

Circle Protocol

1. **A Facilitator.** Welcome everyone to the space. Facilitator is a part of the community too. The facilitator can alternate weekly.
2. **Guidelines.** Guidelines are created during the initial circle (this is true for healing circles and learning circles). The guidelines of the Circle are the agreements that participants make to one another about how to behave in the Circle. They establish clear expectations and common ground to provide a space where people feel safe to speak in their authentic voice, connect to others in a good way and ensure a space that is respectful for all. Pass the talking piece and ask participants to name one agreement important to their participation in the Circle. (You can have them write a guideline on a post-it or small paper plate and place it in the center, or you can write them down on a large sheet of flip chart paper for all to see).
3. **An Opening.** This serves as mark that circle time has begun. Opening activities are designed to help participants center themselves, be reminded of core values, clear negative energies, encourage optimism, and honor the presence of everyone there. You may want to use an opening that is physically active – a game or activity, a reading related to the topic, a song, lighting candles for anyone they've lost to violence, etc.
4. **Talking Piece.** This is a critical element to the circle. Its purpose is to ensure that all members have voice and that voice is heard. Make it clear that the talking piece goes only in one direction and is not passed back and forth or across to participants. Also, let them know that it is okay to pass. Show that respecting to the talking piece is fundamental to the Circle, AND that they need to respect the time so that everyone has an opportunity to talk and share experiences. Talking piece can switch daily or weekly.
5. **Check-in/Check-out Rounds.** Checking in can be as simple as passing the talking piece around and asking everyone how they are doing. You may also add another element to this by adding to the initial question (i.e. tell me how you are doing today and something we don't know about you.) Checking-in should happen after the opening activity. Checking-out is done toward the end of the circle after the topic/learning portion is completed. Checking-out is similar to the checking-in except you are asking participants to sum up their experience of the circle.
6. **Reflection Rounds.** This is done through the topic/learning aspect of the circle. It is the bulk/middle of your circle activities. Pass the talking piece around and ask questions that will help participants to share their feelings, experiences, and needs.
7. **Closing Round.** This round is done after the check-out. Closings help participants to transition out of the Circle. An example closing activity might be the "Commitment Web Activity." In this activity, one person begins by holding a ball of yarn. They hold onto the string at the end and make a commitment to the circle regarding what they will do to promote healing. Then they toss the ball of yarn to someone else in the Circle. Each person makes their commitment and tosses the ball of yarn to someone else in the Circle that has not yet had a turn. Continue tossing the ball of yarn until everyone in the Circle has made their commitment. This exercise creates a web of connectedness and shared values. This activity is one of many possible Closings. Like Openings, you should choose activities that work for you and the participants in the Circle.

