



# WHAT IS A CIRCLE?

## A BEGINNERS GUIDE TO RESTORATIVE JUSTICE



COMMUNITIES  
IN COMMUNICATION  
THROUGH  
RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

## WHY CIRCLES?

### COMMUNICATION, CONNECTION, RELATIONSHIPS

**Circle Definition:** a restorative practice that uses intentional questions to explore the root causes behind a conflict or harm involving individual(s) groups, or a community.

The goal is for participants to move towards accountability, empathy, and resolution.

**Peacemaking circle** is another name for a circle, which is a common practice used among the many indigenous tribes of North America.

There are several types of circles to utilize, which include:

- **Peacemaking**
- **Healing**
- **Community-building**
- **Listening**



# STEPS OF A CIRCLE

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To note: these are the general steps to a peacemaking circle.



**Gather:** all involved parties (voluntarily) come together in a safe and private room.



**Framing:** the facilitator will begin by opening the circle (introductions, community agreements, forecasting the process).



**Restorative Questions:** the group will go around the circle a few times, each time answering a pre-determined question. The facilitator will have the questions ready.

- The facilitator will remind participants to “listen to hear, not to respond.”



**Reach an Agreement:** once all questions are answered, the group can then draft an agreement and confirm commitments.



**Conclusion:** the facilitator will have all participants sign any agreement that is reached and then close out the circle..

When choosing a **talking piece**, use something that holds **shared meaning** or is **symbolic** among the participants or based on the topic.



A photo



Stress ball



Mascot/  
Stuffed  
animal



# CIRCLE RESOURCES

## HELPFUL CYS RESOURCES RELATING TO CIRCLES

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### Facilitating A Circle - A Snapshot:



### 5 Things You Should Know About A Circle:

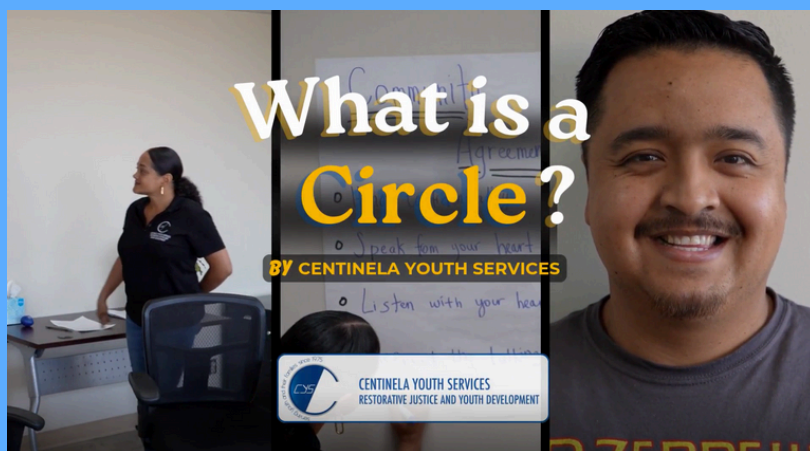


### Circles for the Adult Community



INTERESTED TO SEE WHAT AN  
**ACTUAL CIRCLE** LOOKS LIKE?

Watch this  
**demonstration.**



“Facilitators in restorative circles aren’t just there to guide the conversation; they’re also there to share their own experiences—both the highs and lows—and to serve as models for what vulnerability and accountability can look like.”

-Center for Justice Innovation [1]



# CIRCLE QUESTIONS

THE QUESTIONS ASKED DURING A CIRCLE PROCESS SET THE TONE FOR THE SPACE. THE CHOSEN QUESTIONS SHOULD HELP PARTICIPANTS FEEL SAFE AND VALUED

- Use questions that are **restorative**. Restorative questions are open-ended and non-leading. They allow the people listening to get a better sense of the person speaking, and also elicit introspection from the speaker.
- Avoid “**why**” questions. Questions that are rooted in “why” can make people feel judged or blamed, which can be triggering.
- **Sample** questions:
  - What happened?
  - What was going on in your mind when this occurred?
  - How have you felt since?
  - Who do you believe was impacted by what was done?
  - What do you believe you need to do to make things right?
- Take it further than the timeline - **pull out the story** behind the actions and events. Ask questions that get at the internal thoughts and feelings that came with those actions and events.

## VIRTUAL CIRCLES

While in person circles permit a different level of connection, virtual circles are possible as well. Check out this **example** of a virtual community-building circle:

