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# Community Building Circle Design Template

## Designing a circle

### Consider the 5 C’s:

Convening • Connection • Concern • Collaboration • Closing

###

**Circle Planning**

**Convening**

*This is before the circle process takes place.*

*A well planned circle can lead to a well run circle.*

* What is the purpose of the circle?
* What outcomes would you like to see emerge from this circle?
* Who will you invite to participate?
* What pre-circle questions might you ask participants?
* How will you open the circle? (Opening ritual, ice breaker, community values/norms, etc.)
* What will you use as your talking piece and centerpiece?
* What materials do you need?

**Circle Process**

*The actual running of a circle has these four steps*

**Connection**

*The Connection round includes*

* Welcome
* Opening ritual
* Connecting activity or icebreaker
* Agreements
* Acknowledgements of those present and other acknowledgements
* Stating the purpose of the circle

**Concern**

*The underlying guideline here is to build trust and understanding*

* How would you introduce the topic of concern?
* What questions will you use to identify feelings, needs, or shared vision on the topic/concern.
* [This can be more than one question. Storytelling is an important element in the circle process. You can include questions that prompt storytelling]

**Collaboration**

* What questions will you use to explore how to address the concerns/action steps/options/solutions
* What questions and methods will you use to encourage collaborative decision-making or individual next steps?

**Closing**

* Summarizing the next steps
* What is your closing question that helps the circle identify takeaways?
* Closing ritual

[**Helpful tips for circle facilitation**](#_85g5u2wg3gt2)

## Facilitating a circle

### Agenda template

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *Date / Time / Location* | *Facilitator names* |
|  |  |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Time** | **Details** | **Facilitator** |
|  | **Set up and prep*** Facilitators connect & check in
* Confirm controls, settings, & hosting
* Review agenda and roles
 |  |
|  | **Open the virtual doors*** Message waiting room if needed, and admit when ready
* Participant reminders
	+ Make sure screen name is correct (what you would like to be called)
	+ Mute microphones unless speaking
* [**Choose a welcoming prompt**](#_zhe3mnsm9mip)
 |  |
|  | **Welcome / Convening*** *We’re grateful you’re here, thank you for taking the time to be in community today. (or your personal welcome message)*
* Facilitator introductions

**Purpose** **To be together in community, to feel connected…*****(Set an intention for the circle and share with participants)*****Acknowledgments*** Use this space for any acknowledgments that, if made, would help the space feel more inviting, inclusive, and safe. Some acknowledgments that are important and often repeated are:
	+ Land acknowledgments to honor the original stewards of the land you’re on
	+ Recognition of diversity or homogeneity in a group to raise awareness if there are voices missing from the conversation
	+ Recognition of any circumstances that may be having an effect on participants, such as social unrest, the pandemic and quarantine, economic uncertainty or other issues.
	+ Acknowledgment of indigenous roots of restorative community building circles, inspired by first peoples from all over the world.
 |  |
|  | **Connecting Activity / Connection - *name of activity**** [**Choose a connecting activity**](#_cnnaluvjbhaz)
 |  |
|  | **In the circle*** We are focused on building community and creating a sense of belonging
* We will **take turns speaking**
* It is **okay to pass** or to be silent
	+ *If someone passes, offer another opportunity later*

**Agreements*** **Be present and curious**
* **Speak and listen with respect**
* **Speak and listen from the heart**
* **Be patient**
* **Take the learning, leave the stories**
* **Are there any other agreements would you like to suggest to make this a safe and comfortable place to be open and honest? Or do you have any modifications to suggest?**
* *Participants type ideas into chat or share verbally*
* Gain consensus before moving on
 |  |
|  | **Mindfulness / Presencing**[**Choose a mindfulness activity**](#_avcykvlcg5ex)*Please note that you might add in an* ***inspirational reading*** *before or after the mindfulness activity that fits with the theme or goal of your circle.* |  |
|  | **Check in round / Connection**[**Choose a check-in prompt**](#_ycujhddcynp2) |  |
|  | **Guiding prompt / Concern**[**Choose a guiding prompt**](#_pg1wjkdu9ma9) |  |
|  | **Guiding prompt / Collaboration**[**Choose a follow-up guiding prompt**](#_pg1wjkdu9ma9)*Try to choose two prompts that make sense together, or flow from one to the other.*  |  |
|  | **Closing round / Closing**[**Choose a closing prompt**](#_lprpqkp0p0z2)*You might choose a reading or quote to close out the circle* |  |
|  | **Facilitator debrief*** What did you love about the circle?
* What did you learn from the experience?
 |  |

## Resources

### Facilitation Tips

* For your first circle, try to have **5-8 participants with 2 co-facilitators**. More than 10 people in a circle will add considerable time and you may end up needing to incorporate small group breakout sessions. To start out you’ll want to have your group stay together for the entirety and allow ample time for deep sharing.
* Make sure participants know they can take **breaks** if needed.
* The **agreements** suggested in this template are often used, but please modify as you wish and as you deem appropriate for the group you’ll be working with.
* **Consensus** means that everyone who is participating is in full agreement on all of the guidelines that have been suggested. Allow for modifications, suggestions, and discussion. Ask participants to show agreement with a visual thumbs up or by using an emoji reaction.
* It is helpful to paste the purpose, agreements, and prompts into chat as you read them to make sure everyone understands clearly.
* Remember to synthesize and draw connections to complete each round, so that participants feel heard and you can highlight the community wisdom that emerges.
* An important circle guideline: Always begin and end in a good way. You could also use quotes to start and end the circle

### Welcoming prompts

*This is a great opportunity to quickly check in and help participants connect right away upon entering the Zoom room. Make an invitation to respond to a prompt in the chat. Facilitators can read along and comment, or make connections while the chat is flowing and people are arriving and getting settled in.*

* **Type a few words into chat to share...**
	+ **something that is giving you hope right now**
	+ **how you’re feeling today**
	+ **something that made you laugh recently**
	+ **something that brought you joy recently**
	+ **where you’re calling in from**
	+ **a gift or strength you’re bringing with you today**

### Connecting Activities

* **Pass the Magical Objects**
	+ Starting with the facilitator, share a pretend object you have that you could really use today, such as a magical watch that would give you more time, or a green smoothie for energy, or a dog walker to walk your dog, etc… Share what you have and then ‘hand it over’ to the next person by passing through the camera. The next person shares what the magical item has transformed into for them and continues on.
* **Empty the cup**
	+ In groups of 2, 3, or 4, invite participants into breakout rooms for a few minutes to each share - for a set period of time such as 1 minute or 30 seconds each - something that feels challenging right now, and then something that feels successful right now. This is an active listening and sharing exercise that allows each participant to share their thoughts uninterrupted and to offload things that might be on their mind at the start of the circle.
* **Common Ground**
	+ Ask participants to turn off their cameras and to also check the box in video settings that will hide non-video participants from view.
	+ Offer a series of prompts. If a prompt is true for a participant, they can ‘step forward’ by turning on their camera. Some suggestions for prompts are:
		- Step forward / turn on your camera if you
			* Had a good breakfast / lunch today
			* Took time for self care today
			* Had a walking commute today
			* Are concerned about the state of things
			* Are hopeful about the state of things
			* Are looking forward to some weekend plans
			* Etc…
* **Mimic My Mood**
	+ This activity is done in a round, but if you have a larger group you can split into breakout rooms for smaller groups.
	+ Starting with the facilitator, introduce yourself by saying your name and how you’re feeling (“My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and I’m feeling \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ today.”) When sharing the feeling, show the feeling in body and facial expression.
	+ Everyone in the group mimics the same body and facial expression
	+ Facilitators can choose to have participant microphones on or off during this activity. If everyone’s mic is on, they might repeat, “Your name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and you’re feeling \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ today.”
	+ This is an empathy exercise, so facilitate carefully to avoid mockery

### Mindfulness

* **Important Notes:** these are all suggestions and abbreviated guides. Please choose something you are comfortable leading and do additional research if you aren’t sure how to lead an activity. There are many resources for simple guided meditations available online.
* **Box Breathing**
	+ Invite participants to relax into their seats and close or lower eyes to gaze on something fixed and not a screen.
	+ Guide at least 3 rounds of box breathing:
		- breathe in through the nose for a count of 4
		- hold for a count of 4
		- breathe out through the mouth for a count of 4
		- hold for a count of four
	+ Invite participants back with a suggestion to wiggle toes and fingers and gently return to the room. Take note of any differences you notice in the space.
* **Body Scan**
	+ Invite participants to relax into their seats and close or lower eyes to gaze on something fixed and not a screen.
	+ Guide at least 3 rounds of slowly paced breathing - deeply in through the nose, exhaling deeply through the mouth. Focus thoughts on breath
	+ Invite participants to notice the parts of their body, starting with either the feet or the head and scanning slowly over the whole body.
	+ Notice where there is tension that could be released.
	+ Notice the places that would benefit from a big breath helping to release tension.
	+ Notice weight on the chair or floor. Notice where parts of the body are touching furniture.
	+ Invite participants back with a suggestion to wiggle toes and fingers and gently return to the room. Take note of any differences you notice in the space.
* **Sound focus**
	+ Invite participants to relax into their seats and close or lower eyes to gaze on something fixed and not a screen.
	+ Play a chime from a bell or an audio file and invite participants to take at least 3 deep and slow breaths, hearing the sound and noticing where that sound lands in their body. You might play the chime several times, or just once or twice.
	+ Leave a moment of silence after playing the chime
	+ Invite participants back with a suggestion to wiggle toes and fingers and gently return to the room. Take note of any differences you notice in the space.
* **Silence**
	+ Invite participants to relax into their seats and close or lower eyes to gaze on something fixed and not a screen.
	+ Tell participants you will keep time and that you will take 1, 2, or 3 (or more) minutes for silence.
	+ Playing a chime to mark the beginning and end is helpful
	+ Invite participants back with a suggestion to wiggle toes and fingers and gently return to the room. Take note of any differences you notice in the space.

### Check in prompts

* How are you doing today?
* Give a weather report that reflects your mood today.
* What’s something you would like to share today?
* What might you need to put aside to help you be present today?
* What’s been on your mind lately?
* If your mood was a painting, how might you describe it?
* What do you think is your best quality and why?
* What’s something that made you laugh recently?
* If you could have any superpower, what would it be and why?
* Who is someone you admire and why?
* What do you do to release stress?
* How would your best friend describe you?
* Share a smell or sound of the place you’re from: “I come from the sounds of *seagulls and ocean waves*,” and/or “I come from the smell of *salty air and cajun cooking.*”

### Guiding prompts

* Imagine yourself 10 years from now. Where are you and what are you doing?
* What brings you the most joy?
* What is a goal you have for yourself? How will you celebrate when you accomplish it?
* Share a time when you overcame an obstacle to achieve a goal.
* Share a time when you felt like a valued member of a community.
* What is a skill or talent you have? Is there one you wish you had?
* Share a time when you were outside your comfort zone and learned something important.
* Share a little bit about the neighborhood you grew up in. What made it a special place for you?
* Share the story of one of your names.
* What are three gifts you bring to the circle today?
* Share a time when you faced a difficult challenge and how you overcame it.
* Share a community that you are a part of and what makes you feel valued in that community. (team, family, neighborhood, class, work, etc…)
* What are you trying to learn right now?
* If you had an unexpected long weekend free, what would you do?
* What’s something that you devote time and energy to outside of school or work?
* What’s something people might be surprised to learn about you?
* Share a time when you acted on your core values, even when others did not.
* Who are some of your role models and why do you look up to them? (or *one of*)
* What are three things you would do if you could change the world?
* What is something you’re trying to learn right now?
* Who is someone in your life who has helped you grow?

### Closing prompts

* What is one big takeaway you have from the circle today?
* How are you feeling right now?
* What is being confirmed for you by our time together?
* What surprised you today?
* What is an insight you have had as a result of the circle today?
* Share an appreciation for another circle member *(making sure that everyone receives appreciation - maybe going in a round.)*
* Is there anything you came to the circle with that you would like to leave behind?
* If you were to name this circle, what would you call it?
* What have you learned during our time together today?