CIRCLE BASICS

A relational space, not a seating arrangement.

Circles build relationships through **listening, sharing, and consideration of the thoughts shared**. Their purpose is connection and understanding, not solving problems or supplying answers. How people sit is secondary.

THE CARES UNDERSTANDING OF A CIRCLE

"A facilitated relational space, even between just two people, where listening, sharing, and consideration of what is shared strengthen relationships and trust."

TWO PEOPLE CAN BE IN A CIRCLE

It is the quality of the relational space that matters. A physical circle can help people see one another as equals, but the arrangement alone does not create safety or trust.



TWO PEOPLE

Shared voice and listening



SMALL GROUP

Mutual understanding



COMMUNITY

Relationships across voices

WHAT CIRCLES CAN SUPPORT

APPROPRIATE PURPOSES

- Building connection and belonging
- Listening to understand, not to fix
- Sharing thoughts, stories, and experiences
- Considering perspectives with dignity

NOT A TOOL FOR...

- Solving problems or providing answers
- Giving advice or fixing another person
- Pressuring disclosure or demanding agreement
- Replacing mediation, therapy, or safety measures

Remember: A circle is not measured by the answers it produces. Its relational value lies in whether people are heard and their thoughts are considered with dignity.

FROM GATHERING TO RELATIONAL SAFETY

A circle is a place for people to connect, not an attempt to fix them. **Relational safety, choice, and preparation** matter more than reaching agreement or generating solutions.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Circles offer space to listen, share experiences, and consider different thoughts, even when there is no issue to address.

WHEN TENSION IS PRESENT

People may share difficult experiences. A circle remains relational; it is not a substitute for mediation, investigation, or treatment.

BEFORE REQUESTING A CIRCLE, ASK...

These are questions about readiness, **not instructions for leading a circle.** Check whether they have been addressed.

- ☐ **PURPOSE**
  Are we here to listen and strengthen relationships, not solve an issue?
- ☐ **CHOICE**
  Can people decline, pass, or set boundaries without retaliation?
- ☐ **FACILITATION**
  Is someone with appropriate training, preparation, and judgment involved?
- ☐ **SAFETY**
  Have we considered trauma, power differences, conflict, and immediate risk?
- ☐ **EXPECTATIONS**
  Are privacy limits and the purpose of participation explained honestly?
- ☐ **FURTHER SUPPORT**
  Can people seek needed support outside the circle without pressure?

A PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARY

This handout is **not facilitator training**. Circles are not for solving conflicts, giving answers, or compelling disclosure. Abuse, coercion, serious harm, and unsafe dynamics require qualified support and separate safeguards.

CARES foundation: Consideration is "The conscious regard for the needs, values, and dignity of others, especially when making decisions."

Learn more about CARES Restorative Leadership and circle training: careslp.org/contact/