



## Community Partners



## The Circle Process

### What is a Talking Circle?

Safe & Sound Community Partners have used Circles as an alternative communication form for working with Safe Place youth and community members. It is a process that brings together individuals who wish to engage in conflict resolution, healing, support, decision making or other activities in which honest communications, relationship development, and community building are core desired outcomes. Circles offer an alternative to contemporary meeting processes that often rely on hierarchy, win-lose positioning, and victim/rescuer approaches to relationships and problem solving. Derived from native traditions, circles bring people together in a way that creates trust, respect, intimacy, good will, belonging, generosity, mutuality and reciprocity.

*Our ancestors gathered around a fire in a circle. Families gather around the kitchen table in a circle to solve problems, support one another and connect with one another. The Peacemaking Circle method combines the Native American tradition of a “talking piece” with contemporary concepts of democracy and inclusiveness. Every person has a story and every story has a lesson to offer us. In the circle, people touch one another’s lives by sharing stories that have meaning. The stories weave people together in their common humanity creating a tapestry of great depth and beauty.*

### How does the Circle process work?

Circles may be only one session or involve a series of 4-5 sessions building to the group outcome. There are essentially four components of each Circle: introductions, building trust, issues and solutions. To begin a Circle, a common consensus of group values must be established. Active listening skills are developed during this process through the tradition of a “talking piece” allowing only the person holding the piece to speak. The talking piece is passed clockwise around a circle of typically not more than 10 or 15 people. A question is posed by the facilitators or group and each person is given an opportunity to respond. The participants can only speak when they have the talking piece. There is typically a centerpiece made up of participant’s items of significance to them.

The process is never about “changing others,” but rather is an invitation to change oneself and one’s relationship with the community. The process works because it brings people together in a way that allows them to see one another as human beings and to talk about what matters. Circles can be understood in terms of the values and principles upon which the group operates, and the structures they use to support these values and principles.



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### Values:

- Each circle develops its own values and principles
- Circles are designed by those who use them
- They are guided by a shared vision
- Circle call participants to act on their personal values
- They include all interests, and are accessible to all
- Offer everyone an equal and voluntary opportunity to participate
- Take a holistic approach, including the emotional, mental, physical and spiritual
- Circles maintain respect for all
- Encourage exploring instead of conquering differences
- Invite accountability to others and to the process

### Structure:

- Meeting space must be neutral, private and comfortable for participants (i.e. not the principal's office)
- Participants are seated in a circle focusing on the center where symbolic objects, brought by the participants, may be placed.
- A talking piece is used as a way to ensure respect between speakers and listeners.
- The talking piece is passed from person to person and only the person holding the piece may speak.
- Two "keepers" of the circle guide the participants, keeping it a safe space for all.
- Ceremony (icebreakers, experiential activities) are use to create safety and form.

