

## THE USE OF CIRCLES AND CLASSROOM MEETINGS TO HELP DEVELOP A COLLABORATIVE AND RESTORATIVE CLASSROOM

The circle format and use of a talking piece is an ancient form of communication for spiritual, political and communal life and is found throughout world traditions. It has been adapted for discussion and decision-making by teachers, social workers, judges, community members, police officers and students. The circle is used throughout the world when a group of people want to talk about an issue in a way that allows everyone to participate and contribute.

Circles can be used in the classroom to discuss many issues including moral and ethical issues, behaviour management, (peacemaking), problem solving and curriculum issues or simply as a format for having fun. It can be effectively used to decide upon classroom rules, and set up a climate of collaboration amongst students.

### A TALKING PIECE

In order to facilitate and share speaking time in the circle, a talking piece is introduced. The desire to interrupt can be as strong as the desire to be heard without interruption. The talking piece can be almost any item. In many circles a feather is the favoured talking piece. As the feather is passed around, each participant strokes the tines in line so the bird can fly free as does open communication during circle time. Indigenous Australians have used a talking stick for generations, so a stick signed by all classmates can make a favoured talking piece. A talking piece can also lend itself to being tossed around the group. A koosh ball, a sock, a balloon, a paper airplane can energise a tired class at the same time as allowing one person to speak at a time. Encourage participants to create their own talking piece, provided it is not too large, and has meaning that is connected to the ideals of community, - caring and peace.

The guidelines that cover the use of the talking piece are:

- It always moves clockwise around the circle, unless otherwise decided by the group.
- You do not talk when you do not have the talking piece
- You can pass the talking piece, you do not have to speak

When you hold the talking piece, you must:

- Speak honestly and from the heart
- Speak with respect for others
- Try not to speak at length
- Speak to issues of the circle

**Circles or class meetings usually follow a set format:**

**Opening:** The opening sets the tone of the circle/a level of comfort and safety. It usually involves the keeper of the circle (in an educational sense, this can be the teacher, but all students can be involved as keepers at various times), introducing everyone, or reinforcing the role of the talking piece. They can also be a simple statement as to why the circle has been formed. E.g This is a healing, we are here today to right a wrong, to make a group whole, to restore a trust, to help us understand each other better so we can work with one another. It might simply be formed to play a game.

**Guidelines:** These could be the values decided upon by the class for the rules by which the circle discussion operates, including the use of (and when ) the talking piece. Guidelines could include:

- Everything said in the circle, stays in the circle
- No put downs (verbal & non-verbal)
- Value and Respect others' opinions

- **Reviewing curriculum** – How do we feel about linear equations? How can we make this topic more relevant? Who would like some support or buddy to work through these curriculum issues? Who is willing to be that buddy?
- **Brainstorming ideas**

### **Role of the Keeper/Teacher**

Guide the Process – “We ask you for suggestions”.

Promote Equality – “We all have important experiences and something to offer.”

Generate Respect – “We are different, but we all have something to learn from each other.”

Share Responsibility – “Problems belong to all of us – and we all have a responsibility for finding solutions.”

Encourage New Ideas – “Every idea is a good one – and helps us work together to find answers.”

Seek Solutions that Benefit Everyone – “Can we find a way to meet the needs of all of us.”

Promote Brainstorming – “Can we imagine some ways to deal with the challenges.

Maintain Positive Perspective – “We are moving forward in a great way.”

### **CLASSROOM CIRCLES**

Classroom circles are a great way to allow students to develop and enhance life skills that are so important to all of us. They take many forms, from getting to know one another, to curriculum topics, to cooperative activities to problem solving and conflict resolution. Everyone takes part in what becomes a democratic, participatory classroom with a focus on relationships and responsibilities.

Some of the outcomes of effective classroom meetings in circle format are:

- When students feel respected and are included in a dignified process, they feel compelled to own their behaviour.
- When students participate in processes that are procedurally ‘fair’ they begin to take responsibility for personal behaviour.
- When students are part of the solution they begin to develop empathy and insight.
- Students who participate in classroom meetings learn about fairness and justice.
- Students when provided with a ‘safe’ forum are able to talk about what was done to them and how it can be fixed.

### **RESOURCES**

#### **Inyahead Press**

Ph 1300 556 830

[www.inyahead.com.au](http://www.inyahead.com.au)

#### **St Lukes Innovative Resources Cards**

Ph: (03) 5442 0500

[www.stlukes.org.au](http://www.stlukes.org.au)

*Circle Time*

*Circle Time Resources*

*Coming Around to Circle Time*

*Circle Time for the Very Young*

*Circle Time in Secondary Schools – Set of 3 booklets*

*Circle Time and Learning about Feelings*

*Circle Time and Learning about Stories*

*Circle Time for Emotional Literacy*

➤ *I Can Monsters*

➤ *Strength Cards for Kids*

➤ *Strength Cards*

➤ *The Bears*

➤ *Stones have Feelings Too*

➤ *Mates Traits*

➤ *Angels with Attitude*

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## **COMMUNITY CONFERENCING CHECKLIST**

<b>Before the conference</b>	
Is conferencing appropriate?	
Who will facilitate conference?	
Who will attend?	
Who will participate?	
Who will observe?	
Are both the victim and offender supported?	
Who will contact participants?	
How will information re conferencing process be made available to participants?	
Who will meet with participants prior to conference to collect information?	
How will this information be collected?	
Where will records of these meetings/calls be kept?	
What will be the time and date of conference?	
Where will the conference be held?	
Who will organize venue?	
Do all participants have access to transport?	
<b>At Conference:</b>	
How will seating be organized?	
Who will meet and greet participants?	
Who will enter conference room first?	
How will participants be introduced to each other?	
Who will document proceedings?	
How will final agreement be written and duplicated prior to signing off?	
Who will organize refreshments and other needs for conference?	
<b>After Conference?</b>	
Who will facilitator debrief with?	
Who will contact key participants some time after the conference?	
When will this contact be made?	
Will the outcomes of the conference be shared with other members of the school community?	