Virtual Circle Guide

Why do we (still) need Circle?

Circle is more important than ever. During this unprecedented time of uncertainty, stress, and disconnection it is critical that we create routines and opportunities for people to be together to reflect, process, and support each other. Circle is a key practice and routine that can provide needed support for individuals and the community as we move through this crisis together. While much of the focus in education, understandably, has been on supporting student's academic learning in new and creative ways, we think it is more important than ever to highlight that *learning only happens* when students are *embedded in strong relationships* and *feel safe, productive, and known*.

We believe Circle - even when it happens virtually - is an essential practice for creating and maintaining these underlying conditions so that students (and the adults that support them) can travel this uncertain road in a connected, vulnerable, and healthy manner.



"Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
(You could hardly deny it now.)
Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.
(Surely, that has come clear.)
Do not reach out your hands.
Reach out your heart.
Reach out your words.
Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch."

Selection from "Pandemic" by Lynn Ungar

Updated 8/18/20

Quick Start Technical Tips

- ❏ **Prep yourself to facilitate** with as much intention as you would in preparing for academic instruction. Ensure that you feel confident with the Zoom platform, that you start each Circle with an awareness of the planned Work coming in to Circle after your Badge Work coaching, and that you have thought through all of the technology considerations to keep the Circle running smoothly (a slide with virtual Circle norms for scholars, what to do if someone is sharing and their connection is weak, etc).
- ❏ **Be steadfast in establishing virtual Circle norms to establish safety***, and practice these yourself,* such as:
    - ❏ Doing our best to remove distractions in our physical surroundings by seeking to find a space conducive to fully engaging in Circle (preferably a space to yourself, enable your virtual background, let others in your household know that you are participating in Circle).
    - ❏ Committing to removing on-screen distractions (e.g. turn off notifications, close other tabs/windows, turn your phone over).
    - ❏ Maintain confidentiality by wearing headphones if other people in your environment could overhear Circle.
    - ❏ Have everyone set their view to gallery in full screen mode so they can attune to the entire “Circle”. This enables us to see when participants are attuning to one another (e.g. sending love, leaning in, nodding heads).
    - ❏ Hide self-view to remove the “mirror” that will automatically bring your attention inward to yourself and prevent attunement.
    - ❏ Only use the chat feature when directed by the Facilitator (see best practices in next section) and with the whole group.
- ❏ **Pre- or re-teach these norms.** Take the time to set all Circle participants up for success, especially if you have new scholars or scholars who have missed previous Circles. This might look like a short run-down of norms at the start of each Circle or (for faculty) written directions with clear screenshots to review as pre-work.

Best Practices for Virtual Circle Quality

- ❏ **Personalize your rationale and framing for virtual Circle.** Some of your scholars might quickly jump at the chance for connection and some might be understandably hesitant to lean into the vulnerability of an online space for Circle - particularly in the context of engaging from home, and in the context of stressors or trauma brought on or exacerbated by the pandemic. Don't underestimate the need to share (more than once, and in different authentic ways) your gratitude and personal "why" for inviting scholars into this virtual space.
- ❏ **Maintain existing Circle norms and rituals**, adapting for technology. In a time of change, or in the spirit of acceptance, it can be really tempting to let norms slide, but maintaining routines and walking your talk brings everyone a sense of safety and predictability. In the first few Circles you should name explicitly what is the same / what is different from academic instruction as you warmly launch the entire Circle and/or specific components.
- ❏ **Set a high bar for engagement.** Name up front that it can be easier to step back in a virtual setting (i.e. choosing not to resonate, limiting what you share) but both adults and scholars will rise to the occasion if we set the bar high from the start.
- ❏ **Validate, Validate, Validate.** We anticipate that both adults and scholars are likely to experience a wide range of more intense emotions during this increasingly strenuous time. As a facilitator, when these big emotions arise it can be easy to fall into the trap of trying to problem-solve or quickly move past a difficult emotion. What all of us need right now is to know that all of our feelings and experiences are valid. (See tips and examples in the table below this list.)
- ❏ **Take Advantage of the Chat Feature.** The Facilitator might find it helpful to take advantage of the chat feature in order to garner a lot of resonance or support for a participant who has shared. For many people, typing a chat lowers the vulnerability, while also allowing you to edit your words, creating a robust sense of connection. In addition, allowing multiple people to type resonance and support is a time-saver! This might look like the Facilitator prompting the group, "Let's open the chat feature now and all take a moment to type our Resonance to Lisa so that she can hear from a lot of us about how her work moved us. Remember to focus on what stood out and what that tells you about Lisa." Or, after a check-back, "Lisa if you're open to some support, let's all type into the chat some words of encouragement and support for her so she can feel the love from lots of us."

Validation Quality Indicators	Validation Examples
• Derived from relational **attunement** (present, balanced, kind, curious) • Accurately **reflects back** the participant's feelings or experiences • Names the participant's feelings or experiences as **understandable or valid** (e.g. "that makes sense") • Communicated with **economy of language** to keep the focus on the participant	*1) "I can hear so much love in your voice as you describe your Grandpa, it makes sense you are worried about this important person in your life".* *2) "No wonder you feel overwhelmed- holding work responsibilities with little ones at home must be incredibly so hard"*

Component Specific Guidance

Circle Component	Core Steps	Adjustments
Circle Launch/Space Check: Just as you often start in person Circles with a check of the space and ensuring everyone is ready to be fully present, the same routine can be helpful in a virtual space. Start by reminding participants of the virtual Circle norms. This is also a critical time to ground in your personal rationale for carving out this time and space together before launching into the components.		

True North

 	
	• Warmly Launch
	• Guide Participants through the core practice sequence of:
	  ○ Grounding
	  ○ Posting attention on an anchor
	  ○ Noting when attention wanders
	  ○ Gently releasing the practice
		• Stick with the core practice of anchoring attention to a part of our breath. This familiarity will bring comfort and allow people to drop into their hearts by not overthinking a new practice.
		• Mute all scholars during the True North
		• *Note: Some facilitators have considered turning cameras off for the True North to further limit distraction, but we have found that this isn't likely to have much benefit. It is still useful in the virtual setting for the facilitator to scan for engagement.*

Check-In & Check-Back 	Check-In • Warmly Launch • Every participant shares all parts of Check-In (Name, Feeling or State, Work, Introduce Friend) • Document who needs time in Circle Check-Back: • Warmly Launch • Reflect back what you heard & invite to share • Attune & Validate	**Check-In:** To rotate around the "circle" you can • Have one person start and then ask each individual to pick the next person • Especially if you have a large Circle, have a list of participant names to ensure everyone has checked in and document feeling words • As scholars check-in, use the chat to type their name and check-in word(s). This allows scholars to remember how others are feeling if you want to open up check-backs to the group. **Check-Back:** We recommend really prioritizing check-backs in the Virtual Circle. This is such an important part of addressing what is coming up for scholars now.

	• Offer aligned support or connection	• Ensure as the Facilitator you always validate first (see examples in the Circle Quality section above).
		• To offer aligned support in this setting you can:
		  ○ Send love *(*if they don't need or want more intensive support)*
		  ○ Invite Resonance - especially around common feelings, emotions, or experiences that the community can relate to right now
		  ○ Ask the participant if they are willing to do Individual Work if more support would be beneficial

Work & Resonance 	• Warmly Launch
	• Guide the work to ensure it includes all steps *(optional: Deepening Questions)*
	• Attune & Validate
	• Invite Resonance *(what stood out, what that tells you about the person, & how it moves you)*
		Work:
		• **Encourage scholars to share Individual Work.** This can be particularly powerful during this time as individuals can connect around common experiences and challenges many of us are facing right now. You might name that "support" might have to look different than typical- but even from afar we can support by checking in on people, offering talk, sending something that tells people they are in our thoughts, etc.
		• **Badge Work.**
		  ○ At the middle schools, scholars are only sharing Noble Purpose and Big Heart badges in Circle. All others badges will be submitted to their Compass Teacher by the assigned due date.
		  ○ At VCP, scholars will choose 1 badge to share in Circle on a pre-scheduled date. They can choose to share this Work in their Affinity Circle if they wish. In addition, VCP scholars will be piloting a new type of Individual Work called "Real Stories." (more info to come on this)
		• **IW/CW/RW**. Scholars are also responsible for sharing 1 of these "organic" pieces of Work per semester so that they have brought a minimum of 4 pieces of Work (3 for VCP) to Circle by the end of the year.
		
		Resonance:
		• While it will take some adjusting, we can still meaningfully

		resonate with each other in a virtual Circle. If you notice participants are hesitant to resonate you can try one or more of these strategies: ○ Normalize any hesitance by warmly narrating it and giving some wait time ("I know this is a new format, so we might be a little hesitant at first and that makes sense. Let's all take a minute to think about what hit our hearts as ___ shared before we open to Resonance". Don't worry too much about getting the format correct, just speak from your attunement/heart) ○ Invite a participant to choose one person they would like to hear from *before* they share work. ○ Try the "chat" feature option for Resonance to scaffold more people into resonating. Be mindful that we don't want this to be the default replacement for 1:1 connection, but just a strategy that you can pull on as needed. ■ <u>You can scaffold verbal Resonance by asking a couple scholars to read theirs aloud</u> after everyone has typed in their Resonance. ■ Set the expectation that everyone chats some Resonance so that you are building skill across the Circle (not the time for a 100% moment) ○ The facilitator can always resonate to ensure participants are never left hanging. ● To close with connection, you can simply "air five" or "air hug" on a webcam.
Appreciations 	● Warmly Launch ● Appreciations include specific impact + action ● Maintain key Appreciation norms	● The core principles still apply- choosing one person to appreciate by naming something specific and how that impacted them or the community at large ● If participants are struggling to think of a recent example (if they haven't been interacting as often in this setting) encourage them to think back to examples from earlier in the year, or from the Circle they've just participated in. ● Similar to Resonance, if engagement is low you can try inviting participants to share Appreciations via the chat feature using the

		same norms (be specific + name the impact). ● To close with connection, you can simply “air five” or “air hug” on a webcam.
Closing 	● Invite the Circle to stand and embrace in a“group hug” or other symbolic connection ● Prompt reflection and intention to keep Circle alive ● Lead the closing chant, call, or other ritual	● Focus more on the opportunity for reflection than the closing cheer - encourage “eye contact” with every other Circle member and encourage scholars to consider their relationships and who they might want to offer support to or connect with after Circle ● Everyone can come off mute and verbally share your motto or rallying cry. ○ The audio delay has made closing joyfully clumsy for most of us. However, if it ends Circle on what is feeling like an awkward, disconnecting note, you can choose one scholar to say your cheer while everyone remains muted.