



Healing Circle Participant Guide

College of Health & Social Sciences
R.A.C.E. Initiative



SAN FRANCISCO
STATE UNIVERSITY

When Someone Deeply Listens to You

by John Fox

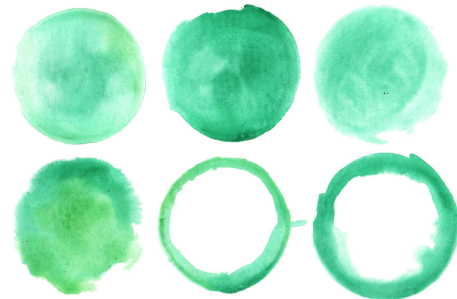
When someone deeply listens to you
it is like holding out a dented cup
you've had since childhood
and watching it fill up with
cold, fresh water.
When it balances on top of the brim,
you are understood.
When it overflows and touches your skin,
You are loved.
When someone deeply listens to you,
the room where you stay
starts a new life
and the place where you wrote
your first poem
begins to glow in your mind's eye.
It is as if gold has been discovered!
When someone deeply listens to you,
your bare feet are on the earth
and a beloved land that seemed distant
is now at home within you.



What is a Healing Circle?

“Deriving from practices of **Native Americans, First Nations, and Indigenous peoples**, the Circle Process allows for the formation of relationships, the honoring of voices, and the creation of unity. The process is, at its essence, a story sharing process, which brings together people as equals to have open exchanges about difficult issues or painful experiences in an atmosphere of respect and concern for everyone.

It is called "**Circle**" because everyone sits in a circle. An item called a “talking piece” is used to ensure each participant gets uninterrupted time to share with the group; the person holding the object is the only one who may speak. The talking piece is passed from person to person, and everyone is expected to respect others and be sensitive to their experiences as they share their stories. The others listen openly, without question or judgment” (Anderson, 2019, para. 1).



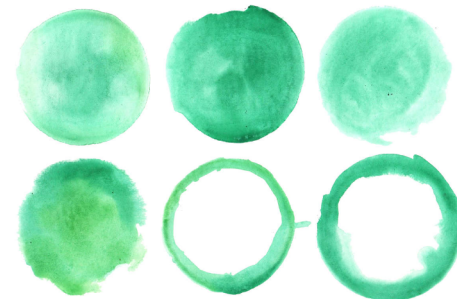
What is a Healing Circle?

“The key principles of the Circle Process are to:

- honor the presence and dignity and value the contribution of every participant;
- emphasize the connectedness among people;
- support emotional and spiritual expression; and
- give equal voice to all.

Confidentiality is also key, to ensure openness and emotional safety.

Furthermore, participation is voluntary; no participant is required to share unless they choose to” (Anderson, 2019, para. 1).



What are Healing Circle Roles?

3 CIRCLE ROLES



Circle member places their own aged wood on the fire

By aged, we mean members offer thoughtful comments usually after a moment of silence as opposed to blurting or quick reactionary responses.



Host keeps the fire going

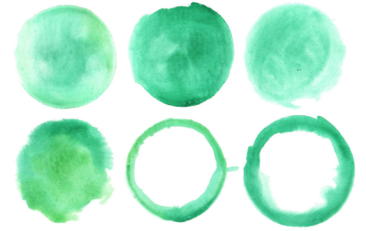
Hosts keep the fire going by ensuring everyone has the opportunity to share & moments of silence are honored.



Guardian ensures everyone on the rim is safe

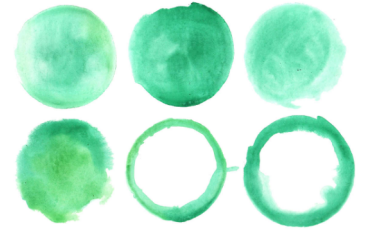
Guardians ensure safety by continually acknowledging the community agreement and referring to it when a member gets off track.

What are Healing Circle Roles?



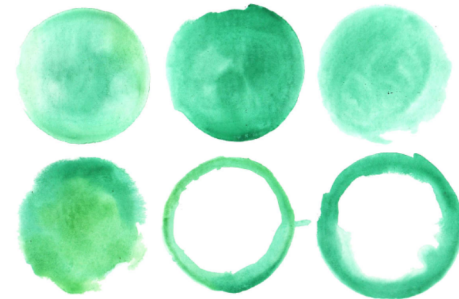
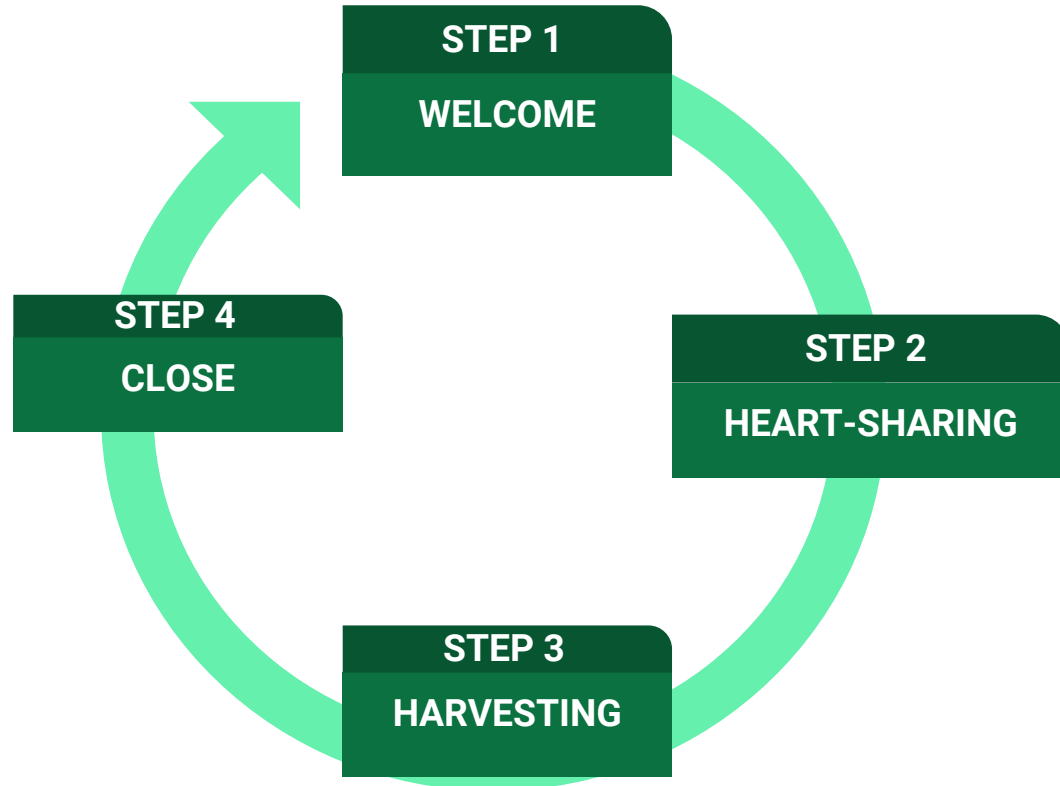
- The **Host and Guardian** perform service, not leadership, roles in the circle.
- If we continued the campfire metaphor, the **Host** is responsible for tending the fire (protecting the center): starting the fire and keeping the fire going without the fire getting out of control. The Host opens and closes the circle and might direct the transition from one segments of a circle to another. The Host is usually not there to be a subject matter expert. The host will also serve as the main contact for the group.
- Metaphorically, the **Guardian** is responsible for protecting the rim of the circle, making sure no one gets burned by being too close to the fire, and keeping an eye on those who feel the need to back away from the heat. Practically, the Guardian watches the energy of a group, protects the safety of the circle by ensuring agreements are kept, and rings the bell for silence. According to The Circle Way, creators of the Guardian role, “The guardian usually employs a gentle noise-maker, such as a chime, bell, or rattle, that signals to everyone to stop action, take a breath, and rest in a space of silence.”
- In person, the **Host and Guardian** sit opposite each other to ensure sightline to everyone in the circle.

What are Healing Circle Roles?



- **Circle members** both tend the fire and protect the rim. All participants share responsibility for holding the circle and for their own healing.
- **Any member** may call for the bell to initiate a pause.

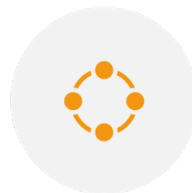
What is the Healing Circle Process?



What is the Healing Circle Process?: WELCOME



Warm welcome



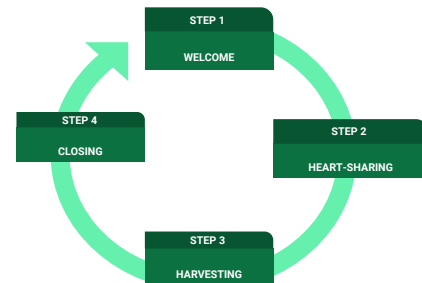
Entering the Circle



Circle Agreements



Introductions (if needed)



What is the Healing Circle Process?: WELCOME

ENTERING THE CIRCLE: SILENCE

Light a Candle or Online-Show a visual of a Candle

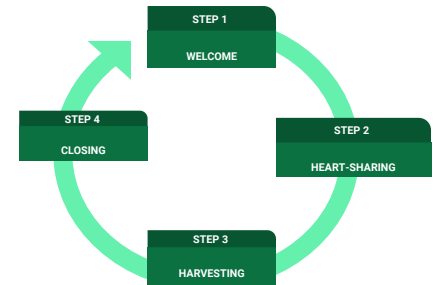
Have a Moment of Silence

Read a Poem or a Breathing Exercise or Meditation

Let Go of Whatever Keeps Us From Being Present

Come Into Ourselves, To How Our Bodies Feel, To Whatever Emotions
Are Present

Come Into Circle- We Are All Entering a Healing Space, A Sacred Space



What is the Healing Circle Process?: WELCOME

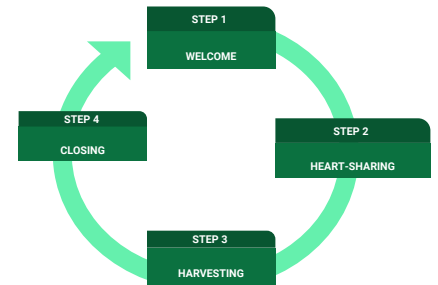
ENTERING THE
CIRCLE: BELL



Mindfulness Bell- Calls Us Back to the Present After a Member of the Group Has Spoken

Gentle Reminder Bell- Acknowledge Community Agreement & Bring Members Back Into Focus

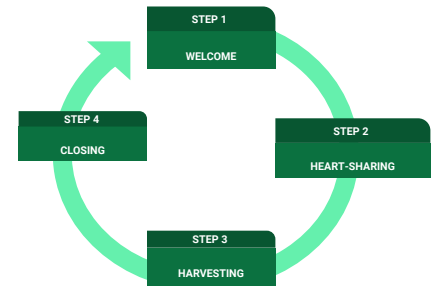
If a Bell is Triggering or Physically harmful (migraines, etc.), Silence May Be Used Instead



What is the Healing Circle Process?: WELCOME

INTRODUCTIONS

- **Goal:** Bring everyone's voice gently into the room; begin the process of connecting
- **Brief:** Model the length and keep it to that length
- **Common ground:** "We're in this together"
- **Example Questions:** What brings you to this healing circle? What do you hope to gain from this experience? Is there anything else you'd like this group to know about you?



What is the Healing Circle Process?: CIRCLE AGREEMENT

OUR INTENTION

The creation of healing circles intentionally centers well-being and caring as a foundation for racial justice. Healing circles recognize the trauma and pain of racism and racial injustice and uphold the hope for healing and growth that comes from connections and community. While each individual will ultimately define the experience of racial healing for themselves, we envision these healing circles as spaces for:

- Bearing witness to and naming the trauma, violence and pain of racism - present and past
- Validating the complexity and intersectionality of people's experience with race and racism
- Affirming the restorative power of connecting to those with shared experiences
- Honoring the safety and trust that is needed for people to be their authentic racial selves
- Sustaining our commitment to advancing the social justice and educational mission of the college
- Fostering our spiritual, emotional, interpersonal, and intellectual well-being as we engage in the practice of racial justice
- Creating safe spaces that allow us to dream and reinvent a racially just institution

DEVELOP CIRCLE AGREEMENT

As a group, create a list of ways our intention can be embodied and achieved.

Example questions may include...

How will we treat one another?

What should listening look like?

When will we speak?

How do we honor each other's stories?

What does trust look like in this group?

What does confidentiality look like?

What does commitment to this process look like? Engagement?

How often do we want to meet?

Will this be a closed or open group to new members?

What do we do when there is hurt?

What do we do when there is anger or conflict?



What is the Healing Circle Process?: HEART-SHARING PROCESS



ONE PERSON
SPEAKS AT TIME



EVERYONE SPEAKS
WITH INTENTION



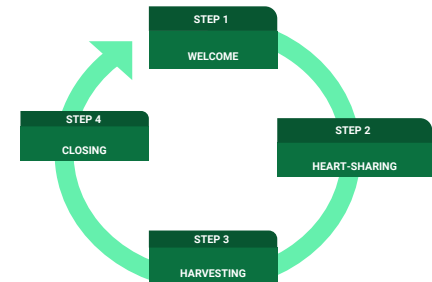
THE CIRCLE
LISTENS WITH
ATTENTION



A PAUSE & SILENCE
TO HONOR THE
SPEAKER



A PASS TO THE
NEXT



What is the Healing Circle Process?: HEART-SHARING PROCESS

Maintaining the Circle

- Asking deeply relevant, authentic questions that matter in our lives now
- Answering the question from our own experience
- Reflecting clearly if we need further clarification to understand someone else
- Asking open and honest questions of each other if a person asks for direct help

HEARTWORK

Attunement

- **aware of and responsive**

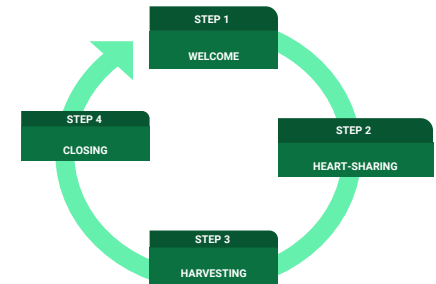
Accompaniment

- **with trust and openness to mystery**

What is the Healing Circle Process?: HARVESTING

Ways of Transitioning into Harvesting

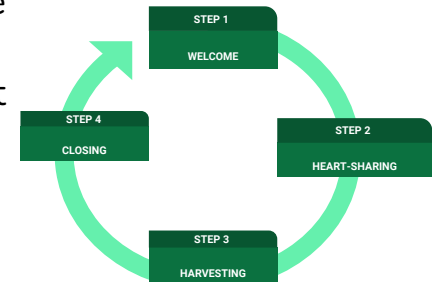
- Host, Guardian, or group decides to continue with their individual learning from the previous round and just pass the talking piece around again, or
- Group proposes questions they'd like the group to address today, or
- Host synthesizes Heart-sharing round and offers a question.



What is the Healing Circle Process?: HARVESTING

Formats and practices for harvesting

- **Personal**—We go around the circle again using the talking piece, this time each in turn takes their own discovery process deeper by speaking to what they have harvested from the previous round.
- **Whole circle**—The circle explores questions using two different circle practices:
 - *Popcorn Council*
 - Talking-piece variation where we don't go around in circle but rather anyone can share their thoughts, without cross-talk or follow-up questions.
 - Used to get ideas out quickly, e.g., brainstorming
 - Used for harvesting experience in large groups where not everyone needs to share
 - Used to report individual reflection where not all will want to share
 - *Conversation Council*
 - Similar to normal conversation without persuasion or disagreement



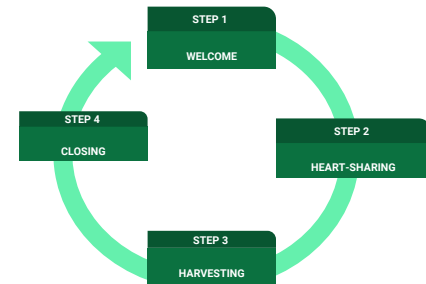
What is the Healing Circle Process?: HARVESTING

Tips for Hosts

- Honor the collection of inner wisdom before priming occurs in the group by having a moment of silence or the opportunity to write a question down.
- Harvesting to find universals or collectives may or may not ultimately be of value to the one. Beware of group think.

Because conversation is how we normally interact with each other, we can easily fall into habits. Take some time to think about how you would address these situations in circle:

- Trying to fix or save
- Trying to impose a belief system on another
- Dominating or interrupting a conversation
- Not giving time to the quiet voices in the room
- Believing you know what's best for another



What is the Healing Circle Process?: CLOSING THE CIRCLE

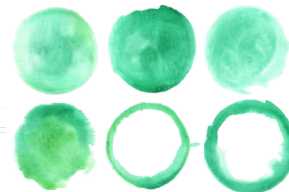
CHECK OUT

SILENCE

CANDLE OUT

Typical check-out question: In one word or sentence, what are you leaving with from today's circle? What is percolating inside that you'd like to continue to work on?

Silence between bells: May start with a poem or song before ringing the bell for silence

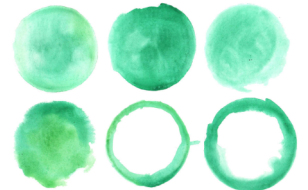


Healing Circle Agendas

Below are links to session agendas to utilize for Sessions 1 & 2. The agendas include activities that will support group members in the [forming](#) stage of group development by sharing individual and collective “whys” for participating in the Healing Circle, as well as establishing community agreements.

[Session 1 Agenda](#)

[Session 2 Agenda](#)

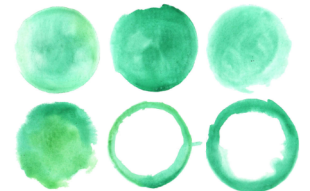


Differences between physical and virtual circles

The following table shows how to transfer what you're accustomed to doing in physical circles to virtual circles.

| What you're used to | What you can do instead |
|---|---|
| A center with a lit candle and possibly other objects (such as flowers) | Each participant can light a candle of his/her own, adding any other objects that are meaningful. For example, in a grief circle, participants might also display a photo of a lost loved one. |
| A single talking piece | All participants can have a talking piece of their own. |
| Holding a common talking piece while speaking | Participants can hold their own personal talking piece while speaking. This tangible cue reminds them to speak only when it's in their hand (and not to speak when it isn't). |
| Visual cues: passing a common talking piece from hand to hand | Verbal and visual cues Participants can: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hold their talking piece up so it's visible to participants, which indicates they wish to speak.• Say, "I'm passing the talking piece to [name]."• Pick up their talking piece from an imaginary center and say "I'm picking up the talking piece." Then say "I'm returning the piece to the center" when finished.• Raise hands to indicate they wish to speak—either physically or using the Raise Hand feature within Zoom. |
| Reading the agreements | Agreements can simply be read by the host as in physical circles or they can be screen-shared so everyone can see them and a participant can read them aloud. Agreements can also be included in the invitation. |
| Reading a poem or sharing a photo | As above, text can be screen-shared and so can images. |

Virtual Considerations



Virtual Considerations

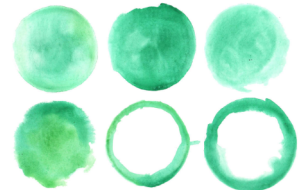
Ritual elements

Use the same ritual elements in virtual circles that you would in physical circles. For example, you can:

- Use a bell to begin and end a circle or mark a period of silence
- Encourage participants to light their own candles
- Make sure participants have a talking piece at the ready (as described earlier in this document).

Virtual Roles

- Host & Guardian are co-hosts via Zoom
- Guardian role includes “technical guardian”... muting participants with noisy backgrounds, hiding videos of distracting participants, etc.

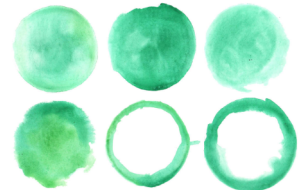


Virtual Considerations

Structure

Use the same structure for a virtual circle as you do a physical circle, including:

- Welcome
 - Transition into the circle (for example by ringing a bell, observing a period of silence, or reading a quote or poem)
 - Make introductions (if necessary)
 - Share intention and agreements
- Check-in/share from the heart
- Harvest
- Close



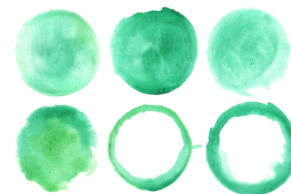
Virtual Considerations

Tips for Preparing for a virtual circle for participants

Before you participate in a physical circle, your host spends some time preparing the space. In virtual circles, you also prepare your own space.

To prepare for a virtual circle

- Identify an area in your home that's free of visible and audible distractions and also has a strong internet connection.
- Set up your computer or device and be sure to plug it in (video conferencing consumes a lot of power).
- Light a candle and position any other objects (such as flowers or photos) that help you create sacred space.
- Find a small object to use as a talking piece. You will hold it when you speak.



References

Anderson, R. (2019, February 26). *The Origin of Our Healing Circles*. Healing Justice.
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