

A Policy and Process for Addressing Conflict In **The Empathy Center** Organization and Community

<https://tinyurl.com/TECConflict>

Introduction

Conflict is a natural part of every organization and community, and when met with mutual empathy and care it can become a pathway to deeper understanding, growth, and innovation. This policy affirms our commitment to addressing conflicts that may arise within the Empathy Center organization and across the broader community of Empathy Circle practitioners

We welcome differences as opportunities to listen, learn, and discover common ground together. By cultivating empathy-based practices, we aim to transform challenges into opportunities for connection and collective growth. This work is evolving, and we warmly invite feedback to strengthen it further.

As part of the founding Bylaws for The Empathy Center, a 501(c)(3) non-profit, Board Members have agreed to participate in a Restorative Empathy Circle process when conflict arises (see bylaws excerpt below). The Board now wants this agreement to extend to anyone working in a position of responsibility with the Empathy Center (e.g. Volunteers, Training Team Members, Summit Team Members, EC Calendar Event Holders, etc.)

THE EMPATHY CENTER BYLAWS ARTICLE 14 ADDRESSING CONFLICT

SECTION 1. EMPATHY CIRCLE PRACTICE

Board Members and Executive Director agree to learn the Empathy Circle process and take part in periodic Empathy Circles to discuss issues related to The Empathy Center.

SECTION 2. EMPATHY CIRCLE FOR ADDRESSING CONFLICT

Any board members or the Executive Director can call for an Empathy Circle to address a conflict. Board members and Executive Director agree to take part in these Empathy Circles to address and constructively work out conflict.

On September 25, 2025, the Board of Directors of The Empathy Center formally adopted the policy below to begin articulating a well-defined process for addressing conflict within the Empathy Center organization and wider Empathy Circle Community.

The Empathy Center Policy on Addressing Conflict

The Empathy Center is committed to establishing a clear, open, caring, and effective process for addressing conflict both within our organization and across the wider Empathy community. Because conflict is inevitable in any human endeavor, having agreed-upon processes, and many people who can facilitate them, is good practice for sustaining and deepening a culture of empathy.

While a regular Empathy Circle can be effective for some conflicts, our experience is some conflicts require additional structure to be effective. For this purpose, we use a Restorative Empathy Circle (REC) process, developed to integrate empathy-based dialogue with restorative practices.

- [Edwin Rutsch](#) has worked on developing the [Restorative Empathy Circle](#) process. Example [Restorative Empathy Circle \(REC\) with XR Santa Cruz](#)
- Lou Zweier brings training in [Restorative Circles](#), a closely related practice, and has begun training the Empathy Center Board in this practice to build capacity.
- Moving forward, we aim to expand training so that many people are equipped to facilitate this process, ensuring it is widely understood and practiced.

Board Members have committed to using the Restorative Empathy Circle process when conflicts arise. We are now asking this same commitment from anyone working in a position of responsibility with the Empathy Center (e.g., volunteers, trainers, trainees, Summit Team members, those that host events on the Empathy Center Calendar, etc.).

How the Process Works

The purpose of this process is to nurture a culture of empathy where each person feels fully heard and understood to their satisfaction, and then participants use this understanding to formulate an action plan for restoring trust, respect, and dignity to their relationships. These are the steps:

1. **Initiating the Process:** Any person—volunteer, trainer, trainee, or community member, etc.—may request a Restorative Empathy Circle (REC). Requests can be made to a Board Member or to any trained facilitator (see list below). A REC facilitator will be assigned to the request. They will begin the process with the requestor, then invite in the other participants and guide the process.
2. **Pre-Circles:** Each participant has a conversation (precircle) with the facilitator, where they share their experience of conflict. The facilitator provides empathic listening and also explains the REC process and answers any questions about it.
3. **Restorative Empathy Circle:** All participants come together in a facilitated circle to explore the conflict through 3 questions:
 - a. How have you been affected by the conflict and its consequences?
 - b. What actions did you take related to the conflict and what were you after when you took them? (ie, how did you respond to the conflict?)

- c. What actions would you like to request or offer that would restore trust, respect, and dignity to the relationships?

4. **Post-Circle Followup:** A re-assembly of the circle at a time after the agreed actions have taken place to see how they went, if they had the effect hoped for, and if other actions are needed.

Note again: This work is evolving, and we warmly invite feedback to strengthen it further.

Restorative Empathy Circle (REC) - Trained Facilitators

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