



Practices: Sharing circle

This is my own version of how to run a sharing circle practice, based on what I learned from sitting in many circles, especially those hosted by Billy Matheson. This practice comes from American First Nations traditions. You can read more about other forms in the following links: Firstnationspedagogy.ca rschools.nan.on.ca co-intelligence.org

Set-up

I try to prepare the room where we will share, setting up a circle of chairs and/or cushions. If you have the chance to be outside and have a small bonfire for people to gather around even better!

I like to create a comfortable, inviting, safe environment. Eg. I like lowlights or candles, comfy seating, if possible have some blankets if it's cold. Importantly add something to the centre of the circle that is pleasing to look at. Eg, candles, fairy lights, plants, flowers...

When welcoming people into the space I ask them to keep silence or a mindful presence.

Introducing the circle

For many many many generations humans gathered, sat in circles around the fire, and shared with others their stories, visions, feelings... To celebrate, process and dialogue as a community.

And for many many many generations others sat with them to listen... to witness what needed to be shared, to hold space for others to be heard...

A sharing circle is a safe space where we practice honest, vulnerable sharing, and deep non-judgemental listening.

There can be a calling question, topic or idea. Or just be a space to share what is alive in your heart, body and mind.

Guidelines

This is what I share before we start to set up the norms. There may be some questions people have, especially if it is their first time in a sharing circle. You may want to remove or add different guidelines according to your context.

- We share our truth to the circle. We don't speak directly to a particular person. We don't seek an answer, don't reply to what someone has said, or seek to open a conversation.
- There's no speaking order, we don't go around the circle one by one, we don't lift our hand or seek permission to speak. We share when we are ready, but only share one time.
 - If there's a limited amount of time for the circle (*I recommend 2hrs max*), be mindful of the amount of time you take, leave enough space for others.
- How do you know when is your time to speak?... Your heart will give you the cue, if it starts pumping because it has something to say.
- Not everyone has to speak, only if you feel like it.
- We don't interrupt people, we make sure they are finished sharing and we leave a few seconds of silence before we speak.
- There may be some moments of long silence, that's ok!
 - As the circle holder I may check in long silences to see if we are complete by asking "*Is there anything else that wants to be said in this circle?*", and give more time for the quiet voices to gain courage to share. This may be repeated a few times until I close the circle.
- We don't laugh or comment on what someone has shared, we just witness. If you feel moved or touched by what they have said you can use 'sparkle fingers' to signal
 - This hand signal can also be useful if you feel that the person speaking may need some support or courage to share.
- We try to hold a space of presence and reverence for what is shared.
- Everything that is shared in this circle is in a confidentiality context, please don't share any personal details about what is said here with anyone else outside this group.
- If what you listen triggers some strong emotions in you, I invite you to stay present with your feelings and just observe them.
 - If the emotions are too much you can also leave the circle to be alone. You may also return later on.
- If when you share or listen you feel moved to cry, is ok! Please don't apologise, you and your emotions are welcome here.

Starting

So when the space is set, I ask people to take a couple of minutes to center themselves and I open the circle by reminding them of the calling question/topic/idea, and saying *"the circle is open... what wants to be said?"*

Ending

You can set up a time frame and finish then; you can give an estimate and check after a certain time has passed how much energy there is to continue; or you can finish when everyone that wanted to share has done so.

With a group of around 20 people I try to keep it shorter than 2 hrs if possible (this gives everyone between 3 and 5' to share if they feel like it, also allowing for some silence), as holding the kind of attention and emotional presence needed to be in a sharing circle can be exhausting for people.

After checking a couple of times *'if there's anything else that wants to be shared?'* if it doesn't seem there's anyone else moved to do so I'll close the circle by giving thanks to anyone that shared and listened and saying: *'the circle is now closed...'*