

Focused Circle Share Guidelines

1. Prompts around a central theme are introduced into the center of the circle during a focused share. Anyone can introduce a prompt, and anyone can answer.
2. One person at a time takes a turn speaking while the others **listen**. The talking bowl (fruit, rock, mute button, etc.) makes it very clear who has the floor, and it eliminates interruptions, confusion and cross talk.
3. Round robin responses—where everyone present has the opportunity to weigh in on each prompt—are welcome but not required. You are not required to speak during a focused share. Sometimes there is nothing to say or nothing to say yet.
4. It is wise to practice speaking from the "I." Rather than generalizing about how people feel, or how a particular group feels, or how someone else must feel, it is suggested that you say how *you* feel, specifically. In this way, circle share helps people to become increasingly self-referential, that is, looking *inside* rather than *outside* for direction.
5. Focused shares can appear to highlight our differences and similarities, and yet the only “right” answer is your own.

6. There is no need to plan and no one to impress. Just take the talking object (or press the unmute button) when you feel ready, and begin to speak. As long as you are speaking your truth, what could be wrong? In wanting to look good to others, we plan what we are going to say, withdrawing our attention from the person who is talking. Trust yourself enough to *allow* what is there for you to say to just *emerge*. Premeditation stifles Truth.

7. Listening without Judgment. Listening without Agenda. It is irrelevant whether or not you agree or disagree with what someone is saying. It doesn't matter whether you think they are right or they are wrong. What matters is that you listen carefully and accept what is being said as their reality. This is what their world looks like, this is how they feel, period, even if you are sure that with one small skillful remark you could set them straight or make it all better...

8. Listening without Agenda means that you are not there to solve problems or make interpretations for people. So often, in an attempt to be helpful, we suggest options and actions to solve others' problems. However, this is not the purpose of Holding Space. Listening without Judgement is a gift we give each other in Circle.

9. Becoming aware of the differences in our similarities and the similarities in our differences during a focused share is also a gift. This awareness hones the articulation of our individual truths.

10. In Circle Share, you practice Holding Space for others, while others practice Holding Space for you. Paradoxically, a group of humans becomes healing and converting only after its members have learned to stop trying to heal and convert. Community is a safe place precisely because no one is attempting to heal or convert you, to fix you, to change you. Everyone has the right to heal themselves.

11. Instead, the members accept you for who you are, differences and all. You are free to be you. And being so free, you are free to discard defenses, masks, disguises; free to seek your own mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health; free to explore and practice your own truth.

12. Holding Space in Circle Share is the practice of being present with the speaker, who stands alone with the truth of their own experience. It can be especially tempting during a focused share to “plus one” what another speaker has said, but the more useful response is not sharing whether you agree but to answer the focused prompt for yourself. We strive to refrain from offering external cues, reactions or judgments when another is speaking to encourage their guidance to come from within. We can reference what another’s words brought up for us, but only as a re-centering in the process of articulating our own truth.

13. While focused shares encourage journaling or other processing beforehand and afterwards, the practice of sitting in circle is the practice of not planning what you are going to say. Listen when it's time for listening, and speak when it is time to speak. Consider allowing rather than controlling. Letting go rather than holding on. Trusting your Truth to voice itself... see what happens. ヽ_(ツ)_/

14. Trusting your truth can feel vulnerable and scary. Vulnerability is having the courage to show up and be seen when we have no control over the outcome. Truth and courage aren't always comfortable, but they're never a weakness. People who wade into discomfort and vulnerability and tell the truth about their stories are the real badasses. 🤘 🤘

15. When we come together in the circle, we're practicing our *Courage* by speaking our truth and practicing our *Compassion* by listening without judgment.

16. Sometimes, after sharing something deeply meaningful, minutes, hours, or days later, we begin to feel regret sweep over us like a warm wave of nausea, a “vulnerability hangover” so to speak. We feel this regret because we’re taught that vulnerability is something we should be ashamed of instead of something to practice. Consider any vulnerability hangover experienced after Circle Share a reminder of your bravery.

17. The degree of individual growth that occurs in a group is contingent upon how much intimacy develops. In turn, that intimacy depends on trust. Trust grows when the vulnerable details that people share are handled with love and respect. Every person is welcome to share their experience at Circle Share with whom they choose. Details about another's story, however, are not public information, but confidential.

18. Respecting the circle's confidentiality includes asking consent before discussing someone's share with them after the session is over. As a speaker, you can indicate your willingness to receive follow-ups with the phrases "open cup" or "cup up." Similarly, communicating a share as "closed cup" or "cup down" signals that the speaker needed this space and does not wish to verbally process further.

19. Circle is an opportunity to check in with yourself on all levels. Please take care of yourself during this time—stretch, hydrate, go off camera, create a welcoming environment, or go to the bathroom—the container will hold.

Resources

- Guidelines are culled from: *Sacred Circles* by Robin Deen Carnes and Sally Craig and the works of Brené Brown, author of *Daring Greatly*
- Guidelines originally compiled by Hilary Egan and Na'la Phillips.
- Later revisions and additions by Christy HartSmith, Hilary Egan and Na'la Phillips.