



**TOOLS &
METHODS**

CIRCLE PRACTICE

CIRCLE - THE MOTHER OF ALL FORMS

DESCRIPTION AND CORE PRINCIPLES:

The circle, or council, is an ancient form of meeting that has gathered human beings into respectful conversation for thousands of years. The circle has served as the foundation for many cultures. What transforms a meeting into a circle is the willingness of people to shift from informal socialising or opinionated discussion into a receptive attitude of thoughtful speaking and deep listening and to embody and practice the structures outlined here.

What is circle good for?

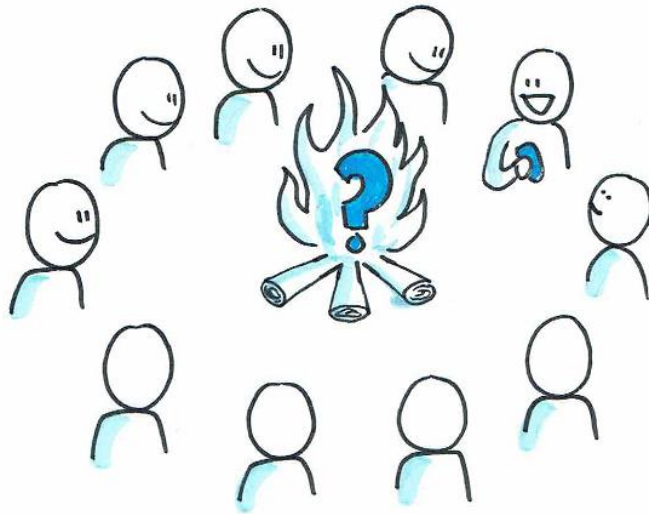
One of the beautiful things about circle is its adaptability to a variety of groups, issues, and timeframes. Circle can be the process used for the duration of a gathering, particularly if the group is relatively small and time for deep reflection is a primary aim. Circle can also be used as a means for “checking in” and “checking out” or a way of making decisions together, particularly decisions based on consensus. Be creative with circle and be ready for the deep wisdom it can uncover!

Main components of the circle

Intention - Intention shapes the circle and determines who will come, how long the circle will meet, and what kinds of outcomes are to be expected. The caller of the circle spends time articulating intention and invitation. Additionally, the centre of a circle usually holds a focus that can be supported by placing the question in the centre or objects that represent the intention of the circle.

Welcome Start-point - Once people have gathered, it is helpful for the host, or a volunteer participant, to begin the circle with a gesture that shifts people's attention from social space to council space. This gesture of welcome may be a moment of silence, reading a poem, or listening to a song – whatever invites people to become present.

Check-in/Greeting - Check-in helps people into a frame of mind for council and reminds everyone of their commitment to the expressed intention. It ensures that people are truly present. Verbal sharing, especially a brief story, weaves the interpersonal net. Check-in usually starts with a volunteer and proceeds around the circle. If an individual is not ready to speak, the turn is passed and another opportunity is offered after others have spoken. Sometimes people place individual objects in the centre as a way of signifying their presence and relationship to the intention.



Agreements - The use of agreements allows all members to have a free and profound exchange, to respect a diversity of views, and to share responsibility for the well-being and direction of the group. Agreements often used include:

- We will hold stories or personal material in confidentiality.
- We listen to each other with compassion and curiosity.
- We ask for what we need and offer what we can.
- We agree to employ a group guardian to watch our need, timing, and energy. We agree to pause at a signal, and to call for that signal when we feel the need to pause.

Three Principles

The circle is an all leader group.

1. **Leadership rotates** among all circle members.
2. **Responsibility is shared** for the quality of experience.
3. **Reliance is on wholeness**, rather than on any personal agenda.

Three Practices

1. To speak with intention, noting what has relevance to the conversation in the moment.
2. To listen with attention, respectful of the learning process for all members of the group.
3. To tend the well-being of the circle, remaining aware of the impact of our contributions.

Check out and Farewell - At the close of a circle meeting, it is important to allow a few minutes for each person to comment on what they learned, or what stays in their heart and mind as they leave. Closing the circle by checking out provides a formal end to the meeting, a chance for members to reflect on what has transpired, and to pick up objects if they have placed something in the centre. As people shift from council space to social space or private time, they release each other from the intensity of attention being in circle requires.

Essential Materials

- Chairs arrange in a circle – people should be able to view each other without impediments (i.e. tables or desks)
- Materials for harvesting conversation