

# 5 TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE CIRCLE FACILITATION

*Best practices for creating brave spaces and authentic sharing*

## Engage the body

Talking circles are powerful opportunities to connect, but often rely too much on speaking and listening. Effective facilitators use techniques to engage the whole body through movement, mindfulness, and sensory exploration. Examples include doing a “body scan” meditation, stretching, or playing a brief game at the beginning of a session.



## Use a talking piece

A talking piece is a tangible symbol of attention. Using it creates an awareness that the circle is not just a regular discussion or social hangout, but a special space defined by the group agreements. Tip: Consider inviting participants to bring their own special item as a talking piece to a session. A stone, stick, or other natural item is a great start.



## Start with a check-in



Just like our bodies, our hearts often need time to “warm up” to more intense experiences. A “check in” is a brief round of sharing that invites participants to become fully present with themselves and their experience, while also beginning to invite others to witness as well.

Examples include a simple round of saying our names and how we’re feeling, or using a “1-5” on our fingers to rate our emotional state.

## Participate and model

Unlike teaching, facilitation is the art of guiding a process organically (literally, “to make easy or happen”). Most participants feel a greater comfort and buy-in when the facilitator is actively participating, sharing, and modeling, as opposed to just asking questions and observing. Consider how to engage fully without losing track of your role as facilitator, and find a balance.



## Have a plan (and be ready to toss it)

Circle process flows in a unique way. Experienced facilitators often start with an intended theme, outline, prompts, and a sense of where it will go. And, sometimes things “come up” in circle that are unexpected, intense, and/or seem to “take over” the energy. If it does, don’t panic! Being flexible with our plan can allow some of the most meaningful and transformational moments to happen, even if it feels uncomfortable and mysterious in the moment.



# Session Outline

## **OPENING**

Examples include mindfulness, a brief movement activity, a simple game, or reading a poem.

## **CHECK IN**

An opportunity to get present with oneself and the group, and begin to touch the emotional world.

## **AGREEMENTS**

Early in a group it is important to review agreements regularly, though over time this be less frequent.

## **SHARING ROUNDS (COUNCIL)**

Typically involves the use of 1 or more prompts/questions that invite open-ended sharing and storytelling.

## **CHECK OUT**

May include opportunities for participants to acknowledge what was experienced, honoring or gratitude.

## **CLOSING**

Symbolically closes the session, often in a shared gesture, audible sound, or movement.



# Sample Session

## **OPENING**

Mindful breathing, 2 minutes. Pay close attention to the pace of your natural breath, and notice the space between inhale and exhale.

## **CHECK IN (10 mins)**

Share your name, feelings, and how well are you caring for yourself these days?

## **AGREEMENTS (2-10 mins)**

Review and/or create a simple set of agreements for your group. You may start with the 5 Intentions of Circle as a starting place.

## **SHARING ROUNDS (30 mins)**

**Discuss:** What is the difference between self-care and self-medication?

**Council:** What gets in the way of your self-care?

## **CHECK OUT (10 mins)**

Popcorn Sharing: Reflect back something you heard today that you appreciate.

Pass talking piece: What is a commitment you will make to improve your self-care?

## **CLOSING (1 min)**

Group rub hands together and all clap at the same time.



# *Five Intentions of Circle*

## SPEAK FROM THE HEART

Share from one's own experience

Use "I" statements

Avoid intellectual concepts & generalization

## LISTEN FROM THE HEART

Seek understanding vs agreement

Engage all of my senses

Hear the deeper truth

## BE ESSENTIAL

Express only what is needed

Honor my audience

Be willing to pass

## SPONTANEITY

Allow the truth of the moment to arise

Avoid rehearsing

Accept silence and mystery

## CONFIDENTIALITY

What happens in circle, stays in circle

Share only about my own experience

Obtain consent & honor boundaries

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