

# CIRCLES



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Restorative Circles are used in conflict mediation and community building. Circle rituals and structures are used to think through questions and issues, or to de-escalate or resolve conflicts that involve or affect multiple people.



Often, people use “Restorative Circles” as a term to encompass many different types of circles with separate functions. Some examples of different types of circles are:

- Conflict resolution circles
- Talking or sharing circles
- Celebration circles
- Healing/grieving circles

In Chicago Public Schools, the term “Talking Circle” is used to refer to preventative circles that are used to build community, share joys and concerns, collaboratively create solutions to community problems, etc. “Peace Circle” is used to designate circles that are structured to address and repair harm.

## A SAFE SPACE

The circle is a safe space to share feelings, thoughts, and stories, and to connect to others. It is a confidential space, free of judgment, violence, or aggression. The circle structure eliminates hierarchy and ensures equality so that participants feel open and safe to be intimate with the group. This safe space builds trust and respect, which are key to building relationships.

Circles should only be facilitated by trained individuals, called Circle Keepers. The Office of Social & Emotional Learning provides Restorative Circle training for district staff; a training calendar is available at [cps.edu/SEL](https://cps.edu/SEL). Schools should contact their Network SEL Specialists for information on additional professional development opportunities for Circle Keepers, including professional learning communities and on-site coaching.

## THE CIRCLE STRUCTURE

**CIRCLE KEEPER**—Circles must be facilitated by one or two trained Circle Keepers. Keepers guide the participants, maintain a safe space, and assist the flow and timing of the circle. They also engage genuinely in the circle process themselves, opening up and sharing so as to build trust.

**CIRCLE SHAPE**—Equality is one of the important values of Restorative Practices, so participants, including the Circle Keeper, sit in an actual circle in seats of equal height or on the ground or to dispel any sense of hierarchy.

**MEETING SPACE**—A private meeting space ensures confidentiality.



## Types of Circles

Circles can be used for a variety of purposes, from setting classroom norms to resolving conflict. These are a few examples of types of circles—but all have one key purpose in common: building community and relationships.

### CELEBRATION CIRCLES

Share and affirm accomplishments, happy news, or other positive events. May be used to celebrate individuals, groups, or whole classrooms

### TALKING CIRCLES

**(Community-Building Circle)**  
Pro-actively build relationships and community among classroom or team. Talking circles may be used as daily check-ins (such as Morning Meetings), to set classroom norms and agreements, teach social and emotional skills, provide feedback, and discuss pertinent issues and topics.

### PEACE CIRCLES

After conflict or behavior issues, guide reflection on the actions and their impact on others, empower participants to develop a plan to make things right.

### STAFF CIRCLES

As part of regular team meetings or professional development, staff circles can be used to build collaboration, set vision, make decisions, provide feedback, and reflect on practice.

### RE-ENTRY CIRCLES

Welcome student back to classroom and school following a disciplinary action, such as suspension or expulsion. Use the circle to address outstanding issues and rebuild relationships.

### PARENT/COMMUNITY CIRCLES

Engage parents/family and community members in circles to introduce the circle process, develop partnerships, welcome new members, hold parent/teacher conferences, and provide feedback to the school.

### HEALING/SUPPORT CIRCLES

Create space for students to identify loss, express emotions, cope with trauma, and build community. Can be used after specific incidents in the community or to share life experiences.

**TALKING PIECE**—A talking piece is passed around, allowing all participants to have their voices heard equally. Often, Circle Keepers bring in meaningful objects they want to share as part of the circle process.

**CENTERPIECE**—The circle may have a centerpiece that serves as a focal point to support speaking and listening. The centerpiece often contains symbolic objects or words that represent the core values or vision of the group. Objects from the centerpiece may also be used as talking pieces.

**VALUES & GUIDELINES**—Each circle creates its own values and guidelines. Values and guidelines are established by the shared vision of the group, written out, and posted on the wall as a reference for the group during the circle.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**—What happens or is said in the circle stays in the circle. Participants will often hold

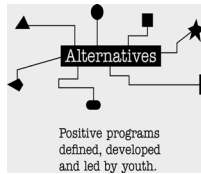
each other accountable to this, and the breaking of this confidentiality requires the rebuilding of trust using the circle process.

### WHEN IS IT APPROPRIATE TO HAVE A CIRCLE?

3rd–12th grades

Talking Circles can be used pro-actively to provide an opportunity to share thoughts and experiences and build a sense of community. Talking Circles can be used to help a group process current events and local issues.

Peace Circles are used in response to interpersonal conflict. May be used in response to repeated inappropriate behaviors or persistent disruptive misbehaviors (Groups 1-3 in the Student Code of Conduct), and some very seriously and most seriously disruptive behaviors (Group 4-5 in the Student Code of Conduct).



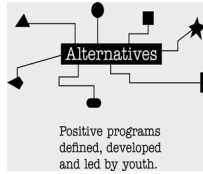
## Talking Circle Best Practices

**The purpose of a talking circle is to build relationships and build community.**

- Staff are trained Circle Keepers
- Circles are part of a consistent, predictable routine
- Circles are held in a safe, quiet and confidential space
- Staff embrace and model restorative attitudes and actions outside of the circle
- Staff have a clear vision of how they are going to use circles
- Circles are used in a constructive manner, such as, but not limited to:
  - Checking-in or reflecting
  - Building relationship
  - Discussing difficult topics with multiple opinions
  - Celebrating
  - Addressing incident that caused harm

## Tips for Circle Keepers

- Talking circles are to build community and relationships. There does not need to be an incident or conflict in order to hold a circle.
- The role of the circle keeper is to set the tone of the circle and help the group maintain safe space.
- Circle keepers bring a talking piece and, if needed, prepare questions ahead of time.
- Circle Keepers do not try to convince others of a particular point of view. They keep the circle open to multiple opinions and perspectives.
- Choose questions or talking points that can have multiple views and are relevant to the group.
- Help the group create safe space guidelines that they group will all follow. The entire group (not just the Circle Keeper) is responsible for upholding the guidelines.
- Circle Keepers do not use the circle to reprimand or embarrass individual students or groups of students



<b>The Talking Circle Process</b>	
<b>Pre-Circle Preparation</b>	<p>Determine who will meet and why.</p> <p>Determine the ritual you will use to open and close the circle (a chime, bell, poem, breathing exercise, moment of silence etc.)</p> <p>Outline the key points of your introduction and your closing</p> <p>Create your circle questions (opening, substantive, and closing)</p> <p>Arrange the chairs in a circle (no extra or open seats)</p> <p>Place the centerpiece in the circle center (this can be a plant, a candle, small rug etc.) This not only grounds the circle and reminds participants of a common connection, but it also gives participants a place to look when speaking</p> <p>Designate a meaningful object to use as a talking piece</p>
<b>Opening the Circle</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Welcome everyone to the circle and open the circle with an opening ritual</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Introduce yourself and acknowledge the reason why you are meeting</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Briefly describe the circle process and your role as the Circle Keeper               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circles bring people together to talk about their own experiences and to listen and learn from others</li> <li>• Circle Keeper helps set the tone of the circle and creates inclusive conversation</li> <li>• Circle Keeper does not steer the group to a particular outcome, but helps the group reflect through questions or topic suggestions</li> </ul> </li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explain the role of the talking piece               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A talking piece is used to help everyone participate in the circle</li> <li>• Only the person with the talking piece speaks</li> <li>• Share the story behind the object and its significance to the circle</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Circle Guidelines</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The explain the circle guidelines               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The talking piece goes around the circle, never across</li> <li>• When the talking piece gets to you, it is your turn to talk</li> <li>• When you do not have it, it is your turn to listen</li> </ul> </li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ask if the group agrees to abide by the guidelines, passing the talking piece around the circle</li> </ul>
<b>Questions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Start with a positive reflective question</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Pass the talking piece to the left or right. The circle keeper may answer the question first or wait until the end</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Participants answer the question when it's their turn and listen intently when it's not</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Participants may not interrupt or talk over each other</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The circle ends with a positive and forward looking question to help transition the group out of circle</li> </ul>
<b>Closing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Draw relevant connections between what was said</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Thank everyone for sharing and remind participants to respect what was said in the circle by not discussing it outside</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> End with a quote, poem or moment of silence as part of the closing ritual</li> </ul>
<b>Follow Up</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Meet with key participants to reflect on the process, if necessary</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledge positive efforts</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Celebrate successes (big and small)</li> </ul>
<b>Overall Tone</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Circle keepers maintain a calm tone of voice. They are encouraging, positive, help the group uphold safe space values, and strive to see the best in everyone.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> When participants break the safe space guidelines (i.e. talk to each other without the talking piece or make a negative comment about what someone says), the circle keepers reminds the group about the values (i.e. respect, trust, etc.) and helps the group maintain safe space values.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The Circle Keeper is a role model for the way they want others to act in circle.</li> </ul>

# RESTORATIVE CIRCLE PLANNING TEMPLATE

**1. OPENING** [How will you open this circle? A poem, quote, song, breathing, story...?]

**2. INTRODUCTION OF TALKING PIECE** [What object are you using and Why?]

**3. CHECK-IN** [What question will you ask?]

**4. GUIDELINES / VALUES** [What questions will you ask to create shared guidelines and values?]

**5. DISCUSSION ROUNDS** [What needs to be addressed in the circle? What questions will you ask? How many rounds?]

**6. CHECK OUT** [How are people feeling right now?]

**7. CLOSING** [How will you close this circle? Poem, quote, breathing, song, story?]

# RESTORATIVE CIRCLE OPENINGS AND CLOSINGS

Opening and closing ceremonies help create a tone that ensures circles are sacred and focused. Opening and closings should be carefully chosen for the participants and purpose of the particular circle. The circle keeper, or participating students familiar with circle processes, can choose a reading, poem, quote, breathing exercise, or other way of beginning and ending the circle. The following are a few examples of quotes that may be used for opening and closing circles.

- “What lies behind you and what lies in front of you, pales in comparison to what lies inside of you.”  
**RALPH WALDO EMERSON**
- “Carry out a random act of kindness, with no expectation of reward, safe in the knowledge that one day someone might do the same for you.”  
**PRINCESS DIANA**
- “You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself in any direction you choose. You’re on your own, and you know what you know. And you are the guy who’ll decide where to go.”  
**DR. SEUSS**
- “If you accept the expectations of others, especially negative ones, then you never will change the outcome.”  
**MICHAEL JORDAN**
- “Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly.”  
**LANGSTON HUGHES**
- “You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it.”  
**MAYA ANGELOU**
- “A goal is a dream with a deadline.”  
**NAPOLEON HILL**
- “A problem is a chance for you to do your best.”  
**DUKE ELLINGTON**
- “The refusal to listen is the first step toward violence.”  
**MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.**
- “That’s the risk you take if you change: that people you’ve been involved with won’t like the new you. But other people who do will come along.”  
**LISA ALTHER**
- “Our character is what we do when we think no one is looking.”  
**H. JACKSON BROWN, JR.**
- “Empathy is about standing in someone else’s shoes, feeling with his or her heart, seeing with his or her eyes...it makes the world a better place.”  
**DANIEL H. PINK**
- “One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say.”  
**BRYANT H. MCGILL**
- ““No” can be one of the most positive words in the world. No, I will not be defeated. No, I will not give up.”  
**MARTHA WILLIAMSON**
- “You have to stand for what you believe in. And sometimes you have to stand alone.”  
**QUEEN LATIFAH**
- “Be sure you put your feet in the right place, then stand firm.”  
**ABRAHAM LINCOLN**
- “When adversity strikes, that’s when you have to be the most calm. Take a step back, stay strong, stay grounded and press on.”  
**LL COOL J**

# SAMPLE CIRCLE TOPICS AND PROMPTING QUESTIONS

## EXPLORING VALUES:

- When you are being human, at your best, what are you? (in a word or short phrase)
- Imagine you are in conflict with a person who is important in your life. What values do you want to guide your conduct as you try to work out that conflict?
- What value would you like to offer for our space together?
- Tell us about your work and what the challenges are.
- What is your passion?
- What do you keep returning to in your life?
- What touches your heart?
- What gives you hope?
- What demonstrates respect?
- What is something you value about your family? Why?
- What is something you value about yourself? Why?
- What is something that you are thankful for? Why?
- Talk about something that you want and something that you need. What is the difference?
- What have you learned about power? What does it mean to you?
- What have you learned about work? What does it mean to you?
- What have you learned about money? What does it mean to you?
- In your experience what supports healing?
- What sustains you during difficult times?
- What would you not want to change about your life?
- If you could talk to someone from your family who is no longer alive, who would it be and why?
- If you had an unexpected free day, what would you like to do?
- If you were an animal, what animal would you be and why?
- Name two things or people who always make you laugh.
- I like to collect . . .
- Name one male and one female who is a good role model for young people.
- When was the last time you said “yes” and would have liked to say “no?” Why did you say, “yes?”
- If you could have a face to face conversation with someone here or passed who would it be and why?
- Describe your ideal job.
- Describe your favorite vacation.
- If you could change anything about yourself what would it be?
- What is one skill or talent you have?
- What are three “gifts” (attributes of yourself) that you bring to the circle?
- If you were a reporter, what kind of stories would you like to write about?
- Who are some of your heroes? Why are they your heroes?
- What do you think other people see as your best quality? Why?
- What is the silliest thing that ever happened to you?
- What is the best thing that happened to you this past week? What was the most difficult or challenging thing that happened to you this week?

## GETTING ACQUAINTED:

- Share a happy childhood memory.
- Share a funny story from your work (or life.)
- If you could be a superhero, what super powers would you choose and why?
- What do you appreciate about your work or main activity?
- How would your best friend describe you?

## STORYTELLING FROM OUR LIVES TO SHARE WHO WE ARE AND WHAT HAS SHAPED US

(to build community, deepen relationships and develop empathy)

## INVITE PARTICIPANTS TO SHARE:

- A time when you had to let go of control.



- A time when you were outside your comfort zone.
- An experience in your life when you “made lemonade out of lemons.”
- An experience of transformation when, out of a crisis or difficulty, you discovered a gift in your life.
- An experience of causing harm to someone and then dealing with it in a way you felt good about.
- An experience of letting go of anger or resentment.
- A time when you acted on your core values even though others were not.
- A time from your adolescence when you were in conflict with your parents or caregiver.
- An experience where you discovered that someone was very different from the negative assumptions you first made about that person.
- An experience of feeling that you did not fit in.
- A time in your life when you experienced justice.
- A time in your life when you experienced injustice.
- An embarrassing moment that you can laugh at now.
- Something that scares/scared you. How do/did you deal with it?
- Something that makes/made you angry. How do/did you deal with it?
- A time that was one of your most difficult challenges. How did you deal with it?

### **TAKING RESPONSIBILITY:**

- How have we each contributed to this situation, and how can each of us, by taking responsibility, act differently now?
- Does anyone have anything to clear?
- What is unspoken in the group that blocks good relationships or possible success?
- Name one thing about yourself you would like to grow or improve in?
- What do you think other people see as a quality that you need to work on?
- What is the most important lesson in life you have ever learned? What made it so important?

### **COMMUNITY:**

- What change would you like to see in your community? What can you do to promote that change?
- What is something you value about your community (culture, school, youth group, etc.)? Why?
- Your favorite place to go in your community and Why?
- The neighborhood that you grew up in. What are some of your earliest memories? What are some of your more recent memories?
- Something that you like and something that you do not like about your neighborhood. Why?
- What is one thing about your family (community, school, team, etc.) that you would change if you could?
- If you could change or overhaul two things in our culture or society, what would they be?

### **EXPLORING RELATIONSHIPS:**

- What is the most important quality to you in a relationship with someone else? How and why is it important to you?
- Talk about a relationship between people you know that you admire? Why?
- Who is someone in your life that you look up to?
- Who is someone in your life that you have learned from? What did you learn from them?
- Who is someone in your life that has helped you to grow? How have you grown? How did they help you to do so?
- Who was a teacher who influenced you in positive ways? In what way did they influence you?
- How are you different from your father if you are male, or from your mother if you are female?
- Tell us about a time when you felt like you really belonged?
- Tell us about a time when you felt left out?
- In what social setting or situation have you felt the least powerful? What was it that caused you to feel that way?

- What person or persons in your life are your greatest challenge?
- What do you remember that your father (mother) or father (mother) figure most often said to you?
- What have you learned about sex, relationships and responsibility?
- Complete this sentence: Let me introduce you to my father; he's the kind of man who...(Do the same with mother.)
- What person or people know you the best, and how well do you feel they really know you?
- What do others want from you?
- What do you want from others?
- What is a quality that you've seen in the opposite sex that you'd like to have or have more of in yourself?
- What do you most appreciate about someone who is important to you in your life?

#### **HOPES AND DREAMS:**

- If you could go anywhere in the world, where would you go? Why?
- Close your eyes and imagine your self ten years from now-Where are you? What are you doing? Who/ What is one person or thing that stands out to you? Describe them. (You can also do this for your family, community, school, neighborhood.)
- What is it that you do that gives you the most pleasure?
- What is it that you do that gives you the most satisfaction?
- What is one skill or talent you wish you had?
- If you could do anything that you wished in the world, what would that one thing be?
- What did you dream about when you were a young child?
- What do you dream about now?
- What are three things you would do if you could change the world?
- What is a goal you have for yourself? How will you celebrate yourself when you accomplish it?
- What is one obstacle that gets in the way of your reaching your goals? What is your plan to overcome this obstacle?

- If you were totally free, what would that mean? What would it look like?
- What brings you the most joy?
- What are you honestly looking for in your life right now?
- What are you really trying to learn at this point in your life?

#### **CELEBRATING EACH OTHER AND OURSELVES:**

- Who do you appreciate in this circle and why?
- What do you want to celebrate about the person sitting to your right?
- What is one experience you have had this year for which you are grateful?
- What is one gift you have brought to our group this year?

#### **TOWARD THE END OF A CIRCLE:**

- Is there anything you came with that you would like to leave behind?
- What are you taking from this circle that supports your healing?
- Where do you see yourself moving forward?
- What have you learned?
- What can you take away that is useful to you?
- How will these insights help you in the next two weeks?
- If you were to give a name to this circle (group), what would you name it?

For younger students or English learners, writing the circle question or a sentence starter on the board or chart paper may be a helpful visual.

**EXAMPLE:** I appreciate

because

If I could go anywhere, I would go to

# CHECK-IN QUESTIONS

A Check-in is the initial component of Restorative Circles.

Check-in questions are used to build and strengthen relationships, assess the “temperature” of the group, reinforce agreements, identify issues, and support reflective thought processes and follow up.

Check-in questions can be asked as part of the opening to a longer Restorative Circle, but checking in can also be the purpose of a circle in and of itself. Regularly held check-in circles help to deepen trust and strengthen communication. Check-ins can provide information on how people are feeling so that the community can support, be aware and engage sensitively.

Check-in circles may be brief, but be aware that issues may come up that will require deeper involvement.

The language and approach used in check-in circles should be welcoming, personal, and encourage the initial stages of sharing. The Circle Keeper generally responds to the check-in question first, to set the focus for other circle participants to be aware of the length and content of their statements. The Keeper’s check in should be real, personal, and relevant.

Open-ended check-in questions invite stories which have the potential to be lengthy and to change the course of the circle or planned activity. If someone reveals a personal crisis, a problem—some distress—that requires acknowledgment and response, you may feel derailed. General community and relationship check-in circles often can handle these changes of course, and in doing so have immense impact for the participants. On the other hand circles and meetings convened for specific purposes: learning circles, planning circles, conflict resolution circles, may want to use a more controlled and directive check-in and schedule follow ups individually with students who are struggling.

## **SAMPLE OPEN-ENDED CHECK-IN QUESTIONS:**

- I would like to take this time to welcome you back from winter break. How are you doing since we were last here at school? What’s been happening with you?

- Let’s welcome Francisco to our school. What does a student here need to know that isn’t in the student handbook and no one will tell you?

## **SAMPLE SHORT CHECK-IN QUESTIONS (DIRECTIVE, TIME-MANAGEABLE):**

- Please share one word that describes how you are feeling this morning
- Welcome back from winter break. Please share one good thing that happened over the weekend

After the talking piece has made its way around the circle, the circle keeper may summarize any themes that emerged and acknowledge any concerns that were shared that may need follow-up.

- “Johnny I’m so glad to hear that you had such a nice Christmas. I’m sorry to hear that you are worried that you may be moving away soon. Can you tell us what we can do to support you?”
- “Melissa It makes me so sad to hear that your bicycle was stolen. Is there anything we can do to help you feel safe here at school?”
- Allow the talking piece to go around enough times that participants are able to share, offer support and show appreciation as needed.

# COMMUNITY-DEVELOPED PLANS FOR SUCCESS

## Circles of Support for Students

The circle process creates and fosters a structured and safe forum for those most impacted by a student's success to dialogue, express how they envision the student's success and collectively develop a plan for achieving it. The process will, hopefully, create an effective, doable plan that empowers individuals and strengthens supportive relationships in schools. This circle may also be used to address student's emerging behavioral or academic problems.

### PRIOR TO THE CIRCLE

1. Use the Restorative Circle Planning Template to identify opening, check-in, value setting, and closing questions and activities.
2. When arranging the seating for the circle, the subject of the circle should be seated in such a way that the talking piece comes to them first from the circle keeper. The circle keeper will introduce the question to the circle and share out first and pass the talking piece.

### CIRCLE OF SUPPORT

**INTRODUCTION TO THE CIRCLE:** "We are meeting today to help \_\_\_\_\_ create a plan for success. I would like to invite everyone to speak from their heart, share their insights and to be open to the ideas and perspectives that are shared in circle. Please be honest when sharing the challenge \_\_\_\_\_ faces and resources available to assist in addressing them. I welcome you to offer your support and experience to \_\_\_\_\_ as we partner together with them on their journey to success."

### DISCUSSION ROUNDS:

**ROUND 1:** What are the student's strengths?

Hear what the student's strengths are in their own words. Feel free to share how the student has impacted yourself and others in a positive way. Acknowledge achievement and improvement.

**ROUND 2:** What are the student's challenges?

Offer your perspective on the student's challenges and struggles. Use "I" statements to share your concerns. Be honest.

**ROUND 3:** What is needed to succeed?

Where does the student stand? What are the expectations for students in your school and how is success defined? What would you like to see the student accomplish?

**ROUND 4:** What is the plan?

What does the student need to do to succeed at this school? What supports are needed? Document agreements and offers of support in the Restorative Action Plan. You may want to remove the talking piece for this round and have an open discussion about where to go from here.

### REINTEGRATION CIRCLES (WELCOME CIRCLES)

Through a reintegration circle, also called a welcome circle, students returning from suspension, expulsion, or incarceration receive a supported transition back to school. A reintegration circle allows the student and family to receive needed supports to enable student to be successful in school. During a reintegration circle, a plan is created which clarifies each participant's role and responsibilities in supporting student, and the student is supported and held accountable to fulfill their plan.

### PRIOR TO REINTEGRATION

A re-entry circle will be scheduled for the day that the student returns to school. All participants will be notified of the reintegration circle date and time.

Participants may include the student, parent/guardian, probation officer, case manager, counselor, the student friend or mentor, and others as appropriate.

Special attention should be given to the family of the student. The reintegration circle process should be explained to the student and his/her family prior to holding the circle and questions they have should be addressed. The family should be aware of possible attendees.

Use the Restorative Circle Planning Template to plan the circle, including the following elements:

- A sign-in sheet should be distributed which collects names and contact information including cell phone numbers and email.
- **GUIDING QUESTIONS:** The majority of the circle time is used to address questions that are framed in a positive manner with the intention of identifying needs and generating a plan for supporting the student. Examples of guiding questions:
  - » What are your hopes for this student at this school?
  - » What would success look like for this student here?
  - » What resources are available to help this student achieve success?
  - » Who will be the “go to” person at this school when the student has questions or needs support? Make sure the student has this person’s contact information.
  - » Time should be allowed for questions or other necessary discussion. The talking piece may be suspended for this conversation if the circle keeper deems it appropriate.
- **CREATING A WRITTEN PLAN:** The outcome of the circle is a plan for support. The group will identify one participant who will have the role of monitoring the plan. The decision making process used shall be consensus. The plan should be written down on a Re-integration Plan Template and signed by all parties. Copies shall be distributed to all participants.
- **FOLLOW-UP:** The team should schedule follow-up meetings with the student’s mentor, and as necessary, a follow-up circle, prior to closing this meeting.
- **CLOSING:** The facilitator will close the circle with summary of the plan and a round of appreciations.

## **FOLLOW-UP MEETINGS**

- The circle format above should be followed again. The agreements from the original circle should be reviewed and updates as needed.
- **FORMAT:** All follow up meetings should involve a check in, a review of the written plan and celebration of progress to date followed by an assessment of needs and revisions to plan as needed.
- Special attention should be given to the student and family. The student and family should be encouraged to discuss supports received, how they are working, and any unmet needs.

## **PROMPTING QUESTIONS THAT MAY BE HELPFUL TO ASK THE STUDENT:**

1. What do you feel you need to be successful?
2. What are your triggers? What space do you need when you feel triggered?
3. What are your challenges away from school?
4. What did you learn from what happened?
5. Is there anything in your life that we should be aware of?
6. What is new, has changed, or been different?
7. Disarming Question: What don’t you like about probation?
8. Describe the best day you had at school.

Adapted from Oakland Unified School District, Family, Schools, and Community Partnerships Dept.—Restorative Justice

# SAMPLE DETENTION, IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION, OR SATURDAY SCHOOL CIRCLE

This circle is designed to offer the participants an opportunity to acknowledge harms they have caused, challenges they face and to develop a plan to address issues that have caused them to be in an exclusionary discipline setting.

The circle process lends itself to structure and respectful communication. This type of circle also helps to foster introspection and accountability and can help to develop a community where greater interaction, growth, and learning may occur.

This circle should be held when enough time is available to utilize all of the activities. Please be aware that each activity is designed to make the circle a complete experience and the exclusion of any activity can lessen the effectiveness of the circle.

Use the Restorative Circle Planning Template to plan the circle, including the following elements:

## INTRODUCTION TO CIRCLE

“Today we will be meeting in circle to discuss why we are here, talk about how any harms you have caused may be repaired and hopefully to put in place steps to ensure that you don’t return. Through this process we will get to know one another better, speak more honestly and respectfully to one another, get support when we need it, make decisions together and build a closer community”

## CONCENTRIC CIRCLES ACTIVITY

“I would like for us to play a game to get to know one another better before we begin our main activity. We are going to split ourselves into two groups. So let’s count off 1, 2, 1, 2...”

(The circle keeper starts as number 1 and participates in the circle if needed. If there are an even number of participants, the teacher sits out and can wander around the circle while students are participating.)

“Everyone please stand up. I would like for the 1’s to turn and face the 2 standing to your left”.

The group forms pairs arranged in two circles with the inner circle facing a person in the outer circle. The Keeper will ask a question or give them a topic to discuss. Each member of each pair will have a specific amount of time to respond and then the other member will speak to the topic. After each question, the circle keeper will ask the participants in the inner circle to take one step to the right so that they are facing a different person at the introduction of each question. The amount of time allowed is based on the time you have for Circle, the size of the group, and the seriousness or lightness of the topic. Start with light topics and small time allotments and then move into more thoughtful or serious topics that are relevant to the purpose of the circle and need more time.

“I am going to introduce a series of questions for you to ask one another. After each question I will ask the participants in the inner circle to take one step to the right so that you are talking to a different person at the beginning of each round. Please continue your conversation with the person facing you until I ask you to rotate and give you the next question to ask”.

- “What is your favorite TV program?”  
(Give participants about 30 seconds each- about one minute total).
- “If you were an animal, what would you be?”  
(30 seconds each).
- “If you could have a superpower, what power would you choose?” (30 seconds each)
- “What is the best thing about you? Your greatest strength or asset?” (1 minute each).
- “What would you like to improve about yourself?” (1 minute each)
- “What does respect mean to you?”  
(2 minutes each)
- “What does disrespect mean to you?”  
(2 minutes each)

At the end of the activity, ask the group to sit back in the circle. Ask the group what they thought about the activity and if they heard anything that really got their interest. The Circle keeper who facilitated the activity can start

first, sharing anything he noticed or heard (like laughter, high energy, specific comments). Pass the talking piece.

### **RESPECT AGREEMENTS**

For this activity you will need index cards and pens or pencils for each participant and a whiteboard or large sheet of paper for the circle keeper to write on. Hand out the materials before beginning.

#### **DISCUSS WHAT RESPECT MEANS**

“Today we will develop agreements on how we will treat one another to help everyone in our group feel respected. To begin the creation of our Values and Guidelines, I would like for each of us to share some of our experiences regarding respect”

**ROUND 1:** Please share a time you felt respected.  
(ie. Last year I received an award for...)

**ROUND 2:** Please share a time you felt disrespected.  
(ie. About two months ago I was pulling into my driveway when my neighbor...)

**ROUND 3:** Next I'd like for us to create a set of agreements on how we would like to communicate with one another today. What do you need from everyone else here today to feel respected?

Write down the requests on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper. Read the list aloud once everyone has had a chance to share.

“Is this a list of agreements we can agree upon for our classroom? If you can agree to this list give a thumbs up, if you need more clarity on a guideline hold your thumb in the middle and thumbs down if you cannot agree to a requested guideline for respect on this list”

Pass the talking piece, if needed, and discuss until the group comes to an agreement.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY, AGREEMENTS AND SUPPORT**

This part of the process may start as a discussion in circle, individual Restorative Conversations, or both.

### **ROUNDS IN CIRCLE**

**ROUND 1:** Why are you here today?

**ROUND 2:** Who is affected by you being here today?

**ROUND 3:** What needs to happen to fix things and ensure you don't come back?

**CLOSING ROUND:** How did today's circle feel?  
Or Was this process helpful?

Adapted from Catholic Charities of the East Bay.  
“Saturday School Template.”

# COMMON CHALLENGES IN CIRCLES OR...WHEN GOOD CIRCLES GO BAD

If This...	Then Try This...
It takes too long for students to get in a circle...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice getting in and out of circle before holding an actual talking circle</li> <li>• Figure out possible alternate furniture or room arrangements</li> <li>• Use a timer and build in an incentive for meeting the time expectation</li> <li>• Have students sit on top of desks in a circle</li> <li>• Consider holding the circle outside, or another location</li> <li>• Ask the students to come up with suggestions</li> </ul>
The circle process takes too long...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You can do a check in circle in a few minutes with 32 students. You could ask for a one or two word check in on how their weekend was or how they are feeling at the moment</li> <li>• Time spent up front building relationships and coming up with shared values and guidelines will save time in the long run dealing with problem behavior</li> </ul>
No one is talking, or English may be a second language for my students, and they are hesitant to speak...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use alternative methods of expression such as drawing, freestyle poetry, journaling, movement, activities with no words, etc.</li> <li>• It is ok not to share as long as everyone participates by being present in circle</li> <li>• Use a partner-share icebreaker or concentric circles so every student can have a chance to talk without speaking to the whole class</li> <li>• Try to set a fun and community-building tone, gradually getting to more serious content over time</li> <li>• Build in incentives for participation</li> <li>• Ask students to brainstorm why they or others aren't talking (could be written, anonymous, etc.) and some suggestions to encourage it</li> <li>• Ask questions students are more likely to want to answer like "What is it you want adults to understand about youth?"</li> </ul>
There are specific misbehaviors that de-rail the circle...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revisit the shared guidelines and values you created together</li> <li>• Try to determine the possible function of each misbehavior and focus on that rather than the behavior itself</li> <li>• Engage the students that are misbehaving as circle keepers or ask them to think of questions for the circle</li> <li>• Have 1:1 Restorative Conversations at another time with the students that are misbehaving to get to the root of the issue.</li> <li>• Consult with colleagues for ideas</li> </ul>
One or a few students do all the talking...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have students make or bring their own talking pieces that are meaningful to them or their culture and ask them to speak about it in circle</li> <li>• Consider giving the "natural leaders" jobs circle such as being a circle keeper or making a centerpiece for the circle</li> <li>• In private conversations with more quiet students, ask if there is something they need in order to participate more fully</li> </ul>
Students make rude or mean facial expressions...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify unacceptable non-verbal behaviors as not following the shared guidelines</li> <li>• Acknowledge kind respectful non-verbal behaviors</li> </ul>
Students talk about private family issues, abuse, suicide, drugs or alcohol...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When you start facilitating circle be very clear as to what types of issues you are mandated to report. Students will appreciate the clarity</li> <li>• Be sure to clearly explain the limit of confidentiality is anything related to <b>danger to self or others</b></li> <li>• Consult with your Principal and mental health support staff about how to pre-plan for this possibility and discuss in an age-appropriate way</li> <li>• Follow-up with administration, school based mental health counselor, or school nurse immediately and make a mandated report as necessary. You may even need to personally walk the student to a school mental health professional</li> </ul>
The circle just doesn't seem to go well overall...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult with colleagues for ideas, suggestions or coaching</li> <li>• Observe another colleague's circle, or ask them to observe yours</li> <li>• Have a colleague co-facilitate a class circle with you</li> <li>• Ask students what they thought about the circle, and how it could be made better</li> </ul>



# TALKING CIRCLE: POST-CIRCLE QUESTIONNAIRE

Please rate the degree to which you believe the following statements:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The circle addressed an issue that is important to me and/or our community.				
I felt like the circle was a confidential, safe space to talk about my feelings and viewpoints.				
I felt like others in the circle listened to me.				
The circle keeper provided all participants with equal opportunities to share their perspectives, including using a talking piece to ensure one person spoke at a time.				
The circle helped me understand someone else's opinions, feelings, or story.				
The circle made me feel like I was part of a community.				
I would like to participate in a circle again.				
What did you like best about participating in the circle?				
What do you think would have improved the circle?				
What other topics would you like to discuss in a circle?				

# PEACE CIRCLES

A Peace Circle is a planned, structured meeting between a person or people who caused harm, the person or people who were harmed, and both parties' family and friends, in which they discuss the consequences of wrongdoing and decide how to repair harm. A Peace Circle is used when it is clear who caused harm and who was harmed, and a structured process is needed for responding to an incident. Centering on the needs of the harmed, Peace Circles are a straightforward problem-solving method that assists students in resolving their own problems by providing them a constructive forum to do so (O'Connell, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 1999).

Participation in a Peace Circle is always voluntary. Peace Circles provide the party or parties who were harmed and those close to them with an opportunity to confront the person who caused harm, express their feelings, ask questions and have a say in what happens next.

Peace Circles hold the person who caused harm accountable while providing them with an opportunity to discard the "offender" label and be reintegrated into their community, school or workplace. Peace Circles provide the person who caused harm a chance to hear firsthand how their behavior has affected others. Following a Peace Circle, the person who caused harm may choose to begin to repair the harm they have caused by apologizing, making amends and agreeing to restitution or personal or community service work (Morris & Maxwell, 2001).

## THE FACILITATOR'S ROLE:

After it is determined that a Peace Circle is appropriate and both the person who caused harm and the person who was harmed have agreed to attend, the circle keeper invites others affected by the incident, which may include teachers, classmates, family, and friends (O'Connell, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 1999). All participants are made aware of the purpose and process of the circle prior to the scheduled time and date.

Unlike other circles, during a Peace Circle, everyone in the circle does not answer the same questions. First, the harm-doer will respond to a set of questions, and then the people who have been affected by the harm will respond to a separate set of questions. The talking piece

should be held by the harm-doer until all questions have been answered. Then, the talking piece will go to the person harmed, and then to others affected by the harm.

Use the Restorative Circle Planning Template to plan the circle, including the following elements:

## DISCUSSION ROUNDS

### 1. QUESTIONS FOR THE HARM-DOER

- What happened?
- What were you thinking about at the time?
- What have you thought about since the incident?
- Who do you think has been affected by your actions?
- How have they been affected?

### 2. QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS AFFECTED BY THE HARM

- What was your reaction at the time of the incident?
- How do you feel about what happened?
- What has been the hardest thing for you?
- How did your family and friends react when they heard about the incident?

### 3. QUESTION FOR THE PERSON WHO WAS HARMED

- What do you need in order for the harm to be repaired?
- The response to this question is discussed with the harm-doer and everyone else in the circle, ensuring that the agreement:
  - Holds the harm-doer accountable for the harm they caused
  - Helps the harm-doer to repair the harm and restore relationships
  - Assists the harm-doer in building skills and competencies so that they do not repeat their behavior

When an agreement is reached, a simple contract is written and signed. A sample Peace Circle agreement form is included in this toolkit.

This resource is adapted from: [http://www.iirp.edu/what-is-restorative-practices.php#restorative\\_conference](http://www.iirp.edu/what-is-restorative-practices.php#restorative_conference)

# PEACE CIRCLE KEEPER CHECKLIST

## Before the circle, have you...

- Planned circle topic, check-in question, opening, closing, and scripted questions based upon participant needs and referrals (if applicable)?
- Held [Restorative Conversations](#) with potential circle members prior to inviting them to be part of the circle to discuss their needs?
- Scheduled a time to hold the circle that works for all participants?
- Set up circle in a private and comfortable space, with enough chairs for all participants, and identified talking piece and centerpiece?

## During the circle, are you...

- Using planned opening and check-in question and setting the stage by explaining circle process, talking piece, centerpiece; and establishing group values?
- Using and eliciting restorative language, including ["I" statements](#), and avoiding alienating language, to ensure that feels are central to the conversation?
- Demonstrate and encourage empathetic listening with eye contact, body language, and empathetic responses?
- Ensuring that all participant(s) voices are heard equally and considered?
- Consistently asking planned restorative questions that allow all participant(s) to explain the situation from his/her perspective, their thoughts/feelings, and needs?
- Using open-ended restorative questions to guide the participant(s) through acknowledging feelings and needs of others, reflecting on the impact of their actions (including norms broken and harm done), and identifying what they can do to make things better?
- Encouraging the participant(s) to create an explicit agreement on how to make the situation better and to accept responsibility for their own actions, including identifying restorative/logical consequences when necessary and reflecting on how this experience is connected to their personal growth?
- Closing the circle with a planned ritual and by acknowledging participants for their willingness to work through the issues and summarizing agreements made and next steps?

## After the conversation, are you...

- Providing all participants with a chance to [respond to and reflect on the circle](#)?
- Following up with others affected, including referring staff, to summarize agreements and consequences?
- Following up with participant(s) on agreements made by the timeline agreed upon?
- Identifying whether additional interventions/steps need to be taken if the behavior/incident continues?

# PRE-CONFERENCE WITH THE REFERRED STUDENT

## INTRODUCE YOURSELF AND YOUR ROLE

### AS FACILITATOR:

- Impartial and non-judgmental
- Make certain the process is safe and productive for all participants
- Tell participants what will happen if agreement is not completed

### CONFIDENTIALITY:

Reassure the referred student that everything said in a Peace Circle is confidential. You will not share what they say unless they want you to say something to the person harmed. (Except for Mandatory Reporting)

### PURPOSES OF THE PEACE CIRCLE:

1. Bring a positive resolution to the harm caused, not to be demeaning or punitive
2. Discuss the harm done and how it affected community
3. Any of the participants may leave the circle any time if they do not feel safe

### LISTEN TO THEIR ACCOUNT:

Ask the referred student about their experience. Listen to their side and ask for details with questions like, "What happened?" "How did you feel about what happened?"

### POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

Emphasize the potential advantages of coming to the Peace Circle:

- An opportunity to apologize if they are willing
- An opportunity to be listened to
- Have a voice in creating the agreement to repair harm

### GROUND RULES:

- Confidentiality
- Focus on the harm done and its effects
- Respectful communication

- No inappropriate or disrespectful language
- No interrupting

### PEACE CIRCLE PROCESS:

Explain that the referred student will have the opportunity to explore what happened, how his/her behavior impacted others, and offer solutions to repair the harm. The people impacted by the incident may or may not participate in the circle to share their perspective. Explain that the Peace Circle facilitator will lead the discussion and help the referred student come to an agreement about how to move forward.

### COMMITMENT:

Gain the referred student's commitment to participate in the process with an understanding of what will happen if the student chooses not to complete the agreement.

## PERSON HARMED IMPACT STATEMENT

If the person who was directly harmed by the incident the referred student committed cannot attend the restorative intervention, try to interview this person before the hearing so that their feelings and needs are represented to the referred student. Remember to use active listening skills and show that you care.

### THE FOLLOWING ARE SUGGESTED QUESTIONS TO ASK.

1. How did this incident affect you and the school community?

2. What was the emotional and/or physical impact of this incident on you?

3. What would you like to see happen?

4. Would you like an opportunity to participate in the restorative intervention with the referred student?

5. Would you like to make a recommendation for the agreement? If so, what would you recommend?

6. Is there any other information you would like to share about the incident and how it affected you?

# PEACE CIRCLE AGREEMENT FORM

**NAME(S) OF REFERRED STUDENT(S):** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE OF CIRCLE:** \_\_\_\_\_

**REASON FOR REFERRAL:** \_\_\_\_\_

**I AGREE TO DO THE FOLLOWING:**

(for each activity, specify the days, time, location and any contact person if available)

Activity	Contact Person	Signature of Contact Person

This agreement will be completed by:

\_\_\_\_\_

Follow up person:

\_\_\_\_\_

Location of the follow up:

\_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand that if I satisfactorily complete this agreement, this matter will not be referred back to school discipline office. However, if I fail to complete this agreement, my case will be returned to the school discipline office for other possible disciplinary action as determined by the administration.

Agreement Complete	Agreement Incomplete

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent / Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Facilitator



# LETTER OF APOLOGY

A letter of apology is part of your Restorative agreement. The agreement states whom the letter should be addressed to. Completed letters should be returned to \_\_\_\_\_ within one week of the agreement.

If you are having difficulty with the letter, please talk to \_\_\_\_\_ for assistance.

**A LETTER OF APOLOGY SHOULD INCLUDE:**

**NAME OF PERSON**

**DATE**

Dear...

I was responsible for (doing what)

I am sorry because (explain why)

Since the incident I have learned (explain)

My restorative intervention experience and the agreement I completed has taught me that

I realize the effect of my action on (who was harmed)

And I regret (what)

Sincerely,

# PEACE CIRCLE: POST-CIRCLE QUESTIONNAIRE

Please rate the degree to which you believe the following statements:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I felt comfortable and prepared to participate in this circle.				
I felt like the circle was a confidential, safe space to talk about what happened.				
I felt like others in the circle listened to me and considered my needs.				
The circle keeper provided all participants with equal opportunities to share their perspectives on what happened, including using a talking piece to ensure one person spoke at a time.				
The questions asked during the circle helped me reflect on the root cause of what happened and the impact of my actions.				
The circle helped me understand someone else's perspectives, feelings, and needs.				
The circle helped us come up with a way to resolve the issue and make things better.				
I am confident that I will uphold the agreement that we decided upon.				
What did you like best about participating in the circle?				
What do you think would have improved the circle?				
What else do you think needs to happen to make sure we follow our agreement?				