

Talking Circle Suggested Guidelines

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Introduction

A Circle is a wonderfully versatile held-space which allows us to communicate with others in a way that is non-hierarchical, equal, respectful and connecting. The Circle as a symbol appears in cave paintings dating back 35000 years. Jung discovered that the circle, often in the form of a sun-wheel, appeared in cultures that developed in complete isolation from one another. When we pull the chairs away from a table and out of linear rows and into a ring where we face one another, we are turning ourselves into a sun-wheel. We assume the shape of the symbol ourselves and the synergy comes with us.

As part of Extinction Rebellion's Regenerative Culture, a talking circle can offer a space for people involved to mutually support, share and process a multitude of thoughts & feelings that emerge through their relationship to climate emergency and associated actions.

The following guidelines are offered in support of creating safe, boundaried, inclusive spaces that may be utilised in a variety of ways, including.:

- Pre-Action emotional debriefs
- Post-Action emotional debriefs
- Affinity/Local/Working Group process

Host/Facilitator

The host/facilitator can be responsible for invitation and introducing the components of the circle, ground-rules and shared intentions - it's helpful if over time the role of host is rotated so that all participants have an opportunity to practice. Unlike a conventional facilitator role the host sits within the process and participates in the circle and calls the group to a peer-to-peer shared accountability of how the circle proceeds.

Space

A space should either be a physical location or a virtual online location. Any space should be able to be free of outside intrusion and physically comfortable. If a physical space is being used

chairs or cushions can be used to form a circle shape but depending on the room can end up being oval or more egg shaped! The purpose of a circle shape is so that everyone can see who else is present, to see who is talking and be able to hear well, listen and interact with everyone present. Ideally no more than 20 people in any one circle.

If we imagine the circle as a wheel, the centre is the hub. Originally a fire was often at the centre of a circle - a fire requires tending, the centre of a circle also requires tending to. We can place meaningful objects at the centre of the circle - a candle if practical or a symbolic representation of the group's intention and an invitation to focus - flowers, images or a natural object. The centre provides a neutral space where diversity of thought, stories of grief and outrage and heartfulness, can be held and considered by all participants.

Intention

Intention is what gets us in the room together, usually glad that someone took the initiative to host. The intention may seem obvious but sharing an explicit intention supports the creation of a shared container. The intention may be as simple as 'this circle is to hold a space in which participants can share their emotional responses and what they have been left with since action week'

Process

The circle has a beginning, a middle and an end. The host can offer a simple ritual to signify these shifts.

Beginning

A beginning chime that beckons silence, a lighting of a candle, setting out of objects or reading of a quote or poem. Any of these actions elicits the reflective attention of participants.

Group Agreements

The success of a circle rests on the ability of the participants to understand, contribute to and abide by rules of respectful engagement. Agreements provide trust and an interpersonal safety net for participating. Agreements are the circle's self-governance and create a way for each member to hold both self and each other accountable for the quality of interaction.

Suggested initial agreements would include:

- Confidentiality
- Listening with curiosity and compassion
- Speak from the 'I' - only speak from our own experience and within the circle we refrain from commenting about or offering advice/opinion about what another has shared.

Our agreements are what 'carry us through stormy seas' and a group may well need to spend time creating strong and thoughtful agreements that can act as a life-raft for everyone present.

Housekeeping

Host offers information on emergency exits, toilets etc

Middle

A **Talking Stick** or other natural object is something that signifies to everyone that whoever is holding it is the only person allowed to speak at that time. It's useful in ensuring that each person has a turn at speaking at large circles. A talking piece can encourage the people not speaking to listen more deeply since they're not thinking about what they may say in response to the person speaking.

There are two ways in which a talking piece can be used in circle. You can send it in a clockwise or anticlockwise direction or you can place it in the middle of the circle and whoever feels ready to speak can pick it up and replace it when they've finished. Both of these ways lead to very different types of conversation ensuing.

Passing the talking piece consecutively around the circle leads to deeper experience for the individual and the circle together whilst placing the talking piece back in the centre after a person has spoken leads to more conversation type discussion.

There should be no expectation that anyone has to speak and if a participant passes the talking piece on when it's their turn to speak, they can be offered the talking piece at the end or at any point through the circle if they request it. Some people simply need some time to collect what they'd like to say.

The host can share with all the participants how the talking piece is to be used.

Timings

Depending on group size and time set aside, there may need to be an agreement made about how long each participant speaks for - the host or someone acting as timekeeper may need to

be prepared to keep an eye on this and a simple chime rung if any participant speaks over the agreed amount of time available.

Ending

Summary

A suggested circle might run like this:

1. Welcome
2. Group Agreements/housekeeping/timings
3. Opening Ritual - lighting candle/chime
4. Intention/Enquiry/Poem
5. Some minutes of reflective silence and invitation to check in with how you are right now.
6. Initial Check in round of- name, where you have come from and one word of what you are with right now.
7. Longer open round using talking stick where sharing is either completely open or in response to an initial intention, reflection or shared enquiry.
8. Closing one word round.
9. Some minutes of silence
10. Closing Ritual - blowing out candle/chime
11. Deciding next meeting dates/host if necessary