



Circles

A Guidebook for Building
Resilience, Community, & Connection

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
What is a Circle?.....	4
Intentional Setup	4
Circle Structure & Design	6
Opening	6
Agreements	6
Story	7
Closing.....	9
Sample Circle.....	10
Circle Keeping	11
Self-Care for Circle Keepers.....	12
Virtual Circles	13
Sample Virtual Circle.....	14
Quotes Bank.....	15
Prompts Bank.....	17
Community Building Prompts	17
Digging Deeper Prompts	17
COVID Reflection Prompts	18
Contact.....	19

Introduction

Welcome to the world of circles! If this is completely new to you, you're in the right place. If circles are a second language to you, my hope is that you find reflection points and insights that inspire or give life to your circle practice. Over the last four years, circles have become the vessel for meaningful connection and a sense of community in my work at Project Fleur-de-lis.

Project Fleur-de-lis (PFDL), a community and school-based mental health project of Mercy Family Center (MFC)¹, adopted Restorative Practices in 2016. What began as an external program to offer PFDL-affiliated schools shifted into an internal transformation for the PFDL team. Restorative Practices shaped not only the services we provide to our community but also the ways in which we offer them. Circles are the foundation of this work, the practice that instills a relational paradigm. The goal of this guidebook is to share knowledge and insight about the circle process and its structure with enough material for you to begin holding circles in your community whether that be with clients, staff, team members, those you serve, or your family.

Circles are intentional and inclusive spaces where connection and safety are priority. Offering a circle and trusting the process gives everyone within an organization, business, network, or community permission to engage with one another and their own vulnerability in a unique way. Circles honor the dignity and worth of each participant and that of the community. Circles are a profoundly simple yet powerful way to connect. Over the last few years, we have used circles for connection, community-building, grief, celebration, problem-solving, repair, reflection, team retreats, crisis intervention, and sharing. We think it can benefit anyone interested. To get started, please read through this whole document. It is important to be intentional, vulnerable, and supportive in preparing for and facilitating a circle, which starts with yourself.

This guidebook includes details about circles, adaptations for the virtual platform, and sample circles with scripts. There is also a bank of quotes and prompts so that you can choose what is most appropriate and helpful to your community.

¹ Mercy Family Center is the New Orleans-based Louisiana ministry of Mercy Health System which was founded by the Sisters of Mercy, originally established by Catherine McAuley in 1831.

What is a Circle?

Circles are an ancient practice, a way of gathering intentionally. Gifts passed down to us by Indigenous Peoples, circles are an engaging space where we are invited into community with one another as our authentic selves. In circle, each person has a voice, agency within the community, power and responsibility. Seldom do we find this lack of hierarchy in social or workplace gatherings.

Relationship is at the heart of every circle, and respect and responsibility cradle that relationship. In a circle, no one person holds the power or responsibility. A circle keeper helps guide the process but does not take ownership of the circle. Circle keepers do not lecture, assert power, interrupt, crosstalk, or talk down to anyone in the group. They model mutual respect and inclusion.

Participants are welcomed as equals, partners, collaborators in establishing a sense of community and relationship. Each participant takes responsibility for how they show up, for their voice and for their needs. We honor one another by honoring ourselves and our space in the community.

The circle minimizes anxiety, invites safety or courage, and elicits engagement through the components of its structure. Circles are one of the most authentic, helpful, and connecting ways of being together that our team has found in the last 15 years. Adopting circles as our foundational practice has revitalized our program and our team. Whether during times of celebration, conflict, problem-solving, reflection, strategic planning, or grieving, we have found that circles have a certain magic to them that can only be understood experientially. Circles are not just a way of being together, but a way of being.

Intentional Setup

Circle setup is an opportunity to be intentional about what people need in order to feel welcome, show up fully, and honor the sacredness of the circle. This may include nametags, refreshments, pencils and paper, flowers, signage about the circle or where to find bathrooms. Consider what might alleviate anxiety, meet physical and emotional needs, and ultimately settle the bodies of your circle members.

Circles, it should come as no surprise, should be **circular**. There is a reason for this. First and foremost, Indigenous People practiced circle in this way. The traditions, culture, and practices of Native People hold within them wisdom we are fortunate to honor. When humans sit in a circle, there is space for everyone to see equally and to share equal space. In a circle, there is no front or back, no head or caboose. This means that seating should be arranged so that the circle is as circular as it can possibly be. An oval does not allow each face to be seen by each participant. A circle will.

Choose pillows or chairs set up in a circle. There should be no tables or desks in the middle of the circle. It should be open or include a **centerpiece** that does not inhibit visibility or connection. While sometimes overlooked, circle centerpieces can become the focal point of the circle. In that way, they can be the heart of the circle, where everyone's eyes will rest. In some native traditions, the centerpiece was a reminder that we are all a part of something greater than ourselves. Other traditions, peacemaking circles bring in the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water. In my training with the Community Justice for Youth Center in Chicago, cloth is an essential part of the circle's centerpiece.

Consider the group coming together, their purpose for gathering in circle and what might enhance that experience. Centerpieces can be any collection of items that represent or magnify the group's identity, the collective. Symbols of nature can visually soothe the body. Consider stones, feathers, a candle. If you have a collection of talking pieces, you can offer those as the center and alternate your

talking piece. I would encourage a cloth beneath whatever objects you bring. Small quilts are nice because of their mosaic nature, the web of difference that makes them whole.

A **talking piece** is crucial as it embodies the circle agreements. It is a symbol honoring our voice, our very essence and breath. It is the means for maintaining respectful sharing and respectful listening. The talking piece reminds us that it is a privilege to share our story with others, and it is a privilege to truly listen to the stories of others. It invites us to share from the heart rather than the mind. When we receive the talking piece, we have permission to share what comes to us in that very moment. We don't have to rehearse or practice what we are going to say in our minds like we often do outside of circle. When we pass the talking piece (or don't have it), we are invited to listen with our heart and without any other agenda. We do not have to respond, react, follow up, or even understand. We are given this gift of sharing and listening wholeheartedly, truly being *with* one another.

When you think about the circle you will be holding, choose an object that resonates with you. Choose the talking piece thoughtfully and purposefully. The reason you chose your talking piece should be offered to the group so that they understand its meaning. Talking pieces should be respected, honored, and held with gratitude.

Lastly, think about **how you will welcome** circle members into the physical space. What will they see, hear, smell and feel when they enter the space? Think about how will you begin the circle process, invite folks into their chair or seat, orient them to the circle space and the circle process. Signage can make people feel welcome, alleviate their worries about even the smallest things like asking for directions to the bathroom. Consider inclusive signage or symbols that may break down discrimination barriers or concerns. These are all just suggestions to get your welcome wheels turning. Your hospitality sets the tone for the circle. Do not beat yourself up if you are limited in what you can provide based on time, financial investment, or space. A warm smile, genuine curiosity, and authentic gratitude for each participant can welcome us all the same. The rest just enhances our sensual experience of connection and respectful community.

Circle Structure & Design

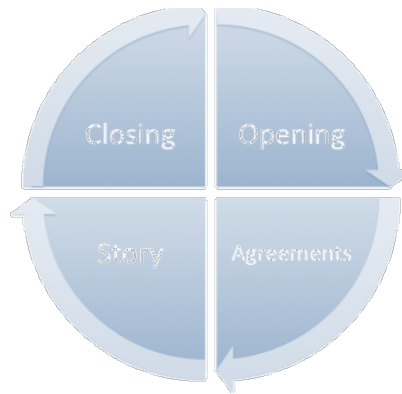
After setting up intentionally and welcoming participants to the circle, you will want to orient them to the space and circle process. Share a brief introduction to circles and state the explicit reason you are coming together, the purpose for your gathering. You can orient folks to the circle process using the Four Parts described below. This is the structure of circle:

PART 1: Opening

PART 2: Agreements

PART 3: Story

PART 4: Closing



Opening

Part 1 includes welcoming participants to the space and the circle process discussed previously as well as the opening ritual or ceremony. The circle is not just any other activity of the day, and the opening and closing ceremonies honor the unique experience of circle as separate and different. The marked beginning and end help our storytelling brains feel most comfortable and at ease. Don't skip the opening or the closing, even if you have to truncate it.

Open with a mindfulness exercise, collective humming, singing, deep breathing, or shared collective audible sigh. Then, share a quote, reading or excerpt that brings everyone's attention together. This serves two purposes. One is to honor ancestors, the wisdom and words of those who have walked before us. Secondly, it is the invitation to enter the community, to engage, to take up space and join, to be included. Some circle keepers follow this with a game, an ice breaker, a quick hello to the person to your right then to your left, or a high five. If you're feeling lively, you can use this to deepen the opening. If not, feel free to allow the quote and mindful moment to speak for itself.

Agreements

Part 2 is where we are explicit in our expectations of one another while in circle. These expectations become our Circle Agreements, the ways in which we promise to uphold one another and the community. You may choose to pre-write agreements that you can bring to circle and review together, or participants can write agreements from scratch. To do this, you can offer a go-around prompt asking what folks need in order to show up fully based on the purpose of the gathering. Each circle may have a different set of Agreements, but there are several things that should be included to honor the integrity of the circle process.

Honor the talking piece

Honor the talking piece means that when we have the talking piece, we get to share our story. We get to share what is on our heart in that moment. We honor the gift it is to share and be witnessed by others who are holding space for us and our story. When we don't have the talking piece, we receive the gift of bearing witness to another person's story, their experiences and what is on their heart. We do not cross talk, validate one another, problem solve, or have to respond in any way. We hold space for one another's voice and listen wholeheartedly. Part of honoring the talking piece is also allowing

folks to pass on sharing. Passing is participating; it is always okay to pass. (Note: if someone passes each and every time, it may be that an agreement has been broken or needs to be added. There could be a safety rupture for that person, which warrants an added go-around to check.)

Offer nonjudgment to everyone, others and self

In circle, we practice nonjudgment. The circle is an inclusive space. While we are human with tendencies to judge, label, and categorize in order to process our surroundings, we suspend that judgment in circle. We do not allow those judgments, which too often cloud our ability to fully listen, to inhibit connection in this space during this time. We practice nonjudgment with others in circle and also with ourselves. We do not have to judge the way in which we show up in circle. We show up as is.

Speak from your heart

This Agreement is an invitation and a reminder that we do not have to waste time rehearsing what we are going to say when we get the talking piece. This is another barrier to truly listening. Instead of practicing what we will say when someone else is sharing, we get to listen fully and completely. When it is our turn with the talking piece, we can share what comes to mind. If we need more time, it is always okay to pass.

Practice presence and mindfulness.

Circles are an opportunity to practice collective presence. In circle, we continue to bring our awareness and attention back to the focal point, whether that be the centerpiece, the opening quote, or the person who has the talking piece at that time. When we get distracted, we practice nonjudgment with ourselves and return our attention back to circle. We continue to do this again and again, together and in our own bodies and minds, imperfectly yet collectively returning to one another. This is mindful gathering, and it is the beauty of the circle.

Mindful gathering also means remaining mindful and aware of the space we take up. How quiet or loud our voices are, how much or how little time we spend sharing, whether we limit or invite others in based on our verbal and nonverbal cues, and what we bring into the space based on our past experiences, belief systems, and worldview. Practicing awareness of ourselves, how we show up and impact the spaces we enter is part of circle practice that we agree to honor.

Additional Agreements

The agreements above uphold the integrity of the circle process and put into action the values of circle: relationship, inclusion, nonjudgment, and mutual respect. If you use the agreements above, make sure to ask if there is anything that anyone wants to add to the agreements. If so, ensure everyone in the circle also agrees. Agreements must be unanimous. If someone has difficulty with one, circle members work together to come up with something to which everyone can agree. For PFDL community circles, the above agreements have been widely accepted and utilized for nearly 100 circles with minor adaptations.

Story

Part 3 is what a colleague of mine calls the “meat and potatoes” of the circle. This is where connection blossoms, where story interlaces invisible strings that weave together our community identity. This is where prompts elicit sharing and give space for wholehearted listening.

How you choose your prompts will become your own process as a circle keeper much like your own preparation and closing practices. There is a list of prompts in this guidebook for inspiration. Write down your own and enjoy this creative component of circle. Prepare for Part 3 by keeping in mind two things: the purpose of the circle and the importance of an integrated narrative.

The purpose of the circle should be reflected in the prompts so that folks can share in and bear witness to *their* shared purpose. This deepens trust, belonging, and safety. Think about your participants and their tolerance for vulnerability. A group of therapists may be quite accustomed to vulnerable conversations about feelings whereas it may be more uncomfortable to a group of elementary education teachers. Consider the participants when determining whether to use icebreakers or more directive questions, how many, and for how long.

Integrating narrative is a story that ascribes meaning and purpose from life's experiences. It is healing and promotes healthy brain function. When we experience traumatic events or chronic stress, our experiences can be fragmented and difficult to make sense of. Telling our story in a meaningful way helps us heal. Neuroscientists have shown that storytelling promotes the release of dopamine, the pleasure hormone, and oxytocin, the "love" or pro-social hormone. These "feel good" hormones enhance our sense of reward and connection to others. Research by Neuroscientist Paul Zak shows that effective story "hooks" us – holds our attention – and transports us to another person's world². Prompts should generate this – capture attention and invite empathy – while unveiling meaningful, integrated narrative. To do this well in community circles, the following basic steps are offered as a guide.

- 1) Begin with a check-in prompt. Give folks space to identify themselves, share something about who they are, how they are showing up, why they are showing up, and/or how they identify in this space.
- 2) Offer a purpose-driven prompt. Choose a question or prompt that ties into the purpose of gathering. This invites a deeper reflection than the initial check-in and also a safe one, as everyone has an identity within this purpose. Add another quote here if it is helpful to introduce the prompt.
- 3) Enhance vulnerability. Introducing a bit of tension "hooks" us humans in story and elicits empathy. Ask about a difficulty, a struggle, or a challenge. I often use, "*What has been the most difficult part of ___?*"
- 4) Elicit meaning-making. Ask a question that draws out the bridge from the past emotional state(s) to the current settled state, the bridge to their own resilience. Understanding and finding meaning in our experiences, our relationships, and our sense of self is healing. Invite the learning, the lesson, the growth, or the impact of the event identified previously. This gives participants the opportunity to make sense of their experience, their story – to complete a narrative – and articulate that story to others. *What got you through the most difficult part? Who helps you when you are deep in struggle? How do you navigate challenges at your best? What have you learned about yourself since the difficult event?*
- 5) Close the story. A closing prompt is essential to close the chapter that was just opened, shared, and witnessed. Sometimes, this comes as a gratitude prompt. *What is one thing you're grateful for in this moment, right now?* If this feels toxically positive, choose another prompt that gives space for folks to close their story. I always end with a version of this question: *How are you leaving this space today?* This prompt gives participants an opportunity to articulate how the circle experience and the community established together has changed them. It is validating, humbling, and it seals the circle. There is something wildly important about knowing we shared something special, and that other people also felt the same special connection. If you are short on time, simply ask folks to share one word they are leaving with.

² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/giovannirodriguez/2017/07/21/this-is-your-brain-on-storytelling-the-chemistry-of-modern-communication/?sh=58f0ac91c865>

Closing

The closing ceremony is similar to the opening ceremony for the same reasons. This experience is likely quite different from what folks experience the rest of the day, and it is important to transition out of this space in order to move into the next one. The closing can include words, movement, breath, song, or dance. Whatever ritual you choose, be sure to invite community engagement and consider a wide spectrum of comfort levels. A short quote is a wonderful way to end time-wise, relationally – as it brings in wisdom of our elders and ancestors – and ritually, as it is often how we began. Lastly, close out with an abundance of gratitude for everyone who showed up and everything that was shared in remembrance of the gift it is to be in circle.

This is a sample outline for designing your circle. The **BOLD** headings should stay the same each time, but you will take time before the circle to identify which quote, prompts, and closing you will utilize.

Sample Circle

PART 1: OPENING

“Thank you for being here in today’s circle. This is a space for us to be together in a new and different way, to build community and nurture relationship as we share time and space together. Most of us are used to meetings that are either lectures or dialogues. A circle is more of a practice, it is an intentional way to communicate. Each time we come together, we have a unique community. Today, we are creating community and gathering around _____. Thank you for showing up!!”

Mindful moment: *“Before we begin, I want to invite everyone to take a deep breath.” Model deep breath. “And another, this time dropping your shoulders as you exhale. Ahhhh. Now let’s open our circle with a quote to ground us in this space.”*

Opening Quote: *“We can be our worst selves when we’re afraid, or our very best, bravest selves. In the context of fear and vulnerability, there is often very little in between because when we are uncertain and afraid our default is self-protection. We don’t have to be scary when we’re scared. Let’s choose awkward, brave, and kind. And let’s choose each other.” – Brene Brown*

PART 2: AGREEMENTS

“In this community circle, everyone has an equal voice so we will take turns speaking and sharing so that each person here has a space for their voice to be heard. In order for us to be able to do that and to show up fully, I want to go over some agreements so we know what to expect from one another.

- **Honor the talking piece; it’s okay to pass.** *I will offer a prompt to the group, share my response, and then I’ll pass the talking piece to the person to my left.*
- **Speak from your heart; no need to rehearse**
- **Offer nonjudgment to everyone, including self**
- **Practice presence and mindfulness**

Does anyone have anything to edit or add?”

PART 3: STORY

PROMPT 1: Share your name and how you are showing up today to this circle.

PROMPT 2: What has been the most difficult thing for you to adjust to during the pandemic?

PROMPT 3: What is one personal strength you have had to lean upon during this time?

PROMPT 4: What is one thing you've learned about yourself?

Closing go-around: What is one word you’re leaving with today?

PART 4: CLOSING

Gratitude & Mindful Moment: *“Thank you so much for showing up today and participating. Let’s take one collective deep breath, breathing in gratitude for one another and dropping our shoulders as we exhale.”*

Closing quote: *“It isn’t more light we need, it’s putting into practice what light we already have. When we do that, wonderful things will happen within our lives and within our world.” – Peace Pilgrim*

Circle Keeping

It is an honor and a privilege to facilitate a circle. Before each circle, take a mindful moment or practice a calm or safe place exercise. It is important that before you offer others a safe space, you offer the same to yourself. Circle keepers are modeling throughout the circle process. They model respect, listening, silence, agreement-keeping, mindful sharing based on time and prompts, and authenticity. They practice mindfulness and trust throughout the entirety of circle. Take a deep breath and lean into the circle process. Remember that it is your job to welcome others, discuss agreements, offer intentional prompts, and close the space.

More information about circle keepers is below from Kay Pranis' [Circle Keeper's Handbook](#) (Roca Inc, 2004)³.

What is a circle keeper?

Keepers are also known as servants, facilitators, carriers and other names. Whatever name is used, the roles are the same. Keepers are the caretakers and servants of the process. As a keeper, you must ensure that everyone takes responsibility for helping to keep the circle, and for making the "circle" a safe place for open dialogue. The keeper has responsibilities before the circle, during the circle, and after the circle.

Qualities of the keeper - Am I striving to exhibit keeper traits?

When you agree to serve as a circle keeper, you are taking on a sacred trust. It can feel intimidating at first. The first thing to remember is to relax, and to forgive yourself for being imperfectly human like we all are. No keeper is perfect. We do the best we can.

Here are some traits that can help you to best serve the circle.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A good listener• Present• Supportive• Nonjudgmental• Fair• Inclusive• Courageous• Reflective• Trusting• Encouraging• Respectful• Aware• Tolerant• Humble• Organized	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Able to keep the process moving• Detached• Appreciative• Patient• Well-disciplined• Watchful• Approachable• Holistic• Able to appreciate humor• Open to other opinions• Honest• An anchor• Willing to forgive• Consistently flexible• Able to keep the space safe
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³ <https://nacri.org/>

Self-Care for Circle Keepers

from the **Oakland Unified School District** Restorative Justice Implementation Guide⁴

To be a great circle keeper for others, take good care of yourself.
Take a moment to check in with YOU.

BEFORE THE CIRCLE

Check in with yourself and notice how you are doing.

- Are you tired, hungry, sleepy?
- Do you have personal emotions about the circle you are going to facilitate?

tip Sleep and eat as well as possible before you go into circle. Take some time to ground yourself and get into a good space. Remember, your feelings will enter the circle with you and impact participants.

DURING THE CIRCLE

You may find yourself bothered by something someone else says about a person or issue. Or, you may recognize that how you are feeling is negatively impacting what you are thinking or what you want to say or do next.

tip Breathe deeply and invite circle participants to breathe with you as well. Remember, the circle is not about YOU, and you are not alone. Circle is about US as a community. Think about what you can do or say to keep everyone in the circle together.

AFTER THE CIRCLE

At times, you may feel energized from joy and pride in doing your job well. Other times, you may feel tired, drained, or have a heavy heart.

tip Whatever the feelings, it is most important that you are nonjudgmentally aware of your emotions. Take a moment to figure out what you need to come back into balance. Make sure to follow through with the self-care needed.

⁴ <https://www.ousd.org/Page/1054>

Virtual Circles

We adapted the circle process for the virtual platform at the start of COVID19, and we found virtual circles very helpful not only to our team but also to our coworkers, supervisors, school mental health professionals, and the school communities in which we serve. We found circles built connection during a very disconnected time. They offered a space to share with clear expectations on how to engage, opportunity to reflect together on the difficulties surrounding COVID19 as well as the lessons, gifts, and growths. Brene Brown stated, “This pandemic experience is a massive experiment in collective vulnerability.” Circles are the most sacred and ancient way of coming together and sharing vulnerability that we know. Circles are a community space for acknowledging vulnerability and navigating newness together.

To maintain the integrity of the circle process, the following principles should be prioritized:

- We are explicit about **the purpose of the circle, why we are gathering**, and we give **clear expectations**. The language we use to describe the circle to others is below.
 - o The purpose of the community circle following COVID19 is to build connection, reflect on the re-remembering and re-gathering process, to share our story and our voice, and to solidify our connection. It may not be the place for problem-solving, for business-related issues, policy updates, or filing complaints. It is a place for building relationship during a unique time.
 - o Keep a circle “agenda” as close to the following as possible:
 - Opening quote
 - *Brief introduction prompt if needed (go around to all participants)*
 - Check-in prompt (go-around)
 - Follow up prompts or reflective questions (go-around)
 - Check-out prompt (go around)
 - Closing quote
- A **talking piece** is important in virtual circles to facilitate go-arounds, where we each have an opportunity to respond to prompts that the circle keeper poses to the group. In place of a true talking “piece,” we use “alphabetical talking peace.” The circle keeper verbalizes this when introducing the importance of a talking piece in circles, the beautiful reminder of the privilege it is to share as well as the privilege it is to truly listen, to witness. The circle keeper can ask the participants to share responsibility for alphabetical talking peace by asking that everyone has their name correctly entered in Zoom, checking to see who they will follow, and remembering where they fall in the alphabet. While these seems cumbersome, we have found it runs rather smoothly. And, it maintains the integrity of the circle while minimizing the awkward silences and frequent interruptions Zoom can bring. The talking piece is essential in allowing for mutual respect and encouraging engagement.
 - o The circle keeper should offer a prompt, share their own response and model appropriately, then pass the piece to the first person in alphabetical order.
- There are **agreements** we acknowledge together, and everyone collaborates to honor them. Those agreements should include the following:
 - o Honor the talking piece; it’s okay to pass
 - o Speak from your heart; no need to rehearse
 - o Offer nonjudgment to everyone, including self
 - o Practice presence and mindfulness

This is a sample outline for designing your circle. The **BOLD** headings should stay the same each time, but you will take time before the circle to identify which quote, prompts, and closing you will utilize.

Sample Virtual Circle

PART 1: OPENING

"Thank you for joining today's virtual community circle. This is a space for us to build community and connection in a different way than many of us are used to gathering. A circle is more of a practice, it is an intentional way to come together. Today, we are creating community and gathering around _____. Thank you for showing up!!"

Mindful moment: *"Before we begin, I want to invite everyone to take a deep breath." Model deep breath. "And another, this time dropping your shoulders as you exhale. Ahhhh. Now let's open our circle with a quote to ground us in this space."*

Opening Quote: *"We can be our worst selves when we're afraid, or our very best, bravest selves. In the context of fear and vulnerability, there is often very little in between because when we are uncertain and afraid our default is self-protection. We don't have to be scary when we're scared. Let's choose awkward, brave, and kind. And let's choose each other." – Brene Brown*

PART 2: AGREEMENTS

"In this community circle, everyone has an equal voice so we will take turns speaking and sharing so that each person here has a space for their voice to be heard. In order for us to be able to do that and to show up fully, I want to go over some agreements so we know what to expect from one another.

- **Honor the talking piece; it's okay to pass.** *I will offer a prompt to the group, and we will virtually "pass the talking piece." The way we have chosen to do that virtually is to go in alphabetical order. Try to remember the person you follow, and I'm happy to remind you when it's your turn if you forget.*

- **Speak from your heart; no need to rehearse**
- **Offer nonjudgment to everyone, including self**
- **Practice presence and mindfulness**

Does anyone have anything to edit or add?"

PART 3: STORY

PROMPT 1: Share your name and how you are showing up today to this circle.

PROMPT 2: What has been the most difficult thing for you to adjust to during the pandemic?

PROMPT 3: What is one personal strength you have had to lean upon during this time?

PROMPT 4: What is one thing you've learned about yourself?

Closing go-around: What is one word you're leaving with today?

PART 4: CLOSING

Gratitude & Mindful Moment: *"Thank you so much for showing up today and participating. Let's take one collective deep breath, breathing in gratitude for one another and dropping our shoulders as we exhale."*

Closing quote: *"It isn't more light we need, it's putting into practice what light we already have. When we do that, wonderful things will happen within our lives and within our world." – Peace Pilgrim*

Quotes Bank

“Sometimes our light goes out but is blown again into instant flame by an encounter with another human being. Each of us owes the deepest thanks to those who have rekindled this inner light.” – Albert Schweitzer

“The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.” – Alice Walker

“It is good people who make good places.” - Anna Sewell

“Talk to yourself like you would to someone you love.” – Brene Brown

“Imperfections are not inadequacies; they are reminders that we’re all in this together.” – Brene Brown

“Daring greatly means the courage to be vulnerable. It means to show up and be seen. To ask for what you need. To talk about how you’re feeling. To have the hard conversations.” – Brene Brown

“Vulnerability is not winning or losing; it’s having the courage to show up and be seen when we have no control over the outcome.” – Brene Brown

“We can be our worst selves when we’re afraid, or our very best, bravest selves. In the context of fear and vulnerability, there is often very little in between because when we are uncertain and afraid our default is self-protection. We don’t have to be scary when we’re scared. Let’s choose awkward, brave, and kind. And let’s choose each other.” – Brene Brown

“If you restore balance in your own self, you will be contributing immensely to the healing of the world.” – Deepak Chopra

“Listen to your life. See if for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness...because in the last analysis all moments are key moments and life itself is grace.” Frederick Buechner

“Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into the places of pain, to share in the brokenness, fear, confusion and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human.” - Henri J.M. Nouwen

“Words need to be heard. When we give words to what we are living, these words need to be received and responded to. A speaker needs a listener. A writer needs a reader. When the flesh — the lived human experience — becomes word, community can develop. When we say, ‘Let me tell you what we saw. Come and listen to what we did. Sit down and let me explain to you what happened to us. Wait until you hear whom we met,’ we call people together and make our lives into lives for others. The word brings us together and calls us into community. When the flesh becomes word, our bodies become part of a body of people.” – Henri Nouwen

“Patience is not just the ability to wait, it’s how we behave while we’re waiting.” – Joyce Kilmer “I do not know if you have ever examined how you listen, it doesn’t matter to what, whether to a bird, to the wind in the leaves, to the rushing waters, or how you listen in a dialogue with yourself, to your conversation in various relationships with your intimate friends, your wife or husband.... If we try to listen we find it extraordinarily difficult, because we are always projecting our opinions and ideas, our prejudices, our backgrounds, our inclinations, our impulses; when they dominate we hardly listen at all to what is being said.... One listens and therefore learns, only in a state of attention, a state of silence, in which this whole background is in abeyance, is quiet; then, it seems to me, it is possible to communicate.” — Krishnamurti

“Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world. All things break. And all things can be mended. Not with time, as they say, but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you.” – L.R. Knost

“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.” – Leo Buscaglia

“The miracle is this - the more we share, the more we have.” — Leonard Nimoy

“Never be limited by other people’s limited imaginations.” Mae Jemison

“Never underestimate the power of a small group of committed people to change the world. In fact, it is the only thing that ever has.” - Margaret Mead

“Whatever the problem, community is the answer. How we are together in our relationships is the solution.” - Margaret Wheatley

“In every community, there is work to be done. In every nation, there are wounds to heal. In every heart, there is the power to do it.” – Marianne Williamson

“The Chinese philosopher Chuang-Tzu stated that true empathy requires listening with the whole being: ‘The hearing that is only in the ears is one thing. The hearing of the understanding is another. But the hearing of the spirit is not limited to any one faculty, to the ear, or to the mind. Hence it demands the emptiness of all the faculties. And when the faculties are empty, then the whole being listens. There is then a direct grasp of what is right there before you that can never be heard with the ear or understood with the mind.’” — Marshall Rosenberg

“If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.” – Mother Theresa

“It isn’t more light we need, it’s putting into practice what light we already have. When we do that, wonderful things will happen within our lives and within our world.” – Peace Pilgrim

“Your task is not to seek love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.” – Rumi

“We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature.” - Sonya Renee Taylor

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.” – Theodore Roosevelt

“I am learning everyday to let the space between where I am and where I want to be to inspire me and not terrify me.” – Tracee Ellis Ross

Prompts Bank

Community Building Prompts

What is one thing coworkers might not know about you?

What is your greatest achievement?

When you think about respect, who comes to mind that embodies respect to you?

How do you define community? Where are you finding it right now?

What is something you've done for yourself this week?

How do you relax best?

What was one of your favorite celebrations of your life?

Think about your favorite birthday and in 2-3 sentences, describe why it was so special.

If you had an unexpected free day and could do anything you wanted, what would it be?

If you were an animal, what would it be and why?

What is a core value that you live by?

If you were an animal, which would you be?

What was a challenge you overcame that you'd be willing to share with the group?

Who has been a major support in your life?

If you could go anywhere for 2 days, where would it be if money, time, and home responsibilities were not an issue?

Digging Deeper Prompts

Share a peak and a valley from this last week.

What is one way you have changed or had to change during this time?

Where do you find support right now?

How are you staying connected during this time?

In what ways do you see potential growth happening as a result of this global pandemic?

Name someone you have supported or received support from during this time.

What is one resource you have found helpful the last couple weeks?

Name a strength of yours that you have had to lean on in adapting and adjusting to the current changes.

What sacrifices have you made to join this circle?

What gives you hope during times of struggle, crisis, or trauma?

What practice have you started or continued that helps you through this?

What messages do you tell yourself that are helpful when you're doing something for the first time?

What messages do you need to hear to show up as your best self?

What resources do you need right now that may be possible to actualize?

What are the biggest challenges right now for your school, organization, agency, or team?

What is one thing you can ask for this week? From a coworker, partner, friend, family member, or yourself?

What keeps you present?

COVID Reflection Prompts

If you had to choose one word to describe your experience during COVID19, what would it be and why?

What is one of the greatest challenges personally or professionally you've experienced because of COVID?

What is one thing that surprised you about yourself during this time?

Name one thing you miss about life pre-COVID19.

What is one word you would use to describe how you have been impacted by COVID19?

How have you been most deeply impacted by COVID19?

What is a question you have had to ask yourself due to COVID19?

What was one thing you were disappointed you couldn't attend or engage in?

What was your favorite way to virtually engage?

Share a problem you had with virtual connection.

What are you proud of that your community (however you define community) did in response to COVID19?

What is the most helpful thing you have heard or been told during this time?

What are you grieving right now?

How do you release or express your grief?

Contact

Thank you so much for taking the time to read through this guidebook. Time is one of the most precious commodities we have in this world, and our perception of its scarcity is one of the greatest barriers to implementation of Restorative Practices. Your commitment to understanding circles speaks to your capacity to keep them well. If you have any questions about the content or process outlined in this guidebook, please reach out. My contact information is below, and email is currently the best (read: quickest) way to get in touch.

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