



Youth Restoration Project

Cultivating Relationships; Restoring Community

Circle and Restorative Practice Rules

- Be explicit about the expectations and purpose for having a circle.
- Explain the function of the talking piece. Use it to take turns so the circle is democratic, fair and orderly.
- Confidentiality promotes trust and builds community. Ask participants to agree to keep all shared information among themselves.
- Fidelity to the shape of the circle matters. Ideally there should be nothing physically between the people, like tables or desks.
- People can choose to pass, if they must. Come back to them at the end. Encourage them to participate, because a community needs all of its voices.
- Circles are driven by questions. What question is everyone going to answer? After everyone has spoken, participants may choose to cross-talk, pursuing topics with specific people.
- Ask “what,” never “why.” When in doubt, use the basic restorative questions as your foundation.
- When solving a problem or brainstorming solutions or strategies, get clear with the group about what questions need to be asked. Discuss or have a circle first about what the question should be.
- Circles that involve conflict – fights, bullying – should always have two facilitators, at least one of whom is an outsider to the conflict. Neutrality gives credibility to the process. Facilitators should ensure a balance of power among the participants.
- Facilitators (aka “keepers”) gently enforce the use of restorative tools to maintain effective communication. This is to say, remind participants to speak from the “I” and avoid interrupting. Strong feelings are fine; aggression is not.
- The point is to maximize the power of sharing honest feelings so participants can create together, effectively solve issues and draw together as a community.



**Social and Emotional Skills
Intrinsic to Restorative Practices
(aka "Sandbox skills")**

Simply by practicing the use of circles for everything from relationship and community building to holding people accountable for misbehavior, people learn to:

- Take turns, which emphasizes the democratic process and listening to others.
- Take only their portion of the attention pie. Big voices need to become modulated and smaller. Small or unheard voices badly need to be heard.
- Listen convincingly, patiently and with an open heart.
- Speak from the heart.
- Give words to your own emotional landscape within, and share it with others.
- Improve your own self-awareness and self-management.
- Own your feelings as yours, and not something someone forced on you.
- Learn to express emotions without being hurtful or aggressive, even when those emotions are negative, even furious.
- Take responsibility for yourself and your own actions.
- Become aware of how your actions affect other people.
- Be part of a cooperative team that has group norms and agreements for mutual comfort and safety.
- Create protocols for restitution and repairing harm.
- Solve problems democratically, through teamwork.
- Cooperate mindfully in relationships, groups and communities.