

The Circle Way

BASIC GUIDELINES FOR CALLING A CIRCLE

Circle started around the
cook-fires of humanity's
ancestors and has
accompanied us ever since.
We remember this space.
When we listen, we speak
more thoughtfully. We lean in
to shared purpose.

COMPONENTS OF CIRCLE

What transforms a meeting into a circle is the willingness of people to shift from informal socializing or opinionated discussion into a receptive attitude of thoughtful speaking and deep listening that embodies the practices and structures outlined here.



INTENTION

Intention shapes the circle and determines who will come, how long the circle will meet, and what kinds of outcomes are to be expected. The caller of the circle spends time articulating intention and invitation

START-POINT OR WELCOME

Once people have gathered, it is helpful for the host, or a volunteer participant, to begin the circle with a gesture that shifts people's attention from social space to council space. This gesture of welcome may be a moment of silence, reading a poem, or listening to a song – whatever invites centering.

SETTING THE CENTER

The center of a circle is like the hub of a wheel: all energies pass through it, and it holds the rim together. To help people remember how the hub helps the group, the center of a circle usually holds objects that represent the intention of the circle. Any symbol that fits this purpose or adds beauty will serve: flowers, a bowl or basket, a candle.

CHECK-IN / GREETING

Check-in helps people into a frame of mind for council and reminds everyone of their commitment to the expressed intention. It insures that people are truly present. Verbal sharing, especially a brief story, weaves the interpersonal net.

Check-in usually starts with a volunteer and proceeds around the circle. If an individual is not ready to speak, the turn is passed and another opportunity is offered after others have spoken. Sometimes people place individual objects in the center as a way of signifying their presence and relationship to the intention.

GUARDIAN

The single most important tool for aiding self-governance and bringing circle back to intention is the role of guardian. One circle member volunteers to watch and safeguard group energy and observe the circle's process. 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, rest in a space of silence. The guardian makes this signal again and speaks to why s/he called the pause. Any member may call for a pause.

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SETTING CIRCLE AGREEMENTS

The use of agreements allows all members to have a free and profound exchange, to respect a diversity of views, and to share responsibility for the well-being and direction of the group. Agreements often used include:

- We hold all stories or personal material in confidentiality
- We listen to each other with compassion and curiosity
- We ask for what we need and offer what we can
- We agree to employ a group guardian to watch our need, timing and energy. We agree to pause at a signal when we feel the need to pause

THREE PRINCIPLES

1. **Leadership rotates** among all circle members
2. **Responsibility is shared** for the quality of experience
3. **Reliance is on wholeness**, rather than on any personal agenda

THREE PRACTICES

1. **Speak with intention:** noting what has relevance to the conversation in the moment
2. **Listen with attention:** respectful of the learning process for all members of the group
3. **Tend to the well-being of the circle:** remaining aware of the impact of our contributions

FORMS OF COUNCIL

1. **Talking piece council** is often used as a part of check-in, check-out and whenever there is a desire to slow down the conversation, collect all voices and contributions, and be able to speak without interruption.
2. **Conversation council** is often used when reaction, interaction and an interjection of new ideas, thoughts and opinions are needed.

3. **Reflection, or silent council** gives each member time and space to reflect on what is occurring, or needs to occur, in the course of a meeting. Silence may be called so that each person can consider the role or impact they are having on the group, or to help the group realign with their intention, or to sit with a question until there is clarity.

CHECK-OUT AND FAREWELL

At the close of a circle meeting, it is important to allow a few minutes for each person to comment on what they learned, or what stays in their heart and mind as they leave. Closing the circle by checking out provides a formal end to the meeting, a chance for members to reflect on what has transpired, and to pick up objects if they have placed something in the center.

As people shift from council space to social space or private time, they release each other from the intensity of attention being in circle requires. Often after check-out, the host, guardian, or a volunteer will offer a few inspirational words of farewell or signal a few seconds of silence before the circle is released.

May your circles be great teachers and places to rest on the journey.

This handout is a gift from **THE CIRCLE WAY**, a loosely connected global circle of colleagues who practice, consult, and teach The Circle Way. Originally mentored and guided by Ann Linnea and Christina Baldwin of PeerSpirit Inc., we offer our own consulting services and training opportunities all over the world. Drawing on the same set of teachings and practices, we work both independently and in partnership with one another to spread what we have learned further into the world.