



## **CLASSROOM CONNECTION CIRCLE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

1. Do I have to include every element in my classroom Connection Circle?

Jan- Each of the 9 elements presented in the on-line training plays a critical role in creating a full Restorative Circle experience. To eliminate one element risks reducing the sacred, safe and inclusive nature of the Restorative Circle. In time and with experience, each element will become second nature to you, and you will realize that no element is expendable. With that said, the elements may be simplified and streamlined requiring little time and effort. For example, you may decide to make the Opening a simple greeting, have the circle do only one deep breath together for the Mindful Moment or reduce the number of Guiding Question rounds.

Leslye - You may choose an appropriate activity or game for an Opening, Closing or for one of your Guiding Questions.

2. How long should I spend on each Classroom Connection Circle?

Jan-The time you invest in a Classroom Connection Circle will vary depending on your schedule, the maturity and number of participants and purpose of the Circle. As mentioned in question #1, you can practice all 9 elements of the Connection Circle in a short amount of time. Some Circles may last as little as 15 minutes and others may require as much as an hour. It is important to never rush the Circle and at the same time don't prolong the Circle beyond its usefulness and the participants' abilities and attention spans.

3. What is the best way to handle the challenge of the one student who refuses to participate and influences the other students to not engage?

Jan-The answer to this question begins within the heart of the Circle Keeper and whether he/she is practicing a Restorative attitude internally. To be "Restorative", whether in the framework of a Classroom Connection Circle or another type of Restorative practice, is to embrace the truth that every person and relationship is a precious gift, worthy of respect, honor and dignity no matter their behavior. This truth must always take precedence over process, activities and agenda. When we have searched our souls and are guided by this truth, then and only then are we prepared to Restoratively and effectively address challenging Circle

behaviors. At this point, the following are some practical ideas to manage challenging Circle behavior:

- Ask the teacher in advance to seat the challenging kids next to the well-behaved kids to reduce negative interaction.
- Ask the teacher in advance to manage discipline issues that may arise in the Circle and explain your role as the Circle Keeper.
- Establish Circle Guidelines as a group and get verbal agreement from each participant by passing the talking piece.
- Incorporate games or movement activities in the Circle to maintain attention and add variety.
- Invite the challenging student to choose the next talking piece or do another task to assist you.
- Always use a calm and respectful voice if addressing the student directly.
- Never call out or shame the student in the Circle.
- Be patient and realize that students improve in Circle behavior as they grow in their trust of you and become more accustomed to the process.
- Have a Restorative Chat with the student in private outside of the Circle time.
- Keep Guiding Questions compelling and fun!
- Pass the talking piece and ask, "What would make this Circle more enjoyable for everyone?"

Leslye - If the student does not want to be in the Circle, let them participate by sitting in the classroom elsewhere quietly. You may note that eventually they come closer and closer toward the Circle, and at that time invite them to join you in the Circle.

Jeannette - In an informal or private conversation, let the student know you see leadership qualities in him/her and that you're depending on him/her to help you lead the group in a positive way.

#### 4. How often do I have to hold circles?

Serena - This is one of those times that the saying, "Practice makes perfect" fits. The more often you hold circles, the better everyone gets at them and the more benefits of relationship building are experienced. I suggest holding them at least weekly, but more often is best as your schedule allows. One way to do this is to hold circles of different lengths of time so you don't feel you are missing a lot of instructional time. Another way of incorporating circles into your day is to hold academic circles that are related to your curriculum content.

Leslye - Use celebrations as an opportunity to be in Circle where honoring each one is offered. Consider using different types of Circles as situations present themselves.

5. Do we have to sit in a circle or may I have students at their desks?

Serena - Sitting in a circle is very important to the restorative circle process. This allows everyone to be seen and heard and to experience shared power in the circle. It is critical to sharing that there be no desks in front of students. The circle also acts as a container for whatever is being discussed and that provides a sense of safety when talking about important issues. Sitting in a circle also sets this sacred time apart from the rest of the instructional part school day.

Leslye - The Circle format suggests a level playing field, there is no front or back, all are equal participants. And thus each one gets a turn to speak if they choose as the talking piece goes around the Circle from person to person, all are included.

Jeannette - The symbol of the Circle is strengthened when there are no barriers (desks) between us.

6. How vulnerable should I be with my students?

Leslye - You will learn over time that what you model invites your students' level of participation. If you tell stories about yourself speaking of challenges you experienced, things you learned from others as well as your own mistakes, your students will feel comfortable opening up in the Circle. This allows connections to develop between all gathered speaking of awkward moments, revealing experiences that changed their life direction. So, speak as vulnerably as you are comfortable step by step as you develop this process with your class.

7. Is it necessary to go around the Circle a second time for each Guiding Question that is asked?

Leslye - It is important to let each one know that they have time to reflect on the question asked so that they are speaking from their heart. If anyone needs to listen from their heart to others first and gather their own thoughts, you want to give them ample opportunity to do so. Going around the Circle a second time lets those who weren't ready to speak the first time do so, if they wish. And so you want the talking piece to go all the way around the Circle again for this opportunity.

8. Why are Circle participants allowed to pass the talking piece without saying anything? Shouldn't everyone have to contribute?

Jan: Though the Classroom Connection Circle is designed to encourage full expression of emotions and thoughtful reflections in a respectful and unhurried space, we never require or force participants to share. In typical classroom settings, some students often feel as if their thoughts and opinions are of little or no value, or that they have no decision-making control over what they do or whether they participate. As Kay Pranis says, “The talking piece is a powerful equalizer”. Though it carries an implicit assumption that every participant has something important to offer the group it also implies that everyone, no matter their age, is entitled to the dignity and freedom to choose when and if they share from their hearts--something that we adults expect and take for granted. The freedom to pass the talking piece with or without speaking reduces the control of the keeper and consequently shares control of the process with all participants. This increases the participants' “buy in” to the process and strengthens their ownership of the Circle. Finally, never underestimate the power of listening. If all a student does in Circle is listen, he or she will grow, relax, feel safe, learn and most importantly, feel a part of something powerful and special!