

CONNECTION CIRCLE

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OBJECTIVE

Participants will build relationships through each sharing something about themselves with the group by answering one or a series of circle questions.

The Connection Circle serves many purposes as a restorative tool. These instructions focus on using the Connection Circle for relationship-building and establishing equal voice.

MATERIALS

An object to use as a talking piece. The talking piece should hold some meaning or significance for the facilitator and should relate to the question(s) being asked.

INSTRUCTIONS

Participants and facilitator sit in one, equal circle with no table in between them. The facilitator holds a talking piece of their choosing. The facilitator welcomes everyone and explains the purpose of the circle (i.e. to build relationships), and then establishes the ground rules.

Ground Rules:

- Please speak and listen with respect. Speak only when you have the talking piece and share the time fairly.
- Respect everyone's privacy. Only tell your own story and do not share what you hear outside the circle.
- You can pass, and I will come back to you to see if you want to answer later.
- I may need to interrupt at points to remind us of the ground rules.
- Are there any additional ground rules we would like to add in order for this to feel like a safe space to share?
- Does everyone agree to these ground rules? (Wait for a nod or some form of agreement from participants.)

The facilitator then introduces the talking piece and its personal significance, history, or relationship to the question. This introduction of the talking piece gives it gravitas and builds respect for the process as a whole. The facilitator then asks a circle question and passes the talking piece right or left, or asks someone to volunteer to answer the question first. The talking piece is then passed around the circle, giving each person the chance to answer the question posed by the facilitator. The facilitator will be the last person in the circle to share their answer to the question. You may choose to just do one question round, or several. If you ask several rounds of questions, make sure that they are inviting greater depth of sharing and vulnerability in each subsequent round.

Example Connection Circle Questions:

- Share your name and a story connected to your name.
- What is your favorite color and your favorite object of that color?
- If you could travel anywhere, where would you go and why?
- If you could have a superpower, what would it be and what would be your first action?
- If you could spend a day with any person, dead or alive, who would it be and what would you do together?
- What is something you would like to learn?
- What is the best advice you ever received?
- Name someone who has been a teacher in your life, someone who has made you think differently about things. What is one thing you learned from them?
- What has been the greatest learning experience of your life and what did you learn?

After everyone has answered the question, the facilitator closes the circle by thanking everyone for participating and providing a brief closing reflection that ties it all together. This could be reflecting common themes that were shared, relating back to the talking piece, or making a connection between the circle and a larger theme for the class.

DEBRIEF

To maintain the circle as a safe and sacred space, the process must have a deliberate closing. If you would like to debrief the experience with participants to hear their impressions of the circle process and encourage reflection on the cultivation of equal voice in the circle process, first intentionally close the circle and put down the talking piece. Indicate a shift through your tone and body movements before saying that you would like to debrief the experience the group just had together and asking for their reflections.

LESSON

A group that is able to communicate with respect and practice conversational turn-taking will have greater capacity to interact and dialogue effectively. The Connection Circle helps to establish equal voice by creating space where one person can speak from their personal perspective and others are asked to listen respectfully.