values even if just briefly.

1. Opening
2. Introduction of Talking Piece
3. Check-In
4. Guidelines / Values
5. Discussion Rounds
6. Check out
7. Closing

### 1. Opening

- **Purpose:** to create a special or sacred space where everyone will come together to share in ways we ordinarily don't have the opportunity to do. Also to ground everyone, set a positive tone for participants to transition into the circle process. An opening purpose is for everyone to bring their 'best selves' to the Circles.
- **Examples of an opening:** poems, quotes, guided meditation or breathing exercise, song, chant, etc.
- **Suggested opening language:** We have come together today to learn more about one another and to be together in a way which will make our school community (or our class or group) stronger, closer and safer.

### 2. Introduction of Talking Piece

- **Purpose:** to create an equitable environment for sharing. Everyone gets a chance to speak or have the right to pass. For those that do not have the talking piece, it is an opportunity to actively listen to the speaker. Sometimes the talking piece may be suspended to encourage spontaneous sharing or brainstorming.
- **Example of a talking piece:** Sacred or meaningful objects that community members can relate to or something that has meaning to someone or is relevant to the topic to be discussed. (Stuffed animal, rock, stone, etc.)
- **Suggested welcome language:** The person holding the talking piece is the only one who may speak. Everyone else in the circle is actively listening and trying not to spend time thinking about what they are going to say. The talking piece usually moves in a circular format (clockwise or counter clockwise). Every person has the opportunity to speak and the right to pass if they choose. Even though someone may pass, they must still be present and participate.

### 3. Check-In

- **Purpose:** to invite participants to talk about how they are feeling on physical, mental or emotional levels at the moment.
- **Suggested check in language:** Q: Name one word describing how you are feeling? If you could be a weather pattern, what pattern would describe how you are feeling right now (today)?

### 4. Guidelines

- **Purpose:** to allow Circle participants to identify and agree upon shared guidelines for the circle.
- **Core circle guidelines:** (1) Respect the talking piece, (2) Speak from your heart, (3) Listen with your heart, (4) Speak with respect, (5) Listen with respect, (6) Remain in the circle, (7) Honor Privacy
- **Suggested guideline language:** Here are the core circle guidelines (review 1-7). Are there any other guidelines you would like to add? Pass the talking piece around the circle and chart any other guidelines.



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**4.1. Values:** the purpose of this activity is to allow Circle participants to identify and agree upon personal and shared group values which everyone will honor during the circle. (Note: The traditional way is to ask people to bring their “best selves” to the discussion. Values we adopt remind us how to ‘be’ in Circle. Values are the foundation to doing things in a “good” way. Respect, honesty, trustworthiness, courage, are examples of such values. When explaining values to children you may say “something that is important to you, your family or your culture”. You may also have them draw a picture)

### **5. Discussion Rounds**

- **Purpose:** choose a topic that is appropriate for the group to discuss. If this is a new group and you are just getting to know each other, you may ask people to share what is important to them about being in this community.

- *A good prompting question for a circle will allow people to speak from a personal perspective about something that relates to the group. After asking a question that allows people to tell a story, you may ask a question that encourages people to speak about the issue or reason they were brought into the circle today (community building, celebration, general check in, current event etc.) Refer to the different types of Restorative Circles – Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3.*

### **6. Check out**

- **Purpose:** To invite participants to express how they are feeling at this moment as the circle is about to end.
- **Suggested check out language:** Share one word about how they are feeling at the end of the Circle or about what they most appreciated about the process.

### **7. Closing**

- **Purpose:** To close the circle with intention and allow participants to re-enter the world and acknowledge the work done in circle.
- **Examples of a closing:** poems, quotes, do a guided meditation or breathing exercise, songs, or chant, etc.
  - You may suggest that everyone stand shoulder to shoulder and take three deep breathes together. You may also read a short poem or quote and with an expression of gratitude to all present for their participation.

**Role of Circle Keeper:** Circle keepers are the caretaker of the circle process, they are not facilitators. As a keeper, it is your job to ensure that everyone takes responsibility for making the circle a welcoming, safe place for open dialogue. Very often, and usually unconsciously, participants will situate the keeper as an authority figure, looking to him or her to direct or make decisions for the group. When it seems the process isn't going smoothly or is taking a direction different than you imagined, it is important to remember that your role is merely to guide the group. It is your job to introduce questions that empower the group to do the work they need to do. As soon as you intervene in a more directive way, participants become less accountable for their actions and decisions. Resulting agreements become much less a reflection of their process and needs and more about what you think the group needs.

#### **Suggested language:**

**Guide the process;** “We ask you for suggestions for shared guidelines for our circle.”

**Promote Equality;** “We all have important experiences and something to offer.”

**Generate Respect;** “We are different, but we all have something to learn from each other.”

**Share Responsibility;** “We all have a responsibility for finding solutions.”

**Encourage New Ideas;** “Every idea is a good one. We work together to find solutions.”

**Seek Solutions that Benefit Everyone;** “Can we find a way to meet the needs of all involved today?”

**Maintain Positive Perspective;** “This is difficult work, and at the same time, we are moving toward a positive outcome.”