

Circles for the Adult Community: Building and Learning

The circle process can be used to help staff, volunteers and adult family members get to know each other, learn from each other and repair conflict or harm, should it arise. We designed the following guide to help administrators, school restorative practices team members and school and community restorative practices advocates educate and engage the adults in the school about practical staff uses of the circle process.

For example, hold a “back-to-school” circle as the school year begins to help the adults get to know each other or reconnect with each other. Use circle throughout the year as a means of maintaining relationships or as a means of deepening their understanding of the process and restorative practices. Circle can be used as means of holding staff meetings, Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings or team meetings. Circle can enhance professional development by ensuring that all voices are heard. It can be easier to learn from each other. By engaging in the circle process for their own needs, adults may begin to apply the circle for use with the family members and students of the school community.

Please note:

One session sitting in circle is not a training. It is an opportunity to experience the process and get to know the other participants. It provides an experience that may result in participants wanting more knowledge and training. But, by incorporating the use of the circle process in the daily work of the school, trained staff can practice circle keeping. At the same time, other staff can begin to learn the process through experience.

While circle keeping appears straight-forward, it can have intricacies. Schools that use circle with staff may find it helpful to identify a circle coach—one or more people who have attended a multi-day circle training, and have experience holding circles. School staff or an outside consultant can be the coach.

Most circle trainings are three to four days. Through experiential learning, participants explore topics such as personal and community values, the indigenous knowledge that informs the process, repairing harm and restorative justice principles, in addition to any other issue that might surface from the group.

The Living Justice Press provides [further description about the circle process](#).

Find more resources on the Minnesota Department of Education [Restorative Practices web pages](#), including [Restorative Practices in Schools Videos](#), [Restorative Practices in Schools Program Directory](#), [Books and Manuals](#) [Restorative Practices in Schools](#) and tool kits.

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Circle Process Terminology

Talking Piece An object of meaning that provides both a visual and tactile aid for conversation. When you have the talking piece, you may speak and when you don't have the talking piece, you may listen. The talking piece goes around the circle in order—usually it is passed to the left.

Center piece A cloth, scarf or napkin that is laid in the center of the circle. It provides a guide for the placing of the chairs. It can also symbolize the community that is sitting in the circle. People may need facial tissues during circle, so include a container of tissues on the center piece.

Keeper The person who starts the circle and provides support for the circle community's communication. The keeper does not teach, but helps the participants talk with each other with respect, dignity and mutual concern.

Common Agreements or Guidelines In circle, the group generates the guideline or agreement for the process. Questions that start the process of making guidelines might include 'How do we need to act so that we are true to our values?' 'Or what do you each need to feel safe in this circle?' Or the group might agree or add to the common agreements from the book *Circle Forward*:

- Respect the talking piece
- Speak from the heart
- Listen from the heart
- Personal information shared in the circle is confidential except where safety is at risk
- Remain in circle.¹
- You may pass.

Outline The outline is a guide for the keeper to use when facilitating circle. Circle discussions can follow the interests of the group. The outline provides suggestions for the discussion, but discussion topics can be changed in the moment. An outline helps frame the discussion when there is a large group of people sitting in many smaller circles, ensuring that everyone is addressing the same topics.

Basic Physical Set-Up Arrange everyone in a circle of chairs with no other furniture. If the school community is larger than 20 or so people, break up the participants into circles of eight. To facilitate the process, one person is the keeper. The keeper opens and closes the circle, and supports the participants by offering questions that invite the sharing of knowledge and experiences. The keeper uses a talking piece. The talking piece goes around in order from the keeper, usually to the left, clockwise. There are several materials that can be useful to have for circle such as markers, paper plates or paper and a packet of tissues. Place these materials on the center piece. You may include other welcoming objects such flowers, a stone or an image of the school mascot.

You can modify the set-up of the circle but any modifications are always made with the intent for everyone to see everyone else, and to offer everyone the chance to speak in a predictable way.

¹ *Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community*, Boyes-Watson & Pranis, Living Justice Press, St. Paul.2016. Page 31.

Outline for Circle Keepers

This outline that follows explains the basic elements of a circle discussion. Use the outline to organize your thoughts for a circle you want to keep. Circle topics arise out of the needs of the community. Any issue can be addressed by hearing all voices in a circle. A keeper follows the concerns of the circle participants, improvising as needed.

Welcome The keeper smiles as people enter the circle, and when all are seated, welcomes them. It is helpful to start with a mindful moment—silent focused breathing, a guided meditation or a wake up activity, such as standing on one foot, or a game intended to mix up the seating arrangement.

Opening The keeper offers a quote, story, or song that frames the discussion or is pertinent to the circle. The keeper explains the talking piece and reviews the common agreements. Ask for additions to the agreements, if necessary. For example, use the common agreements from the manual, *Circle Forward*:

- Respect the talking piece
- Speak from the heart
- Listen from the heart
- Personal information shared in the circle is confidential except where safety is at risk
- Remain in circle.²
- You may pass.

Meeting, Getting Acquainted Begin circle with introductions. The keeper asks people to “say your name and...” providing a prompt for participants to offer extra information on who they are as a person. For example, “I am Hanaa, and my favorite hobby is...”

Building Understanding and Trust (also called Storytelling) The keeper asks a question that invites participants to share a bit more about who they are by telling a story about themselves, or saying where they are from, or sharing what their connection is to the issue that brought everyone together. There may be one to three rounds of storytelling, depending upon the issue facing the community.

Addressing Issues The keeper asks questions to help people explore the issues of the group. There may be one to three or more rounds. It is helpful to start with questions that focus on the positive and then move on to more challenging issues.

Making Plans/Sense of Unity The keeper keeps track of the needs that arise as the community addresses issues and the keeper summarizes those needs. Then the keeper asks for ideas on how to meet the needs, discussing that until there is a plan that all can live with. Or the keeper asks for one thing that everyone may do to continue to build on the spirit of the circle, or the keeper may simply ask, “How was circle for you today?”

² *Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community*, Boyes-Watson & Pranis, Living Justice Press, St. Paul.2016. Page 31.

Closing Circle closes as it was opened, with the keeper leading an activity or sharing a quote, story or summary that reflects the discussion.

Sample Outline for a Circle

Following is the outline of the circle with a brief explanation of each part. A keeper may use this outline to organize their thoughts for each step of the circle process. Please note that the needs of the group may take the discussion in a different direction, so the outline is a guide, rather than a map.

Welcome: mindful moment or activity

Opening: quote, story, song, pertinent to the meeting. Explain the talking piece and review the common agreements. Ask for additions, if necessary.

Meeting, Getting Acquainted: Say your name and...

Building Understanding and Trust through Storytelling:

Addressing Issues:

Making Plans/Sense of Unity:

Closing: activity or quote or story or summary

Thank you for participating in this circle!

A Training Design for Circle with a Large Staff

Circle is to be a safe place to the fullest extent possible. It is hard to feel safe if people are watching but not participating. Everyone needs to have a stake in the safety and respect of the circle. Therefore, no one watches circle. Anyone who comes into a room where a circle is held is invited to participate. This is true whether you're a principal, a parent, a third grader or a journalist.

Holding a circle workshop with large staff poses a challenge. Do 70 people sit quietly, while each person takes a turn to tell their story about their values? It is possible, if you have enough time. Most schools do not. I offer this design for conducting circle with a large number of people. To hold circle, you need a gym (or a large room), chairs, some poster paper and brown paper bags.

Materials for the Circles

For a two to three hour workshop with all staff, ask for chairs to be set up in a large circle in the gymnasium. All staff will start by sitting in this large circle for the introduction. Later they will divide into circles of seven or eight people.

Bring poster paper with enough sheets for each circle. Bring small brown paper bags with circle materials in them—a cloth napkin that will serve as a center piece, a rock or shell as the talking piece, a set of eight small paper plates, a set of eight markers and a circle outline. Mark the bags as 1, 2, 3, etc., and place the bags strategically around the gym as a placeholder for where the smaller circles will gather. A set of common agreements for circle will be printed on paper. Post the common agreements around the gym or place them in the center of the circle. For example, you may want to use a set agreements from the book *Circle Forward*. Agreements include:

- Respect the talking piece
- Speak from the heart;
- Listen from the heart;
- Personal information shared in the circle is confidential except where safety is at risk;
- Remain in circle.³
- You may pass.

If your school community has developed common agreements or guidelines for circle, use those.

Setting up the Circles

Explain the Circle.

1. Introduce yourself, thank the person who invited you to lead the workshop, note how much time you will have in circle and what you will discuss. Welcome people to the large circle. Ask them to sit and

³ *Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community*, Boyes-Watson & Pranis, Living Justice Press, St. Paul.2016. Page 31.

breathe for a minute or so, and send around the talking piece, asking only that they share their first name. Note: It takes 100 people about four minutes to share their first name in circle.

2. Explain the circle process: Chairs are arranged in a circle, so everyone can see everyone else. The talking piece supports the conversation. When you have the talking piece, you may speak or hold it in silence. When you don't have the talking piece, you listen. The talking piece goes around in order clockwise—it is not given to whomever wants to talk. Questions are not answered until the person to whom the question is directed has the talking piece.
3. Explain the role of the keeper: The keeper takes one of the brown paper bags as an example. As you take each item out of the bag, the keeper explains each item—center piece, talking piece, markers, plates, and an outline. The keeper passes out the paper plates and markers, sets up the cloth napkin in the middle of the circle, takes the talking piece and reads the outline to herself. When ready, the circle keeper can start the circle, reading the outline out loud.

For the values circle, each circle will also need poster paper, which can be placed around the gymnasium before the training begins. This will also help direct people to the location for their circle.

To set up the smaller circles, you need to:

4. Ask for enough volunteer keepers, so you can have circles of seven or eight people, including the keeper. Have them step forward in the large circle. Then have participants count off the number of circle keepers you have and divide into smaller circles. Show where each circle will set up around the gymnasium as indicated by the numbered bags. Direct people to take their chairs and find their circle.
5. Tell the participants that when their circle is finished, they should take their chairs back to the large circle and place their paper plates around that circle's center. Remarks on poster paper captured in small circles can be posted on a wall with the remarks from other small circles. When circles are complete, participants may take a break.
6. Announce that the break has ended and ask them to return to the main (large) circle. I give 30 minutes to 45 minutes for the circles. For a training that starts at 9 a.m., I ask people to return at 10:15 a.m. This includes about 15 minutes of introduction and explanation time and it accommodates circles that go more quickly as well as circles that last longer.
7. Repeat the direction that the talking piece goes around the circle in order. It is not handed out of order to anyone who wants to talk. You may talk when you have the talking piece or you may pass. If people do not have anything to say the first or second time around, send the talking piece around again. Usually by the third pass on any question, almost everyone has said something.

Tell everyone to find their circles, and talk.

Review and Debrief

After the break, have everyone return to the large circle.

8. Read all the values aloud. Explain the importance of starting with values when building a circle community, so we all can better understand each other. For instance, after we have discussed our values, next we can establish our common agreements for how we will work together.
9. Invite people to walk around the room and review remarks on the papers. Give them five minutes to do so. When they come back to the large circle, ask a few people to volunteer their reflections on similarities and differences.
10. Debrief about the circle process by asking for input.

- What did you like about the process?
- What felt awkward about the process?
- How did you feel having to wait for the talking piece?

Re-affirm that the talking piece goes around in order and revisit the reasons for that protocol, which include:

- Giving everyone the chance to speak.
- Inviting introverts to participate with their voice as well as their minds.
- Inviting extroverts to listen and take time to think.
- Inviting all participants to be responsible for common agreements.
- Slowing the process down for people who need time to think.
- Teaching impulse control.

Encourage staff to keep and post the values in their staff room, and to hold other small circles to discuss other topics. Read [Circle Forward](#) for more examples of staff circles.

Next Steps

Either close the session, or if you have time, provide an overview of restorative principles and discuss who uses what practices in a restorative school. Give a final presentation—use a video that focuses on the repair of harm process or do demonstration of the repair of harm process. This can close a two to three hour overview session.

For more information on restorative practices workshops and training activities, read the [Trainer's Guide for Working with Schools to Implement Restorative Practices](#) on the School Safety Technical Assistance Center website.

Circle for Meetings

Circle is a new communication process for many people, so the more it is practiced the easier it is to use for any situation. Circle is best done in its entirety, but that might not be practical if there are a lot of people—more than 10—who are meeting. But taking time for both an opening check-in round and a closing check-out round, the facilitator, whether a superintendent, assistant principal or teacher on special assignment, can show a commitment to this core process. Check-ins and check-outs also help people to be more completely present for the meeting, as all have shared one thing about themselves to start and end the meeting.

Establish the Team Ethos

Start the first meeting of any team of adults by identifying and discussing the values of the group. Establish common agreements. Use the common agreements by posting them at each subsequent meeting of the team.

Meeting, Getting Acquainted

The check-in round (going around the circle—with or without a talking piece—in order to ensure that everyone speaks their name and shares one thing about themselves) gives everyone the chance to be heard and seen at the meeting's beginning. It helps everyone warm up their voices and encourages further participation. By saying their names at each meeting, new people are included in introductions and know who is with them in circle. Answers to even simple check-in questions such as "What is one thing you saw on the way to work today?" can give everyone a clue as to how a member is feeling, especially if the answer is "a tow truck!"

If there are many people at the meeting, you can modify the check-in round by having people to stand up, gather in small groups of two to four, introduce themselves to the small group and then sit down. This ensures that people make a personal connection with at least one other person, re-enforcing the importance of relationship.

Addressing issues on the agenda

Having completed the check-in round, the meeting facilitator can continue to follow the agenda in circle, sending around the talking piece, or suspending the talking piece to allow for open discussion and talk across the circle. If the discussion becomes one-sided or if it would be helpful to hear from everyone, picking up the talking piece and sending it around is a simple way to hear more voices, slow down discussion for more thoughtful responses or to work towards consensus.

Closing with a Sense of Unity as Meeting Ends

Send the talking piece around one last time to see if anyone has anything else to say, or ask participants to use one word to answer "How was this meeting for you?" As a meeting facilitator, it is helpful to know how others experienced the meeting or to learn about issues yet to be addressed. With one final pass, all participants have their voices heard again.

Note: Adapted from the Oakland Unified School District Restorative Justice Implementation Guide.

Values Circle for Educators

Suggested Script for Facilitating a Values Circle.

Supplies Needed Markers and small paper plates or half sheets of paper—enough for the number of people in the circle (six to eight people is the suggested group size for circle.); a small scarf or large cloth napkin to use as a centerpiece, a talking piece, a packet of facial tissues and poster paper to use during the planning section.

Instructions Please read script that follows in its entirety so you are acquainted with the basic outline. You may use these words or your own words to conduct and to keep the conversation. Send the talking piece around the circle in order, starting by passing it to the left.

Welcome: “Welcome, everyone, to circle. I invite you to take a moment to pay attention to your breathing. Purposefully and thoughtfully follow your breath as you breathe in and out three times.”

Opening: “I open this circle by sharing with you a Lakota phrase: Mitakuy Oyasin. It means ‘we are all related’—related to each other, to our family, our community, the land, and all the creatures of the world. We are related as educators, coming together for a common goal, to care for and educate our students, to work with the families of our students, to work with each other.

“Restorative practices are being taken up in schools, in part to repair harm, but the practices are also being used to build relationships, to build community. So this morning we will start with just being in circle and talking a bit about ourselves, our values, our family and why we work at this school.”

“Our common agreements for this circle are:

- Respect the talking piece.
- Speak from the heart.
- Listen to understand.
- Take the time you need knowing that others need time as well.
- Honor confidentiality.
- And, you may pass.

Meeting, Getting Acquainted: “First, let us go around and introduce ourselves. Say your name, what you do at your work and one thing you saw on the way to this workshop.” (The keeper answers the prompt and gives the talking piece to the person to the left. The talking piece goes around in order.)

Storytelling: “Thanks for that round. Now, I invite you to take a paper plate and write a value word on it. What was a value that you learned in your family of origin, your work family or your chosen family, which helps you get through the day? Write that word on the paper.” (Give people time to think and write.)

- “For this round, tell us who your people are. Who is your family? Where did they come from? What is your value word? Who taught you that word? Tell us a little about what that word means to you today. When you are finished, place the paper with your word on it around the centerpiece so we can all see it. I will start. My people, my family originally came from or my family is....My word is.... (Again, the talking piece goes to the person on the left.)

- Let us look at all of these values. Read them aloud. During this round, is there anything you would like to say about another value besides your own? Remember, you may pass, or speak.”
- We do not work alone. We work with children and adults. Think of a student or colleague. Which of these values do you guess would be valuable to them and why? Again, you may pass, or speak.”

Addressing Issues “From these values, we can begin to establish a safe and caring learning environment. We can talk a bit more about why we are here today. Can someone take notes on this round? Thanks. I will pass the talking piece around two or three times, so people can take their time thinking. Why do you work in education? What do you hope to get from learning about restorative practices?”

Making Plans “Thanks for these thoughts. As the keeper, please read aloud the list of reasons people came to this workshop.

- What is one thing that you will do to deepen your own capacity for using restorative practices?”
- “For our final round, how was this circle for you?”

Closing “As we close, I want to share a quote from an educator about the usefulness of circle:

“...There's something powerful with just being in a circle, and people are really opening up, and it's incorporating talking pieces and whatnot. It helps other people really listen. And we're working on (equity) and I think it has helped develop, equity, in the way that folks are doing more listening to understand rather than listening to respond.”

“Thank you for participating in this circle.”

Talking Piece Circle

A talking piece is an object of meaning, for either the keeper or for the group. As a way of highlighting an object's meaning, provide circle participants with an opportunity to make and explain a talking piece. Ask participants to be deliberate as they make their talking piece, so that each part of the talking piece has a meaning for the person who made it. Creating a talking piece provides another way for people to share their story with others.

Allow 15-20 minutes for participants to make their talking piece. When finished, ask participants to bring their talking piece to the circle.

Supplies Found objects such as sticks, feathers, ribbon, beads, yarn or other materials can be part of a talking piece. Glue, tape, florist wire and a hot glue gun to help keep the piece together, if needed.

Welcome "Welcome, everyone, to circle. I invite you to breathe—take three deep breathes in and out.

Our common agreements for this circle are:

- Respect the talking piece.
- Speak from the heart.
- Listen to understand.
- Take the time you need knowing that others need time as well.
- Honor confidentiality.
- And, you may pass.

Opening "A symbol is an object that can stand for more than one thing—it can have many meanings. A talking piece is like that. It can be an object or it can also represent other things that are not as tangible, not as specific. For example, an apple is a piece of fruit, but it can also symbolize all fruit, or health, or education. The talking piece can symbolize who we are as an individual. We can talk about who we are by telling the story of the talking piece, and what the parts mean."

Meeting, getting acquainted "First, let us go around the circle. Say your name and answer the question "If you were a kind of weather today, what kind would you be?"

Storytelling "Now, let's explain our talking pieces. What did you use to make your piece? Why did you choose those materials or elements? What does this talking piece say about you? What did you *use*? Why did you *choose*? What about *you*? I will go first.

Addressing Issues "What ideas do you have for using these talking pieces and the circle process? Can someone take notes on the ideas shared? Thanks. So, what ideas do you have for using circle in our classrooms?"

Making Plans "Thanks for the ideas. We can talk about them in more detail at our next circle. Who would like to lead that circle?"

"For our final round, in one word, answer the question, 'How was this activity for you?'"

Closing "Our talking pieces are unique, like each one of us are unique. Thank you for sharing your work."

Compassionate Schools Principles Circle

Educators are learning more about how trauma impacts child’s developing brain and how adverse childhood experiences can effect a student’s ability to learn and behave in school. One resource we can explore to gain insight into creating a trauma-informed school is [Compassionate Schools: The Heart of Teaching and Learning](#), a manual from the Washington State Department of Public Instruction. Working with students who have experienced adversity challenges the head and the heart. This circle provides an opportunity for staff to reflect upon their practice in light of the *Principles for Instruction and Discipline*.

Supplies: Use the handout of the *Compassionate Schools Principles for Instruction and Discipline* as a talking piece. The principles are:

- Always empower, never disempower.
- Provide unconditional positive regard.
- Maintain high expectations.
- Check assumptions, observe and question.
- Be a relationship coach.
- Provide guided opportunities for helpful participation.

The handout follows on the next page.

Welcome Invite people to think of a young person they appreciate. Sit silently for a moment while people collect their thoughts.

Opening Read the Compassionate Schools principles aloud. Review the common agreements of the group.

Meeting, Getting Acquainted:

- “Say your name and the name of the student who came to mind for you.”
- “Which of the principles listed on the sheet do you like the most today?”

Storytelling “Share a time when you had a teacher treat you in a manner that embodied or illustrated one of the principles.”

Addressing Issues

- “Share an example of where you witness one of these principles in practice in your school. Think about yourself, the staff or students. Send the talking piece around twice, because people may want to pass the first time, so they have time to think. Make a list of examples of what you’ve seen.
- “Share an example of where these principles might be used to improve practice in your school. Send the talking piece around twice. Make a list of examples on poster paper.
- “What are some suggestions or ideas to either enhance what is working well, or address what can be improved upon.

Making Plans/Sense of Unity

- “What is one thing you can commit to doing that will help to promote one of the compassionate principles?”

- “Does anyone have anything else they would like to say?”

Closing “I want to close this circle with a quote from Mona M. Johnson, one of the authors of *Compassionate Schools*: ‘When the heart speaks, listen. Then respond compassionately and consistently.’”

Thank people for their time in circle.

Compassionate Schools Principles

- Always empower, never disempower.
- Provide unconditional positive regard.
- Maintain high expectations.
- Check assumptions, observe and question.
- Be a relationship coach.
- Provide guided opportunities for helpful participation.

From [Compassionate Schools: The Heart of Teaching and Learning](#), Washington State Department of Public Instruction.

Staff Check-In Circle

Use this outline, or one like it, to keep a circle where you encourage staff to share what is working well and what is challenging. When used on a regular basis, this basic circle can provide opportunities for problem-solving, encouragement and laughter.

Welcome Start with a mindful moment or a wake up activity

Example: “I invite you to take a moment to pay attention to your breathing. Purposefully follow your breath as you breathe in and out, thoughtfully, three times.”

Or: Let’s do a name toss. We will use a small stuffed animal or plush toy that we will toss to each other. Stand as you are able. First, let’s set up the toss pattern. I will toss the toy across the circle, saying your name. You catch it, then toss it to another person in the circle. Say the name of the person you toss it to. That person tosses the toy to another person, saying the name of the person they tossed it to. Keep tossing and saying names until everyone has been included.

Now we have set the toss pattern. I will start tossing again, using the same pattern and saying the name of the person you toss the toy to. After four tosses, I will add another toy and start from the beginning. Then I will add another toy. See if you can get all three toys around the circle without dropping any of them. Here we go!”

Opening To open our circle, here is an observation from author Robert Fulghum: “Don’t worry that children never listen to you; worry that they are always watching you.”

“Our common agreements for this circle are: (use your school’s or group’s common agreements or the ones listed below).

- Respect the talking piece.
- Speak from the heart.
- Listen to understand.
- Take the time you need knowing that others need time as well.
- Honor confidentiality.
- And, you may pass.

Meeting, Getting Acquainted “Say your name and a value that is important to you today. You need not explain the word—just say the word.”

Storytelling “Let’s check in on how the year is going so far. Think in terms of butterflies and bullfrogs—highs and lows.”

Round 1: “Share a story of a butterfly event in the classroom or at school—something that happened that was easy, graceful or smooth, or fun, or hopeful.”

Round 2: “Share a story of a bull frog event in the classroom or in the school—something that happened that was deep, kind of muddy, and full of algae...”

Addressing Issues “Thanks for those stories. Now, let’s remind ourselves of our abilities and how we can help each other. I have three sentence stems to start our discussion. We will go around three times, once for each stem. Finish the sentence I give:

- “My family is good at.....
- “At school I need support to.....
- “One thing at my schools that I can celebrate today is.....”

Sense of Unity

- “I commit to taking one new action or doing one thing better to make the school strong and welcoming. My one thing is:
- “In one word, how was this circle? We can all have the same word.”

Closing “I close this circle with an observation about generosity from the French philosopher Jean De La Bruyère: ‘Generosity lies less in giving much than in giving at the right moment.’”

“Thank you for participating in this circle!”

Creating a Team Vision Circle

When people come together to form the restorative practices team (or any team), use this circle to help all team members get to know each other. By sharing values, creating a vision and establishing the team common agreements, members will have a framework for working together. By meeting in circle, the team will practice a process that can be used to address conflict or harm that may surface as the team moves forward. With practice, staff will deepen their own understanding of the circle process—a practice that they will ask other adults and students to engage in, thereby increasing the capacity for circle in the school.

Supplies Markers and small paper plates or half sheets of paper, enough for the number of people in the circle (suggested 6-8); a small scarf or large cloth napkin for the center piece, a talking piece and a packet of facial tissues, and blank paper for visioning activity. Arrange a circle of chairs with no other furniture.

Welcome “Welcome, everyone, to circle. Let’s take a moment, let go of anything we have in our hands or on our laps, and sit with our legs uncrossed. Pay attention to your breathing for a moment.

“As we are starting to plan to use restorative practices in schools, I ask you to consider the process of building a community. (Distribute copies of the Wendell Berry poem that follows. Ask a volunteer to read the poem aloud.)

What We Need is Here

Geese appear high over us,
pass, and the sky closes. Abandon,
as in love or sleep, holds
them to their way, clear
in the ancient faith: what we need
is here. And we pray, not
for new earth or heaven, but to be
quiet in heart, and in eye,
clear. What we need is here.

Wendell Berry

Meeting, getting acquainted (The keeper gives the question, and then answers it first. The talking piece is handed to the person to the left. The talking piece goes around in order.) “Please share a word or line from this poem that most resonates with you and why?”

Building understanding and trust, storytelling “Let’s get to know each other and talk about journeys.

- “Please share your name and share a journey you had to take in order to develop personally? What did you learn about yourself?”
- “What supports did you need to stay on your journey?”
- “As we think about our journey implementing restorative practices in our school, what are our strengths that we can draw on?”

Values “Now, I invite you to take a paper plate and write a value word on it. What is a value that that is important to you as you work in this school? Write that word on the paper plate, and then write the definition of the value.” (Give people time to think and complete.)

- “Share your value and why it is important to you. “ (The talking piece goes to the person on the left.)
- “Please share your definition of the value and answer: How did you come up with your definition?”
- “Let us look at all these values—(read them off). In this round, is there anything you would like to say about another value besides your own? Remember, you may pass, or not.”

Addressing Issues (developing the team’s common agreements) “From these values, we can begin to establish a safe and caring team ethos and work environment. We are now going to create our common agreements or guidelines for how we will work together. The idea of the common agreements is that we are willing to be accountable to one another in order to be supportive and productive.”

(Encourage participants to use their values definitions to come up with common agreements. For example, if someone shared the value of honesty, and came up with the definition of honesty as “to tell the truth,” we can add “tell the truth” as a common agreement. Chart participants’ agreements.)

- “Share a common agreement would you like to add based on your value.”
- “What else needs to be added so that we can all feel safe and connected?”

(At the end of the round, if not offered, add one or all of the following common agreements:

- Respect the talking piece.
- Speak from the heart.
- Listen to understand.
- Take the time you need, knowing others need time.
- Honor confidentiality.
- You may pass).
- “Is there anything on this list that you have questions about?” (If there are objections to any of the common agreements, pass the talking piece to discuss what needs the common agreements is trying to meet and what needs make it objectionable.)
- “Can you live with this list as your team’s common agreements for meetings?”

“Thank you for your sharing. These are our common agreements. We will post these common agreements and bring them to all of our meetings. We will re-visit them as we need to.”

Making Plans “Based on our sharing to this point, we can begin to imagine how we want our school to look and feel like—what our vision of our school could be. Take a paper and a marker and draw a picture of what you want the school to look like and feel like as the result of putting relationships first. When you have finished your picture—stick figures can be used—write one sentence that summarizes your vision. We will take five to seven minutes to draw and write.”

- “Now, let’s go around and share our pictures and sentences. When you are finished with your turn, put the picture on the floor around the centerpiece so we can see it. I will start...”
- “Is there anything that you would like to note about these pictures and statements?”
- “What should we do with these pictures and statements?”

(These statements can be listed as your team’s vision for the school you want to create. You may wordsmith them into a short, pithy statements, and/or keep the originals, as a guide for your work and your school. You may bring them to all meetings and re-visit them as needed.)

Sense of Unity “Is there anything else you want to share?”

Closing “To close our circle I give you this from Rumi, a 13th Century Persian Poet.

‘The very center of your heart is where life begins. It is the most beautiful place on earth.’

Thank you for participating in this circle.”

(Adapted by Hanaa Arafat from Vaandering and Vander-Vennen, “Putting Restorative Justice into Practice.” Found in Circle Forward, by Boyes-Watson and Pranis.)

Community of Practice in Circle

A restorative practices coach can use this circle to build the staff capacity for the restorative practices and the circle process. It can be used with a group of people who have various levels of knowledge. The circle will meet weekly or bi-weekly. Participants will learn from each other while reviewing the basics of the restorative practices. Participants need to just show up—no homework is required! Meet 10-18 times for one hour at a time.

Supplies Books and manuals such as [Justice on Both Sides](#) by Winn, [The Little Book of the Circle Process](#) by Pranis, [Circle Forward by Boyes-Watson and Pranis](#), *Restorative Practices and Special Needs* by Burnett and Thorsborne or other training manuals.

Establish the Community of Practice Circle Hold a values circle and then hold a common agreements circle. For ideas, review [Heart of Hope or Circle Forward](#). Make a centerpiece out of the values and common agreements.

Basic outline of the Community of Practice Circle:

- Check-in;
- Share a story of a butterfly or bullfrog moment;
- Read a chapter for section of the book and discuss;
- Make plans by identifying a personal goal for the next week or two;
- Close.

Meeting, getting acquainted “Say your name and the name of a student that you appreciate today.” (Or use any easy check-in question.) Review the group’s Common Agreements.

Storytelling Invite participants to share a butterfly and bullfrog moment with students (we learn from stories of success and mistakes). Or revisit the personal goals and how each person was able to work towards their goal.

Addressing issues—read and discuss Read the text (3-4 pages) from the team’s chosen book silently. When all are finished, use the following prompts or other prompts to discuss. Be sure to send the talking piece around to ensure that everyone gets a chance to speak. Send it around more than once, so that people can take the time they need to formulate their thoughts. Prompts could include:

- “What stands out for you from this section?”
- “What supports what you already do in your discipline practice?”
- “What might you change in what you already do?”
- “What are the intended outcomes of changing your practice?”
- “What might be unintended (positive or negative) outcomes of changing your practice?”

Making Plans

- “What is one thing you will work on or pay attention to in the next two weeks regarding restorative practices?”
- “How was circle today?”

“Thank you for being in circle!”

Debriefing and Support for Staff after Crisis

School crisis' can come in many forms, including a fight, a death in the community, violence in or outside the school that affects people in the school, a tragedy, an arrest of a student or a local, state, national or international event that is disruptive. Such events impact both the students and the adults in school.

Following a crisis, you and your school staff must get the support they need from the other adults, so you all can effectively work with and support students. Professionals from local community groups and organizations are often available to help and support school staff. Consider contacting therapists, members of faith communities and mental health professionals to assist you and your school staff. Give staff suggestions on how to talk with and support their students.

Holding a staff circle provides one way for staff to express their thoughts and feelings as well as get support after a crisis or disruptive event. To help you use circle, a circle "how-to" and sample script follows.

Staff Circle of Understanding

What is a Circle?

Circle is a restorative practice that schools use to develop and strengthen relationships and build community. You can also use circle to help school staff deal with or process crises. Circle gives everyone an opportunity to speak and listen to one another in a safe and supportive atmosphere.

Circle "How-To"

Set-Up People sit in a circle so everyone can see each other and so that every person is equal distance from the center. If you do not have a place to meet, hold a circle by having everyone stand in a classroom or hallway.

Process The circle keeper (facilitator) responsibilities: Keeps the circle by welcoming all participants and ensuring the circle is a safe place for everyone. Introduce the common courtesies for everyone to follow in the discussion.

Common Agreements

- Speak in I statements: "I think, I feel, I believe"
- Respect the process and one another
- Speak and listen from the heart—be open to what each person has to say
- Be brief so each person has an opportunity to talk
- You may pass.
- Honor confidentiality—what is said of a personal nature in circle stays in circle.

Plan a statement about the issue Decide as a staff what you will all say about the crisis or concern. Be sure to consult with mental health professionals, district admin and student support staff, or family members, depending upon the issue to be discussed. Clarify what you as a representative of the district can say, and when to refer student questions to administration.

In addition to the opening statement, prepare questions for the circle and closing statement to conclude the circle.

Talking Piece Use a talking piece (something of meaning/significance to the circle keeper or the participants). Whoever holds the talking piece speaks. Whoever doesn't have the talking piece listens—without interruptions whether verbal or physical interruption. If necessary, gently remind participants they are in circle and to respect the process and each other. It is best to do that only when it is your turn to speak, that is, when you have the talking piece.

Tips for Circle Keepers

- To begin circle, pass the talking piece to your left and ask participants to pass it from person to person in order. Do not to give the talking piece to whoever wants to say something in the moment. It can become confusing as to who has had the chance to speak and who has not.
- Allow participants to pass or just hold the talking piece for a while without talking before passing it on. Send the talking piece around the circle more than once for the same question to give participants repeated opportunities to speak. Some people will not speak the first time around, but they may talk during the second, or third time.
- Wait until the talking piece comes back to you to speak and reinforce positive social norms and values of the group, even if anti-social statements are made.
- Recognize that difficult feelings are normal, natural and people need to express them. But those feelings need to be handled respectfully and in a manner that de-escalates conflict rather than fuels it.

Script for Holding a Staff Circle

Welcome “Welcome, everyone, to the circle. Please sit with both feet on the floor, and pay attention to your breathing. Take a deep breath from your diaphragm until you feel your lungs fill completely. Slowly release the air through pursed lips as if you are blowing out a straw. Repeat this three times.”

“Let us review some common courtesies for our discussion today:

- Speak in I statements: I think, I feel, I believe
- Respect the talking piece and each other
- Speak and listen from the heart—be open to what each person has to say
- Take the time you need, knowing others need time as well
- You may pass
- Honor confidentiality.”

Meeting, Getting Acquainted “I am going to send this talking piece around our circle. Let me tell you about this talking piece, and why I chose it for our circle today (explain).

“When you get the talking piece, it is your turn to speak. Some people also call it a listening piece, because it directs you to the person you can listen to. We will pass the talking piece around the circle in order. When you get the talking piece, please say your name and one thing that you saw this morning on the way to work. I will start. My name is (say your name) and I saw (describe what you saw.)”

(When the talking piece comes back to you, the keeper, you can note all the interesting little (or big) things that we can see in life if we just pay attention, if we just look.)

Building understanding and trust “I want to talk with you today about (talk about the crisis, tragedy, violence or event in the news, etc.) I want to take time to hear from you about what you think or feel or what you need to know. What happened can be hard for some of us or all of us and it can affect our ability to do our jobs. Some of us may see it as part of work. Some of us may see it as an opportunity. We all may see the same thing but experience it in a different way, based upon our own stories, experiences and our own journey.

It is still important for us, as the staff responsible for our students and responsible to each other, to be able to talk about what we think and how we feel about what happened.”

- “So I am wondering, where were you when the incident happened? What role did you play in responding and what did you think of at the time?”
- Today, how are you feeling about what happened? Where do you feel those feelings in your body?

Addressing Issues

- People express their feelings in a variety of ways. What do you need from your colleagues in the way of support as we go forward from this incident?
- What can you do to help yourself and what can you do to help each other?

Making Plans

- Is there anything that we have learned from this incident and our response that can help us respond more effectively in the future? Is there anything we want to definitely keep on doing because it was useful?
- Should these ideas be brought to the school leadership? Are there any practical next steps to take to improve our practice?
- Is there anything else anyone wants to say?

Closing “Remember small acts of meanness could trigger sadness or more meanness in others. But small acts of kindness have the power to create a smile and to lift the happy hormones we all have. This is the time to practice acts of respect and kindness. Help each other out.

And be kind to yourself. I want to share a poem with you today. It’s from the poet Rumi:

Keep knocking, and the joy inside

Will eventually open a window

And look to see who’s there.

Thank you for participating in circle.”