

# Teaching Restorative Practices with Classroom Circles



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# Introduction: Teaching Restorative Practices with Classroom Circles

*“Because of our class circles, students accepted more responsibility for their roles in both creating and solving the problems. It became much easier to encourage students to solve their problems themselves; in part because I gained more confidence that students had the skills to do so, but also in part because of how the project shifted the way I communicate with my students.”*

--Fourth Grade Teacher

This manual supports the teaching of restorative practices and skills in your classroom. Restorative Practices are a framework for **building community** and for **responding to challenging behavior** through authentic dialogue, coming to understanding, and making things right.

This manual describes how to hold restorative circles in classrooms. It contains step-by-step instructions for circles that build community, teach restorative concepts and skills, and harness the power of



restorative circles to set things right when there is conflict. Using these methods consistently will help to create calmer, more focused classrooms. Teachers who use these methods often find that the overall proportion of time dedicated to managing behavior is reduced. This means more instructional time becomes available. It also means that students (and teachers) have happier, more peaceful experiences of their school days.<sup>1</sup>

Restorative thinking is a significant shift from punishment-oriented thinking. People, including students, who are invited into restorative dialogue are sometimes confused by the concept of “making things right.” Their default response to the question “What can we do to make things right?” often has to do with punishment. It is said that “children live what they learn.” When what they have learned is that troublesome behavior demands a punishment-oriented response that is how they will live. But restorative practices invite different ways of responding. These new ways must be learned through experience. The activities in this manual give students the necessary experiences to support a shift toward restorative ways of thinking and behaving.

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<sup>1</sup> One of the best resources for research on restorative practices is the International Institute of Restorative Practices, online at [www.iirp.org](http://www.iirp.org).

Like students, teachers and administrators also find it challenging to make the shift to restorative ways of thinking. Even when we understand the value and concepts of restorative justice, it can be very difficult to move from theory to practice. This manual invites those who lead the lessons it describes—teachers and other adults in the room—to also be participants, to use the methods themselves to experience restorative practices.

The activities in this manual have been shaped by students who showed up in circles in ways that were brilliant, touching, and inspired. Each activity has gone through several iterations of development, and we encourage you to modify them as well. Adapting them to your teaching style and the needs and circumstances of your students and your school, is completely in the spirit of restorative justice, which seeks above all to do what is right in the particular circumstances where it is used. If something in here doesn't feel quite right to you, modify it; make it right.

It is our hope that your time in circle with these activities will help deepen your understanding of restorative practices. We hope you will find that after you work through a dozen or so of these activities you will see significant results. We wish you success as you work to build a positive, supportive, friendly and just classroom environment. **Classroom circles are the foundation of this process.**

**Restorative Justice** brings persons harmed by crime and the person who harmed them, along with affected family and community members, together in dialogue that aims to build understanding, explore how the crime has impacted those involved, including the community, and develop agreements for what will be done to make things right. The result: truly meaningful justice for all involved.

These dialogues take place with participants sitting in circle, so they are sometimes called circle dialogues.

# Part One: Restorative Practices and the Skills of Circle Keeping

Restorative Practices build community and can help set things right when the integrity of the community is challenged by harmful behaviors.

When people come together for restorative interactions they sit in circles. Circle dialogue is a fundamental element of restorative dialogue.

Classroom circles support the two main goals of restorative practices: building community; and responding to harms through dialogue that sets things right.

## Restorative Community in the Classroom

Restorative practices cultivate a culture in which everyone feels like they belong. They build a particular sense of community in which every member--students, teacher, parent volunteers, aides--feel that they are *seen, heard, and respected*.

The activities in this manual are sequenced to support steady growth in the understandings and skills needed to support authentic dialogue and problem solving. They emphasize fairness through understanding, and including everyone who is immediately affected by challenging circumstances in discovering the solutions.



### Goals for Students

1. Students will learn to value and regularly use pro-active, positive ways to build and maintain a peaceful classroom community.
2. Students will develop and enhance positive and supportive connections with peers.
3. Students will develop an understanding of the principles and vocabulary of restorative justice.
4. Students will learn how to participate in circle dialogues, including the four circle guidelines.
5. Students will learn to use and respect a talking piece.
6. Students will learn how to use restorative questions to support conflict resolution and other types of communication.
7. Students will learn to identify who is affected by misbehaviors, and how.
8. Students will contribute to developing appropriate ideas for how to make things right when harms have occurred.
9. Students will learn how and when to ask for a restorative circle.
10. Students will learn to communicate how they are affected by given situations using affective statements and restorative questions.



### Goals for Teachers

1. Teachers will understand the core principles of restorative justice and restorative practices and how they differ from traditional or punitive approaches.
2. Teachers will know how to use restorative practices in many situations where punitive discipline approaches might have been used in the past.
3. Teachers will know how to introduce and lead circle dialogues.
4. Teachers will know how to transition into and out of “circle time” and can switch roles between circle keeper and teacher effectively.
5. Teachers will have an understanding of the principle of “connection before content” as it applies to restorative circles.
6. Teachers will know how to sequence activities to build trust among students so they become more willing to communicate authentically.
7. Teachers will know restorative questions and how to use them.
8. Teachers will understand affective communication and will experience how it supports classroom discipline and community building.

“We have learned a way of having a dialogue that we as a culture did not have. The ability to take real life experiences on our campus and in our community and have a forum to work with them in a way that is transformative in the school is rare. The response to this process has been overwhelmingly positive.”

--A charter school Director

### Goals for Classroom Community

1. The classroom community will have established agreements about how to participate in circle.
2. Community members will share a sense of responsibility for maintaining agreements and many members will do so proactively during circle time and at other times, including out-of-classroom time.
3. The classroom community will identify specific issues to address and will have honest, authentic discussions about these issues.
4. Procedures will be established for calling attention to issues and conflicts and for requesting help.
5. Procedures will be established for engaging in restorative dialogues around issues and conflicts.
6. It will be emotionally, psychologically, and physically safe for students to share concerns about conflicts, issues, and behaviors that are affecting them.
7. There will be high participation by students in circle dialogues, with little or no passing.




## What is Restorative Justice? What are Restorative Practices?


Restorative Justice is an alternative to using punishment to manage misbehavior. Punishment-based approaches are the tradition most of us are familiar with, because they are the basis of our criminal justice system, guided by the idea that punishment, if fair and proportionate, is the best response to crime. In practice this means identifying, prosecuting, and punishing the offender. Often this is done at great cost to society, with little healing for victims and communities and outright harmful effect on offenders and their families.

School discipline has for the most part taken its cue from the criminal justice system. The focus is on punishing wrongdoers with the aim of enforcing behaviors that are safe and non-disruptive. When punishment does not work, misbehaving students may be excluded through suspension or expulsion, with possibly serious long-term harmful consequences to them and society. There is little or no opportunity for social and emotional learning.

**Restorative practices in schools** are based on restorative justice principles instead of punishment. They aim first to build classroom communities that are supported by clear agreements, authentic communication, and specific tools to bring issues and conflicts forward in a helpful way. They provide specific pathways to repair harms by bringing together those who are affected by misbehavior in a dialogue to address concerns, achieve understanding, and come to agreement about setting things right. In addition to serving the cause of fairness and justice, restorative approaches make safer schools and contribute to social and emotional learning.

As schools adopt and gain experience with restorative practices several shifts in perspective take place. These shifts don't typically happen all at once. Nor do they typically happen perfectly. Three of the most important shifts are shown in the chart below.

Three Shifts Toward Restorative Schools and Classrooms	
From...	To...
 <p>Efforts to suppress misbehavior based on the view that misbehavior is evidence of failing students or classrooms.</p>	<p>Recognizing and using the inherent value of misbehavior as an opportunity for social and emotional learning.</p>
 <p>Authority-driven disciplinary actions that focus only on the identified misbehaving students.</p>	<p>Restorative circles that bring together everyone who is most immediately affected by the incident.</p>
 <p>Punishment and exclusion is used to control misbehavior and motivate positive behavior changes.</p>	<p>Dialogue leading to understanding and action to set things right and repair and restore relationships.</p>

 The **first shift** acknowledges *that troublesome behavior is normal*, and when students behave in troublesome ways they create opportunities to learn important social and emotional skills. What is important is not so much that they got into trouble in the first place, but what they learn along the way. Making things right is a powerful learning experience.



The **second shift** is a departure from the retributive model in which an authority, after taking testimony from the aggrieved party, decides guilt and assigns punishment. In restorative practices the authority figure acts more as a convener and facilitator. The initial investigation is concerned with identifying who was significantly affected by the incident. The facilitator invites them into a circle dialogue and, if they accept the invitation, helps prepare them. During the circle dialogue the problem and its impacts are explored and the group comes up with ideas on how to make things right. Usually this means the students who were the source of the trouble take specific actions that address the consequences of their choices. Consider the difference in outcomes between the authoritarian/punitive approach and the restorative approach: the first breeds resentment, alienation and shame and/or possibly an equally troublesome habit of fearing and submitting to authority; the second builds empathy, responsibility and helps restore relationships.



The **third shift** moves the locus of responsibility for well-being of the community from the shoulders of the experts to the community itself. While counseling and similar strategies have their place and are often helpful by themselves, they are immeasurably strengthened when complemented by restorative practices that challenge those who are in the circle dialogue to share information with each other and to come to agreements as a group.

#### What are the results of restorative practices?

There is a growing body of research supporting the effectiveness of restorative practices in schools. Evidence<sup>2</sup> shows that restorative practices can result in:

- Reductions in disciplinary referrals to principals
- Reductions in suspensions and expulsions
- Reductions in amount of instructional time lost to managing student behavior challenges
- Improved teacher morale
- Improved teacher retention
- Improved academic outcomes
- Reductions in disproportionate referrals of minority students.

The anecdotal evidence—what teachers who have used the curriculum in this manual say—is compelling, albeit hard to measure. We have sprinkled some of their comments throughout this manual. They have to do with feeling more connected with students, with increased understanding, patience, and compassion. We know of at least one teacher who had decided to quit her career after eight years of teaching. She was so fed up that she was certain restorative circles would fail with her students. After all, everything else she had tried had failed. But as the students began to open up to each other she started seeing them with new eyes. She remembered why she was called into the profession in the first place. Relationships in her classroom improved, and it became more peaceful and focused. Instead of students being stuck in conflict, repeating the same destructive behaviors over and over again, she saw authentic social and emotional learning occur; she saw students mature during the year and become more skillful in their interactions. Her hope and optimism was renewed. She is still teaching.

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<sup>2</sup> Refer to IIRP research

## Evolution of a Restorative Classroom and School Climate

The ideas presented here are intended to support the evolution of a restorative climate, one classroom at a time. Making the change from a punitive to a restorative culture is a significant undertaking, and can be quite challenging. It happens over time and as a result of sustained effort. The classroom circles described in this manual are a part of the effort. These circles will be most successful when supported by a whole-school approach to restorative practices, including community building in the daily curriculum and restorative practices in the school's disciplinary policies. Change tends to happen slowly and sometimes progresses at a rate that is all but invisible. But with perseverance the moment of realization comes when we recognize that our efforts have taken root and are yielding results. Here are some indicators by which you can recognize the emergence of restorative cultures in classrooms:

- Students have experience dealing with conflicts and feel reasonably safe and supported in doing so.
- The class works together to identify and solve problems that interfere with learning.
- While the teacher is still in charge, there is a shift to shared responsibility for behavior management. It becomes more of a team effort, with most of the students on the team.
- Through restorative practices students' needs for social and emotional learning are supported in positive ways. Over the course of a year this growth can be as observable as growth in academic skills and knowledge.
- Conflicts are often managed by gathering in circles, following circle guidelines, and using restorative questions as a framework for a dialogue in which understanding is reached and there is opportunity for creating mutually acceptable agreements about how to make things right.

*"Before we started with class circles and restorative questions I felt that it was my sole responsibility to solve problems and take care of issues. Now I can see how it makes sense to share this responsibility with students. Students shifted in the same way, from expecting me to take care of everything, to understanding that they had responsibility to help."*

*--5<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher*

These indicators do not usually emerge in a strictly linear process of steady progression. Often it's more like "two steps forward, one step back." It can be frustrating to watch a student successfully resolve an issue using a restorative dialogue, then almost immediately stir up some new trouble. The temptation is to think that the learning is not taking place; but this is probably not the case.

Instead, think of students who are learning restorative practices as conducting their own research into what works and does not work for them. An important research tool is to compare and contrast various methods. A student may try a restorative approach for a while then revert to something less helpful. The trouble that we thought was in the rear view mirror is back in front of us again. Please don't give up! Consider what would happen if we gave up on mathematics because students don't solve all problems correctly. Would we then say, "Obviously, math doesn't work!" and give up? As with academic subjects, social and emotional learning (including restorative dialogue) is an iterative process in which setbacks are best viewed as opportunities for inquiry and clarification. When we realize that this is the case, we can see that "failures" are inherent in how learning happens; then we can perhaps engage repeat offenses with curiosity and inquiry, rather than frustration and judgment.

Classroom circles as described in the pages that follow are an ideal format for this inquiry. The learning process can be accelerated by acknowledging this inquiry frankly, and then inviting students to use circle time to compare and contrast their own social strategies. After gaining some experience with restorative practices, try putting questions like these into the center of the circle, and let the talking piece go around.

- What has worked well for making friends?
- What have you found works for solving problems between friends?
- What can people do to prevent misunderstandings?

There are many other possible questions. The key is to ask questions that are truly meaningful to students...often the unspoken questions that are at the core of each student's social life. These questions drive what is sometimes called the "implicit curriculum;" simply making them explicit by bringing them into circle is one of the most skillful methods of social/emotional pedagogy.

## Circle Dialogue and Circle Keeping

Sitting in a circle is a fundamentally different experience than sitting in rows, or meeting across a desk. When we are in rows there is generally someone standing in front, commanding attention. Clearly this is the person who is in charge, who has the answers, and to whom the group is accountable. When we are meeting with someone who faces us from behind a desk, we also know instinctively that the authority and power belongs with that person. These arrangements have their appropriate functions and restorative practices are intended to complement rather than replace them completely. They can be effective. However, their effectiveness may have unintended consequences. One of these is the implied lesson that the responsibility for the functioning of the community is on the shoulders of the person who holds authority.

When we sit in a circle we experience a stronger sense of community. Every person in the circle shares responsibility for its functioning. Circle culture is more "yes-and" than "either-or." Yes, there is a leader, *and* each person takes the lead in turn, each time it is their turn to speak. Yes, some guidelines are given *and* the group makes its own agreements. Decisions are made, but by consensus of the whole group, and sometimes this means decisions come slowly or take unexpected forms.

Thus, one of the main purposes of circle dialogue is building community. Another purpose is supporting the kinds of honest, authentic dialogue that is necessary to effectively respond to challenging behavior and circumstances. These two intentions for circles take shape as two different types of circle: *community building* and *responsive*. A premise that runs throughout this manual is that *responsive circles* (for responding to misbehavior and harm) work best in classrooms where a foundation has been developed through *community building circles*.

## The Shape of the Circle

The physical arrangement is important and greatly affects the quality of the circle. Arrange the classroom or other space so that students can be in a circle. The operational definition of the circle shape is that everyone can see every face without having to lean far forward. Sometimes the space available doesn't allow forming a perfect circle, and you'll have to make do with the best available

alternative. We've heard students refer to not-quite-circles or circles with some rounded corners as "squircles."

Circles work best when the physical space has an open feeling of no barriers between participants. Arrange the space so there are no tables or desks between students or in the middle of the circle. If your classroom or the furniture you have does not support this perhaps there is another place on campus where you can go for your circle meetings.

Acoustics are another important factor. Some rooms are acoustically jarring, with surfaces that reflect and amplify sound, making it difficult to hear. Many cafeterias and multipurpose rooms have this acoustically harsh quality. They can give students a sense of privacy within the background noise, thus encouraging side conversations. Other rooms (libraries are often like this) have a way of mellowing sound and giving a quieter feel; this is far preferable. Outdoor spaces can work well if the background noises are not too intense. You may find that a circle on a playground between recess works fine, or you may discover that neighborhood delivery trucks are much louder than you ever realized!

### Every Voice Heard: How to Use the Talking Piece



A talking piece is used frequently during circle. It can be anything that is easily passed from one student to another. Beautiful objects found in nature make great talking pieces—feathers, driftwood, river stones, seashells. Animal figurines are appreciated by many students. Some classes adopt a particular talking piece and use it for every circle. Some put a variety of talking pieces in the center and let the student who starts a round choose one for the round.

Some classes make a project of creating a talking piece and then over time adding to it. For example, you can keep a box of large beads and then as a class define a trigger event that signifies when a new bead will be added by lacing it on to a string that is tied to the talking piece. Perhaps this occurs when a conflict has been named and solved. Perhaps it can be as simple as a new bead (or feather, or ribbon, etc.) for each time the class meets in a circle.

You will not always use a talking piece; sometimes it will make sense to simply call on students who raise hands. But the great advantage of a talking piece going around the circle is that each and every student knows that they will have a chance to put their voice into the center, and to be seen by others. When you do set the talking piece aside, do so explicitly—call attention by to the shift away from the talking piece by saying, "I'm setting the talking piece aside for now." Do the same when you pick it back up.



One of the most important tasks of circle keeping is defending the talking piece. This may mean continually reminding students to respect the talking piece by giving the person who is holding it their full attention. Work toward getting students involved in this; perhaps assign two or three each circle to act as “talking piece defenders.”

### A Circle Keeper’s Toolkit

These are some of the things we keep in our Circle Kit, which is a basket we carry with us to all of our circles. You can create your own toolkit that reflects your particular style of circle leadership.

- Bell—a small “singing bowl” style meditation bell.
- Talking pieces: a selection of 3 to 6, various items including sticks, stones, seashells, feathers, stuffed animals, toys, and so on.
- Fabrics: a few fabrics that have rich colors and/or textures, sufficient to cover an area about 3’ on each side.
- Battery-powered LED candles are a safe way to create a sense of warmth emanating from the center of the circle. Placed in the center, they represent the traditional “children’s fire” kept to remind the community to act with awareness of its responsibility to the children present, and those yet to be born.
- Bowl: Find a handmade bowl that can hold water or stones. You can float flowers in this bowl.
- Kalimba: An African musical instrument made with a gourd and spring steel tines.
- Rattle: Any kind of rattle will do. It can be used as a talking piece, or can be given to a student to use during the circle to signal if the circle needs to refocus.
- Stones: A selection of small polished stones or smooth river rocks
- Animal Figurines: Make great talking pieces representing each animal’s unique characteristics. If given a selection of different animals, students will often choose one whose characteristics mirror the current process of the classroom community.



## Focus the Circle with High-Quality Prompting Questions

High quality prompts are questions that give the circle its energy and focus. The circle keeper asks a question and invites everyone on the circle to respond (including the circle keeper). Some questions are proactive and are about building and maintaining community. *Check-in questions* are an example of this. Some prompts are about responding to specific challenges. *Restorative questions* are a sequence of prompts that guide dialogues leading to understanding the consequences of harmful behaviors, and agreements about how to repair those harms. *Closure questions* invite reflection on what has happened in the circle.

High quality prompts have these characteristics:

- They are **relevant**: questions about something that is real and meaningful to the lives of students.
- Often a high quality prompt **gives voice to existing unspoken questions** that are in the social field; consider this: “What does it mean to be popular?” as an example of a question that is implicit in many students’ minds, but is perhaps rarely discussed openly.
- **Simple and clear** language is used.
- They are **open-ended**: not yes-or-no questions, but worded in a way that invites deeper inquiry.
- They are about **inquiry, not advocacy**; discovery, not teaching facts or proving a point. Thus, a prompt framed as “Why is it always best to be polite?” may be helpful, but it also assumes its own conclusion; you may as well say, “It’s best to be polite. Tell me why.” It might be more interesting to ask, “What makes relationships work out well?”
- Often prompts **are related to current events** for which time is not planned in the curriculum. In the week after the earthquakes and tsunamis that devastated Japan we made time in all of our circles for students to share their questions and concerns. It was simply a matter of asking, “Does anyone have anything they would like to say about the earthquakes and tsunamis?” And you bet they did; the emotional load carried by many of these

### Questions for Getting Acquainted

Share a happy childhood memory.

If you could be a superhero, which superpower would you choose and why?

How would your best friend describe you?

What would you NOT want to change about your life? Why?

If you could talk to someone from your family who is no longer alive, who it would be? What would you want to talk about?

If you had an unexpected free day and could do anything you wished, what would you do?

If you were an animal, what type would you be and why?

What is a memory you have to time spent in nature?

Who do you respect, and why?

What change would you like to see in your community? What can you do to promote that change?

What was a time when you were outside your comfort zone? What did you do, and what were the results?

What is it like for you when someone is angry at you?

### Prompts For Restorative Dialogue:

What happened and what were you thinking at the time of the incident?

What have you thought about since?

Who has been affected by what happened and how?

What about this has been hardest for you?

What do you think needs to be done to make things as right as possible?



students was immense. Circles were a perfect opportunity to make room for them to ask questions. (We learned that many 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students in the San Francisco Bay Area were afraid that the tsunami was going to wash them away, along with their school and families, and were sitting in their classrooms silently and politely containing their terror.)

- They **support re-storying**. Re-storying is the process by which we loosen the grip that stories that we have constructed about each other and our world have on us, thus opening up new possibilities for how we see and experience each other.
- They **energize the class** and get the attention of students.
- They invite deeper follow-up questions.

### The Circle has a Center

The center of the circle is an important element. While it can be left clear, it is often more powerful when something is placed in the center to provide focus. Creating the center can be part of the ritual of moving into circle time. Students often enjoy doing this; after modeling it once or twice ask for two or three volunteers to come and arrange the center, working with elements that are kept in a basket or box for that purpose. A colorful piece of fabric with a few small items such as flowers, feathers, a selection of talking pieces, and so on will do nicely. A bowl of water in the center can help bring a sense of calm to the circle, and can be helpful when there is conflict or tension in the room.



It is traditional in circles to speak into the center. The idea is that everyone's voice is added to the center, and it is from the center that the wisdom of the class will begin to emerge. Once someone has spoken into the center, their contribution becomes the property of the circle. It becomes part of a shifting story, a pathway toward an understanding that comes clearer little by little.

### Respecting Each One's Experience: The Principle of Non-Interference

The principle of non-interference means that we simply welcome what people say without trying to influence them. If someone is in pain, we listen and allow simple listening to be a comfort; we do not try to take away their pain. If someone is confused, we simply listen and trust that in its own way the circle will provide clarification. If someone is angry we honor their anger. We don't indulge in psychological maneuvers. We don't directly correct, try to counsel, heal, or "fix" anyone's experience in anyway. We simply listen.

This principle, so very important in building a community where people feel safe to express themselves, also applies to restorative dialogue. When we use the restorative questions we are not trying to force an outcome. We are simply giving a structure to the circle so that each person's voice can be heard. When all voices are in the center, the circle has a way of surfacing what is true, what is needed, and what to do next.

There are exceptions when it is important to give information. We didn't practice non-interference when students shared their fear that the Japanese tsunami was about to strike their school. We gave information. This illustrates an important point: we don't want to be rigid about any of this. Non-interference and the other guidelines in this manual are principles, not commandments.

### Building Trust in the Circle

When there is trust between students it creates a social environment in which students can safely risk self-disclosure, authenticity, confrontation, and expressing affection. Trust is not automatic however, and students have likely had many experiences of broken trust: confidences betrayed by gossip are a near-universal experience, for example. Restorative circles are always by invitation; students should not feel compelled to share when they do not feel emotionally safe with those who are in the circle.

It can take considerable time and effort to build an atmosphere of trust. There is a simple way to tell how trust is coming along: observe the degree of participation in the circle.

**If many students are passing and if sharing is superficial, you may take this as a reliable indicator that students do not feel safe to share; there is insufficient trust in the community.**

We come to trust others' good intentions through experiencing them responding to us in a respectful way. It is perhaps a mark of wisdom to withhold sharing anything intimate with those who have in the past belittled us. As circle leaders we should encourage people to share, but avoid encouraging them too much. Always remember that there may be very good reasons why students are not sharing. Let the maturation of the circle have its slow, positive influence on students' sharing.

We discover how much we can trust others through interactions that test their intentions. If a student shares a thought or idea that is well-received then that student begins to trust the good intentions of the people with whom it was shared. On the other hand, if the idea is belittled or if the student is mocked in any way then a very different conclusion is reached: that these are not people to be trusted with information that is in any way intimate. Yet the student's need for belonging remains strong. The problem now is, "How can I belong, without being intimate?" This problem is solved in many ways, none of which are conducive to a truly healthy community. Becoming a bully is one solution, for example.

In restorative circles we build trust by giving students safe ways to test how much they can trust each other. We begin in our first circles by using prompting questions that invite low-risk answers. Students can give answers that do not expose their inner lives; thus, they can feel fairly safe from social consequences such as teasing. Students should not be required to take risks that are unreasonable, including social risks in socially hostile environments. Students have sound instincts about how much self-disclosure is safe; their level of participation is a reliable indicator of the risk environment.

Teachers and other circle leaders can observe students' level of participation, along with how students react to each other's answers, and steadily increase the depth of intimacy and authenticity invited by prompting questions, choosing prompts that invite more intimate exposure of personal thoughts and

*"When students were asked to solve problems in past, they would respond "I dunno," and I would feel responsible to come up with a solution. I recognized that these solutions were not generally effective. Now I facilitate student's thinking process, and help them come up with solutions."*

*--5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher*

feelings. This carefully managed and sequenced journey into greater intimacy and authenticity is a cornerstone of building community with circle dialogue.



An example of a low-risk prompt is, “Who is a hero of yours--from real life or the movies, and why do you choose this person?” Notice that students have a lot of choice in how they answer. They can say a lot or a little. They can copy what someone else said or they can be original. Whatever their answer, they will have an opportunity to gauge how other students respond. Will they be made fun of? Will their answers help them get to know each other better and perhaps find surprising connections?

When all students are willing to answer questions such as this more or less authentically the time comes to move to questions that are more revealing, and therefore riskier to answer. For example, the prompt might be something like, “Tell the story of a time you had a conflict with someone else and what happened.” This subject

is relevant to the lives of all students, and they may have a deep desire to speak about it. But it also invites answers that are more intimate and revealing. If trust has been built in the classroom they will welcome the opportunity to talk openly. But if they know they will be ridiculed or that other unpleasant social consequences will result it makes perfectly good sense for them to either not answer or to do so in a superficial way.

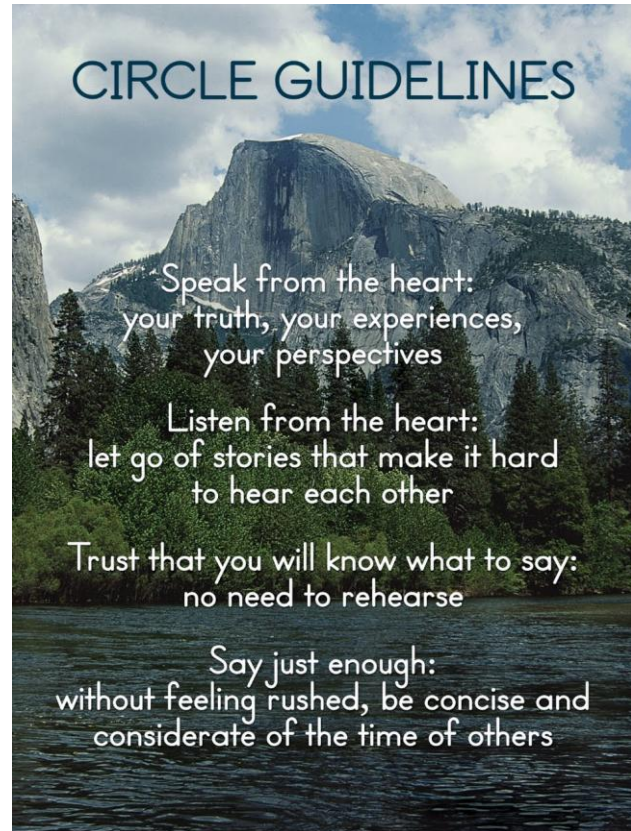
In summary, using level of participation and quality of sharing as a gauge, move steadily from safer prompting questions toward questions that invite more self-disclosure and that focus on things that really matter to students.

Characteristics of Prompting Questions...	
...for Building Trust and Connectedness	...for Building Intimacy and Authenticity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Non-controversial subjects</li> <li>● Easy to answer without introspection</li> <li>● Wide range of choice in answers that are honest</li> <li>● Fun and fast, invite lots of smiling</li> <li>● Not particularly “edgy;” do not invite students into new territory</li> <li>● Primarily about story telling--connecting, rather than content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Subjects may be controversial</li> <li>● Less choice in how the question may be answered honestly</li> <li>● Answers may require time and introspection</li> <li>● Often edgy, inviting students to share in ways that are new or unfamiliar</li> <li>● Primarily about emotional expression and developing social skills (content)</li> </ul>

## Guidelines are Cornerstones of Trust

There are standards for behavior in circles. One of the primary tasks of a circle leader is to teach, reinforce, and act as guardian of these standards. From long experience with many types of circles in many settings, the community of circle keepers has settled on **four core guidelines** (besides the all-important guideline to respect the talking piece, addressed earlier):

1. **Speak from the heart:** This means speaking for yourself, talking about what is true for you based on your own experiences. When we speak from the heart we are aiming for eloquence, for choosing words that accurately communicate what we hold to be important.
2. **Listen from the heart:** We are used to judging other people. Sometimes without even knowing anything about another person we will make assumptions about them. These assumptions can keep us from really hearing what they have to say...and what they have to say may be something that is important and helpful. So when we listen from the heart we are trying to set aside any stories we may hold about the person. This opens up the possibility of making wonderful discoveries about, and surprising connections with, each other.



3. **No need to rehearse:** In circles we discover that we can trust that we will know what to say when it is our turn to speak. We don't have to mentally rehearse while we are waiting for the talking piece to come our way. When we find that we are rehearsing (everyone does) we gently remind ourselves "no need to rehearse" and bring our attention back to the person who is speaking. This guideline is sometimes referred to simply as "be spontaneous."
4. **Without feeling rushed, say just enough:** Keep in mind the limits of time and making room for everyone to speak. This intention is also called "lean expression." It is related to "speak from the heart" because we often find that when we speak carefully we can express ourselves with fewer words than we would normally use, and that when we do our words often have more impact. One way to think about this is, when you are considering what to say, ask, "Does it serve this circle in a good way?"



## Agreements are Also Cornerstones of Trust

The guidelines are nearly universal in circle culture. In addition to the guidelines, each classroom makes its own **agreements**. Agreements are negotiated by the class. In the lesson plans included in Part 3 of this manual a step-by-step approach for negotiating agreements is described. Agreement within the circle is not a one-time discussion; it should be ongoing.

The process of coming and maintaining agreements is governed by “meta-agreements” (agreements about agreements). These meta-agreements should be explicit and understood by everyone. Your class may come up with their own list, but common meta-agreements include:

1. Anyone can ask for an agreement at any time.
2. Anyone can ask to modify an agreement at any time.
3. If there is no consensus about a proposed agreement, it is not an agreement, and it is the responsibility of each member of the circle to be mindful of this fact. For example, if even a single student does not agree to keep things shared in the circle confidential, then there is no confidentiality agreement and all students should keep this in mind when they share.
4. Maintaining the agreements is everyone’s responsibility (not just the teacher’s).

## Mandated Reporting, Agreements, and Trust

In schools, circle leaders are usually teachers or some other professional who is a mandated reporter. It is very important to clarify with the students what this means at the outset, and to remind them of this from time to time. Clearly describe exactly what kinds of things you must report if they come up. If you are not certain, please review your district’s mandated reporting policy and any applicable professional guidelines.

We have witnessed several occasions when students shared in circle sensitive information about their family lives. These students felt so relieved to have a forum in which they were respectfully listened to that they took the opportunity to share what were for them very weighty and confusing matters. In one middle school class we stopped a young man in mid-share, telling him that while we recognize how important the subject was, classroom circles were not an appropriate place to share. In this instance he was talking about his father, describing behaviors that seemed emotionally abusive. It was painful to stop him from sharing; one has to consider, “Where else in his world does he have an opportunity to discuss these things?”

We held a staff circle to explore the incident and the questions it raised. One of these issues was articulated by the students themselves: “You invite us to talk about what really matters, and when we do you tell us this is not the right place.” A conclusion we reached in our staff circle was that we must be more mindful and proactive about communicating the intention of the circles. We acknowledged that we did not have parent consent to talk about family matters in circles, and that it is a political reality that restorative practices programs are vulnerable to parent complaints. Another conclusion was that we agreed with the students, and shared among ourselves our grief that we were not able to use our circles to meet this particular need.

The take-away lesson here is to be proactive about coming to agreements, and to pay careful attention to maintaining them. Otherwise it will be very easy to lose trust in the circle.

## Community Building (Proactive) and Response to Harms: Two Circle Themes

Circles generally have two types of business to address. The first is *community building*: establishing contact with the people, having the time and opportunity to fully show up, to experience being seen and heard. The second is *responding to harm*, which means having sometimes difficult dialogues in which harms are discussed and pathways toward making things right are agreed upon.

- **Community Building Circles** are about giving students opportunity to get to know each other and establish positive connections, including agreements about how they ought to treat each other. Every circle includes community building activities in the beginning. Some circles focus exclusively on this task by building and deepening connections among students. Connection can be invited in several dimensions besides the interpersonal. There is connecting to physical sensation, for example. Before passing the talking piece you can invite students to sit quietly with their eyes closed and tune in to what their bodies are feeling. The same goes for emotions, and for what thoughts or concerns might be present. The aim here is to support students in whatever process they are feeling; to give permission to “come as you are.” This in turn can support the authenticity of the dialogue when the circle moves into taking care of business (content) such as discussing conflicts or other class issues.
- **Responsive Circles** use specific high-quality questions to explore challenging circumstances and move toward making things right. Choosing questions that are “real” for the students is essential to eliciting *content that matters*. When the content matters, the circle will be energized and focused. The Restorative Questions included in this manual articulate the real, actual questions that exist when there is conflict or when someone has harmed someone else. Students readily become engaged with these questions because the content of the circle is truly relevant to their lives; it matters.

## Sequence of Events in a Circle

The sequence of events is important. If you establish a **Circle Pattern** from the beginning, and use it consistently, students will know what to expect. The following sequence works well, although not every element is included in every circle. Each step in the sequence is discussed below.

Starting the Circle 5-10 minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Arrive (circle keeper centers self)</li> <li>2. State the purpose of the circle</li> <li>3. Open the Circle</li> <li>4. Teach and Remember Circle Guidelines</li> <li>5. Make and Remember Agreements</li> </ol>
Doing the Work of the Circle 15-30 minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. <b>Connection:</b> Check in Round with Talking Piece;</li> <li>7. Core Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Building/Connection</li> <li>• Restorative Practices Content or Deeper Connection.</li> </ul> </li> <li>8. <b>Closure:</b> Check out Round</li> </ol>
Ending the Circle 5 minutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Close the circle</li> <li>10. Debrief with colleagues</li> </ol>



**Step 1: Arrive (before the circle):** Check in with yourself prior to starting the circle. Assess your energy level, your emotional state, physical condition, and anything else that will have an impact on how you show up as a circle keeper. The goal is not necessarily to change anything, but simply to be aware. This awareness of your actual condition can be a powerful ally in circle keeping.

**Step 2: Opening the Circle:** After the students are seated in a circle, it is very helpful to have a routine that you use as a ceremony at the beginning of each circle. This marks a transition from regular classroom time into the “special” non-ordinary time of circle.

This is a good time to place items into the center of the circle to help give it focus. Some teachers read a poem or some inspirational prose, or place a battery-powered candle or flowers in the center.

**Step 3: Teach Circle Guidelines:** Remind the class of, or ask them to recall, the guidelines that reliably help circles function well. Write them on the board as students recall or use posters. They are:

1. **Respect the talking piece**
  - a. Give those who hold it your full attention
  - b. When you are holding it give full attention to your truth
  - c. Speak to the center of the circle

- d. Handle the talking piece respectfully
2. **Speak from the heart:** Speak for yourself: your perspectives, needs, experiences
  - a. Trust that what comes from the heart will be what the circle needs
3. **Listen from the heart:** Let go of stories that make it hard to hear others
4. **Say just enough:** without feeling rushed, say what you need to say (“lean expression”)
5. Trust that you will know what to say when it is your turn to speak: **no need to rehearse**

**Step 4: Make and Remember Agreements:** In addition to the intentions, which apply to all circles, each individual class should be given multiple opportunities to make additional agreements, for example about confidentiality, gossip, and so on. Let the group find its own wording. Use a like “fists to five” to generate consensus. All agreements should be by consensus. Agreements are not imposed by an authority; they are negotiated by the group.

**Step 5: Connection:** Do a check in Round with the talking piece. Begin every circle with a check-in round, in which all students are invited to respond to a question. This gives students a chance to put their voice into the circle and feel connected. In the first circles, keep this question very low-risk, and make it progressively more personal at a pace the circle can handle. It can be helpful to ask students for ideas about check-in questions. Relevant questions are preferable...meaning those questions that have to do with the actual situation. So, if the students have just returned from a holiday, a relevant question might be “share something memorable from your holiday.”

**Step 6: Responding to Challenging Circumstances: Restorative Content.** If there are “live” issues to discuss, this is the time to move into them with restorative dialogue. It is important to name the issue clearly and accurately; it’s best when this comes from the students, but can also work when issues are named by the teacher. Lessons 3 and 4 in Part 3 of this manual help students learn how to identify and name issues. Note that the approach used in these lessons is to *learn about* restorative dialogue by *engaging in* it, through progressively more direct and challenging dialogues.

**Step 7: Closure Question.** Ask students to comment on their experience in the circle. If you have very little time (as is often the case) ask for a two-word checkout: “Say two words about your experience in the circle today.” This “rounds out” the circle.

**Step 8: Close the circle:** In a way that is intentional—perhaps even a bit theatrical—put away the center, ring a bell, or make some other small gesture to signal moving back from circle time into ordinary time.

**Step 9: Debrief with colleagues:** What did you learn? Any surprises? What memorable things happened that you want to remember? What frustrations did you encounter? Find a trusted friendly colleague who is also doing circles and debrief each week with these questions or similar ones. Sit in a circle and use a talking piece...trust the circle!





# Part Two: Varieties of Circle Formats and Circles for Building Community

There are various ways to use circles, and specific forms have evolved to support different circumstances. This section discusses some of the forms that circles take.

This section also includes a selection of tried-and-true circles that help build community. Use these in between the lessons in Part 3, as needed.

## Varieties of Circle Formats

### Basic Circle

In a basic circle everyone sits facing the center. Apart from an (optional) decorative center piece, there should be no obstructions, such as desks or tables. The circle is started with a reminder of the guidelines and agreements, followed by a check-in round. A talking piece is used for the check-in round and the following rounds. The leader can ask for a volunteer to take the talking piece and begin; it is then passed around the circle in a clockwise direction (having an agreed-upon direction prevents confusion). Some students may pass; when this happens, after the talking piece has been passed back to the first person, the leader can ask, "Would anyone who passed like to share?" Very often most or all of those who passed will raise their hands. Going clockwise, the talking piece is passed to each one in turn. At the end of the circle the talking piece is passed again for a closure round in which students may comment on their experience in the circle.

### Popcorn Circle

Like a basic circle, but often without a talking piece and without going around in sequence. Students may raise their hands when they are ready to share, and the leader can call upon them in "popcorn" sequence (no particular order). A variation is to challenge students to speak in popcorn fashion without raising their hands, so long as they do not speak over or interrupt each other. This helps develop sensitivity to the group. Another variation is to use a talking piece; it is placed in the center and when someone is ready to speak they go to the center and pick it up. When they are finished they may either put it back in the center, or hold it in front of them until someone else requests it. You might use this instead of a basic circle when it is not so important that every student speaks. It is also a good choice for when there is limited time for responding to a prompting question.

### **Fishbowl (Witness) Circle**

Form a basic circle and check in. Then invite volunteers or a selected group to form a smaller circle in the center; in a class of 24 students, invite 4-6 into the center. Those who are not in the center are instructed that they are active in the circle in the “witness” role. The circle dialogue is conducted with those in the center; a talking piece may be used but is optional. Those in the outer circle stay silent until they are asked for witness comments. Witness comments may be elicited at any point during the circle, and should always be elicited at the end of the circle. Ask witnesses to make observations about the circle: how it functioned, if it was effective, what could be done differently. Often it is possible during a 45 minute circle to have two or three groups in the center, particularly if response time is being limited and monitored (see “response circles” below).

### **Spiral Circle**

A spiral circle is like a fishbowl, but with an empty seat in the center circle. People in the outer circle are invited to come and sit in the empty seat when they feel they would like to contribute. Those in the inner circle are invited to leave their seat and go to the outer circle after they have shared. The rule is that you may leave the circle only after the next person to speak after you has finished speaking. This type of circle is good in large groups, and also for discussing challenging circumstances when not everyone is ready to speak.

### **Feedback Circle**

In a feedback circle the person speaking is given a limited time to share, and the person to speak next is given the responsibility of timing them. For example, the rule may be “share for two minutes.” (Sharing time of 5 or 10 minutes is possible in smaller groups). The next person uses a watch to time, and warns when one minute has passed and when two minutes is reached. After the share, the entire circle can be given a similar amount of time to give feedback. If the time allotted for feedback is two minutes, this can be one person speaking for two minutes, two speaking for one minute each, and so on. Move on when the two minutes are up.

### **Wheelhouse Circle**

For this circle-in-a-circle, ask every other student to move their chairs a few feet into the center of the circle, then to turn them around so they are facing another student, forming pairs. Give the circle a question to work with, and have each person in each pair respond. After a few minutes, ring a bell or give some other signal. Instruct the outer circle to leave their chairs where they are, and move to the left two seats. This creates new pairs. Students find themselves talking with other students who they don’t normally interact with. When teachers participate in the circle there is opportunity to connect with many students quickly. After a couple of rounds, when it’s time for students to move you can ring the bell and call out “bump!” and students will know what to do.

### **Small Group/Student Circle Leaders**

When there is a large group with a lot to share, it can work well to meet in multiple smaller circles of 4-8 students each. The basic circle with talking piece is best suited for this. Before

moving into small groups explain what the question and ask if the students will agree to stay focused. The success of this type of circle is supported by designating student leaders for each circle, and making sure each leader has a talking piece. Small group circles work best with students who have considerable experience in circle and in classrooms in which there is high compliance with circle guidelines and agreements. When student leaders are involved consider making enough time to have a fishbowl circle with the leaders in the center. Ask the leaders to reflect on what worked well in the circle, what challenges arose, and what they learned that they can carry forward when leading circles in the future.

## Building Connections, Building Community

This section contains ideas for circles that help build trust, positive feelings, and a sense of belonging within the classroom community. While they can be used at any time, these circles are particularly recommended for when students seem reluctant to share in circle.

### Goals for Community-Building Circles

We feel connected to other people when we sense that they *see us, know us, and care about us*. That's what connection circles are about: **being seen, being heard, being known, and developing affection**. Therefore, the objectives for these circles are that students will feel:

- they have been seen;
- they have been heard;
- they have been understood;
- connected to other students;
- they have given and received respect—and perhaps affection—from classmates.

### Implicit Questions of Connection

Whenever we humans are in a group we have several unspoken questions, and we immediately begin searching for social cues that will help us answer them. These questions are:

- “Who are these people?”
- “Will they see me in a way that feels good to me?”
- “Can they be trusted?”
- “What is my place among them?”

There are many strategies to get answers to these questions. In most classrooms every student is intensely engaged in investigating, testing, and refining their strategies to find and shape the answers to these questions, and then managing what they learn. Most misbehavior can be easily understood as part of this investigation. For example, when a clique of students makes a point of excluding one or two students, at one level they are dealing with the question of “What is my place in the social structure?” The behaviors of the students who are excluded may be investigations into “How can I be seen in a way that feels good to me?”

Circles are an ideal venue to support these investigations. They can be used to develop connections, understanding, belonging, affection, agreements, and trust. Even when circles are not explicitly about restorative dialogues (dealing with a specific conflict), if they are helping to connect people in a positive

way they are fundamentally restorative because they help to restore a culture that is positive and healthy and safe.

### Basic Connection: The Check-in Round

Near the beginning of every circle is a check-in round. A question is put into the circle, and the talking piece is passed so that everyone in the circle can answer.

Almost any low-risk, relevant question will do. The key is that everyone has a chance to have their voice heard, and to reveal something about their inner lives so that others can see them, and they can feel seen. See if you can identify a question that is also about something relevant to an actual social situation prevailing in the class.

Students love to suggest questions for check in and check out. It's good to let them do so, especially when they've had experience with a few circles. When students contribute questions they feel ownership and responsibility for the circle. One way to get student questions is to ask for several ideas and then choose one or combine a couple. Often it's good to add "and why" to a student's question; for example a student may suggest "What is your favorite movie." Modify this to "What is your favorite movie, and share two reasons why."

### Responsive Circle

**Type of Circle:** Basic, Popcorn, Fishbowl, Spiral

Many classrooms dedicate a circle to discussing how to bring problems that students are noticing to the attention of the whole class, so together the whole class can work to solve the problem. Convene a circle and ask the students for ideas about what kinds of problems might be appropriate to bring to circles for discussion. Then ask what a good procedure might be for naming these problems. Let students contribute ideas until they arrive at a solution. A typical solution is to have a box into which students can put notes about problems they feel should be discussed in circle. Some circles can be dedicated to this discussion. Basic and fishbowl circle formats are useful for this (see lesson plans). These circles can give students the feeling of being empowered. They can also help teachers who feel they have been carrying the burden of classroom problem solving by themselves experience the relief of having students who partner with them in this important task. See lessons 5 and 6 in Part Three for detailed descriptions of circles of this type.

### Story of the Day

**Type of Circle:** Basic, Popcorn, Small Group

After a field trip or other special event where students have had an unusual experience, their learning is greatly enhanced by this type of circle. Gather students into the circle and, using the talking piece, invite them to tell a story in which something is shared from their day that was meaningful or interesting to them. You may have to model this; this activity is best done as a story in which there is a bit of plot. It can help if you suggest they tell it in the third person: "A boy was wandering on the trail one day when spotted a rabbit..." Encourage them to add details. As they students to each other's stories they may realize their day was richer than they had previously been aware of. To close this circle invite comments from students about one thing that stood out for them.

## Something Special

**Type of Circle:** Basic

This is a version of show and tell that works for any age.

- Invite each student to bring something special from home to share with the class. Be sure to discuss what is and is not appropriate to bring.
- Remind them the day before the circle.
- Be sure to put a nice large fabric on the floor in the center of the circle for this activity.
- In the circle, go around and have each student in turn show their something special and put it in the center on the fabric. Encourage them to arrange their item so it becomes part of a collage or sculpture. Some students may forget to bring an item; it works very well to simply have them describe what they would have brought and what it means to them, and then to have them pantomime placing the object in the center with the others.
- If time permits, invite students to share a second round focusing on what they thought about telling the class, but did not say. Almost always this second round will be more intimate than the first round.
- After everyone has shared take a few moments to appreciate the objects in the center. You can ask students if they notice any patterns, similarities, or differences in what people shared.
- To close the circle, have each student in turn pick up their item (including the imaginary items placed by those who forgot to bring something) and return to their seats while the whole class “remembers out loud” what they shared about the item and why it is special to them. We learned this last part about remembering out loud from a 4<sup>th</sup> grade class that invented it spontaneously, and we have used it ever since. It is often a very touching and bonding event.

## The Guest House Circle

### **Type of Circle:** Popcorn

This is a good circle for high school students. We have used it with great success in continuation and alternative schools, where students volunteer to come to a circle that is not part of a regular class. Before using the Guest House format, have at least two or three “getting to know you” type of circles so students learn about the talking piece, guidelines, and make agreements. Clear agreements about confidentiality are especially essential for Guest House Circles. The poem speaks well to the intensity of the inner life of teens. It is read at the beginning of each circle.

- Begin by arranging the center with several talking pieces.
- Read the poem and then announce: “The guest house is open. Everything is welcome. When someone is ready to begin, pick up a talking piece.”
- There may be several minutes of pregnant silence before someone picks up a talking piece.
- In Guest House Circles talking pieces are not passed around but are instead placed back in the center. There are often a few moments of silent waiting until another student picks up the talking piece.
- **Witness Round:** Before closing the circle invite students to make witness comments about the circle. Witness comments can be about anything they noticed during the circle time.
- **Closing Round:** Invite students to pass the talking piece clockwise and share a brief comment about their experience in the circle.

### **The Guest House**

*Rumi*

This being human is a guest-house  
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
Some momentary awareness comes  
As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
Who violently sweep your house  
Empty of its furniture, still,

Treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
For some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
Meet them at the door laughing,  
And invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,  
Because each has been sent  
As a guide from beyond.

## Loving the Questions Circle

### Type of Circle: Basic

When we think of the word conflict, what is the next word that comes to mind? For many of us, it is “resolution,” which reveals an agenda that we almost always have around conflict: either avoid it, or resolve it. But there is a third option, which is to simply be present with the conflict. This circle helps us learn to hold questions that may be unanswerable. It also gives us a chance to connect with each other around our wonderings.

- Invite students to sit in a basic circle. It can be helpful to dim the light and make room for the students to lie down, if space permits and if the students are accustomed enough to circle.

- When students are settled in, read the Rilke quote in the box to the right/
- Explain to students that this circle will be about living questions we have but perhaps cannot answer... our wonderings. Give an example of something you wonder about.

"Have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer."

--Rainer Maria Rilke, in "Letters to a Young Poet"

- Have students turn their chairs and face outwards from the circle and close their eyes.
- Read the poem again. Invite them to ask a question of themselves (not out loud.) While they are thinking, read the following questions as examples, leaving a few moments between each question; ask them to free-associate and see if the questions you ask lead to other questions of their own.
  - What do you wonder about yourself?
  - What do you wonder about your family?
  - What do you wonder about your closest friends?
  - What do you wonder about your teachers?
  - What do you wonder about nature?
  - What do you wonder about the world?
  - What do you wonder about the night?
  - What do you wonder about the universe?
- Next, invite them to say out loud something they are wondering. Use the popcorn format. Invite students to train their intuition by waiting for a moment after someone else's share, then choosing a time to speak when they are not speaking over someone else.

- **Witness Round:** Invite students to face the center. Have them share something that stood out for them about what people wonder, and what it is like to wonder.
- **Closing Round:** Use the talking piece and invite each student to share a few words about their experience of today's circle.

## Thanksgiving Circle

### Type of Circle: Basic, Popcorn

Another dimension of connection is to bring to mind those things to which we feel a positive connection in our lives. Inviting a round of sharing thanksgiving is one way to do this. A useful prompt, based on a Mohawk tradition, is to direct thanksgiving to (in the following order):

1. Sources of Inspiration
2. Grandparents, Parents and other Ancestors and Teachers
3. Moon, Sun, Stars
4. Winds and Clouds
5. Birds
6. Trees
7. Animals
8. Plants
9. Waters
10. The Earth
11. People

**Preparation:** For this circle, prepare slips of paper or index cards in advance. Each one should have one item on it from the list above. Also post the list. Note that there is a specific order in how it is presented, which is the sequence used traditionally.

**Room set-up:** Open space for a circle, with a podium or other designated space for speaking.

### Circle Activity

- Review the list and give (or elicit from students) examples of each.
- Pass out the slips of paper (or have students draw them from a bag). Students can meet in groups of two or three and share what topic they have drawn. Together they can brainstorm what they are thankful for in that topic.
- Students line up in sequential order of subject. Once they are lined up they can move to form a standing semi-circle.
- One at a time, in order beginning with “sources of inspiration” and ending with “people,” students walk to the podium and share what they are thankful for. Encourage them to include details and share stories that illuminate why they are grateful.

A class project may be to videotape the presentation and then present the video in some way to the community. Another project may be to repeat this activity at a parent night or other assembly, and then invite audience members to share what they are thankful for also. This may take some practice until students find their voices of thanksgiving. But consider that the capacity to feel and express gratitude has the potential to be profoundly restorative of good feelings within a community. As a teacher you can model this by sharing things you are thankful



for outside of circle time, perhaps at the start of the class day or when beginning a new lesson. When you are teaching mathematics, can you think of any ancestors of mathematics that inspire a moment of thanksgiving?

Many classes have circles where students are invited to express appreciation of other students. In some classes this works well. But it can also become more about establishing and maintaining cliques based upon popularity than about true appreciation. Watch out for a tendency for the circle to leave some students out and give others (the more popular students) most of the attention. The practice of thanksgiving described above can be a viable alternative when the practice of appreciation isn't quite working.

## Energy Management: Calming Activities

Sometimes the class needs to calm down and get focused at the beginning of the circle, or during the circle if the energy gets too unruly.

### The Quietest Sound

Tell students that we are going to see how long we can hear the voice of a bell. Have them raise one of their hands and close their eyes. When they hear the bell, slowly lower their arms as the sound of the bell fades, finally bringing their hands to rest on their legs when they can no longer hear it.

### Outer and Inner Voice

This is an extension of the previous activity. We are listening to the true voice of the bell. Ask them to notice if, when they can no longer hear the bell with their ears, if its tone continues to resonate within them. As with the previous activity they will lower their arms and rest their hands when they can no longer hear the bell, but then allow their hands to raise up slightly if there is some way in which the bell is resonating within them.

### Secret Voice

This is an extension of the previous two activities. Explain that the bell can speak only in its one true voice, but that humans can choose a variety of voices. Suggest that when the voice of the bell is resonating some thought or image will appear in their imaginations. This is the "secret voice" that we hear when we listen to ourselves. Have them lift their hands when their imagination presents something in response to the tone of the bell. Use the talking piece to share in the circle.

### Speaking with One Voice

This activity helps align vocal energy. Choose a syllable such as "Ah" or "oh." Have everyone rest their hands on their legs. Together, very quietly say the syllable. Lead the class by raising your hands and increasing the volume until everyone's hands are straight up and the volume is at maximum. After a pause suddenly drop your hands and be silent. Repeat until the class can hold silence for 5 seconds after everyone's hands have dropped. If you wish, you can ask a student who breaks the silence early to be "it" and lead the next round.

# Part Three: Restorative Circles in the Classroom: Teaching Skills and Setting Things Right

Restorative practices are best taught through direct experience. The seven circles described in this section are an experiential curriculum that teaches restorative concepts and engages students in restorative dialogue.

Students engage in dialogue beginning with semi-hypothetical situations (Lesson 3: The Chips Scenario) and move toward real, here-and-now conflicts (Lesson 5: Restorative Dialogue). Lesson 6 demands more honesty and authenticity. For students to be fully prepared, it may be necessary to repeat earlier lessons several times.

These lessons have been developed over a period of three years and have been tested in many classrooms, mostly in grades 4-8. We have found that some on-the-spot adjustments are almost always necessary. Try them as they are written until you are sure you have the basic intention for each lesson clearly in mind; then make them your own.

Lesson 7 is about maintaining community by revisiting the circle guidelines and the agreements made by the class. It is a helpful way to build and maintain trust within the circle.

## Teaching Restorative Concepts and Dialogue: Overview of the Teaching Circles

Week	Page	Circle Title	Purpose
1	32	Introduction to Circles	Introduce circle format Teach circle guidelines Introduce the talking piece Cultivate connection among students
2	37	Circle Agreements	Establish trust and safety Teach a process of consensus Make agreements about sharing and confidentiality
3	41	The Chips Scenario	Introduce restorative justice Develop ability to identify how an incident may affect many people in many ways Introduce the concept of “making things right” as an alternative to punishment
4	47	The Issues that Affect Us	Engage students in identifying issues that affect them, the classroom, and the school.
5*	51	Fishbowl Circle Discussions	Use restorative questions to discuss issues affecting the classroom Learn how to use the fishbowl circle format Gain experience with asking restorative questions
6*	58	Exploring Conflicts, Expressing Affection	Use restorative questions to explore and move toward resolution of conflicts with other students. Use Restorative Questions to express appreciation of other students
7	62	Maintaining Our Community	Identify and discuss any issues that may have arisen with Guidelines and Agreements  Deepen students’ sense of ownership and responsibility for circles and classroom climate  New agreements may be proposed and existing ones modified

\*Circles 5 and 6 can be repeated multiple times. They can be used any time there is a conflict between students. They are meant to become a core tool used in the class whenever needed. Circle 7 can be used any time the class is not functioning well as a community (too much disruptive behavior).

## Lesson 1 Overview—Introduction to Circles

Objective	Orient students to circles and how to participate in them.
Time	30-45 minutes
Purpose	Circles have their own set of guidelines that are essential for them to function well. This lesson introduces those guidelines and begins the process by which students will become skillful participants in circles.
Materials	Talking piece; something to put in the center of the circle; a poster of the circle guidelines, or write the guidelines on the whiteboard.
Other Preparation	Figure out in advance how to get your class seated in a circle without tables or desks in the middle.

### Activities

Overview	Give a clear, simple and honest explanation, using your own words, of why the class will be meeting in circles.
Shape of the Circle	Everyone should be able to see everyone else’s face without having to lean forward. This is important and will require everyone’s cooperation each time we gather in a circle.
Check in Round	Review the list of prompts on page 12 –or– Invite students to each tell about a time they have sat in a circle.
Introduce the Four Circle Guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speak from the heart</li> <li>• Listen from the heart</li> <li>• Be Spontaneous/No need to rehearse</li> <li>• Lean Expression</li> </ul>
Talking Piece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce the talking piece and how to use it:</li> <li>• Pass it respectfully</li> <li>• Give full attention to the one holding it</li> </ul>
Circle Agreements	Introduce concept of circle agreements and why they are important. They will be discussed in the next circle (generally held at the same time next week).
Closing Round	Each student shares up to three words about their experience in the circle today.

## Lesson Plan 1—Introduction to Circles

### Purpose and Objectives

Circles have their own set of guidelines that are essential for them to function well. This lesson introduces those guidelines and begins the process by which students will become skillful participants in circles.

#### ○ Objectives

- Understand reasons for being in circle.
- Know a functional definition of the shape of a classroom circle.
- Learn the four circle guidelines.
- Learn how to use a talking piece in the circle.

### Preparation and Materials

Figure out in advance how to get your class seated in a circle without tables or desks in the middle.

- You will need a talking piece. Examples include a small, soft toy; a special stick or stone; a rattle or gourd; or some other object that can withstand being passed around the class multiple times.
- Choose something to put in the center of the circle; a piece of decorative fabric placed on the floor or a low table, with flowers or other beautiful objects. The talking piece can rest here until it is used.
- Prepare a poster of the circle guidelines, or write the guidelines on the whiteboard.

### Introduction

5 minutes

Before you begin your circle, give a clear, simple and honest explanation, using your own words, about why the class will be meeting in circles. If you are completely transparent about the purpose and goals the students will be more likely to trust the circle.

#### ○ Explain

“We will be meeting in circles to learn ways to better communicate and solve problems we may have with each other. We’ll be talking about restorative justice, which is a way to make things right between people after someone has done something hurtful.”

“The shape of the circle is important. Even if we cannot sit in a perfectly round arrangement, we consider it a circle when everyone is able to see everyone else’s face without having to lean forward.”

#### ○ Move into Circle

Give students step-by-step instructions for how to move into the circle. We do not provide a suggested script for this because it will vary depending upon your situation. Because every class has a unique configuration you will have to develop the sequence of steps that works best for your class. Be especially vigilant about having students move their chairs safely; it may be helpful to discuss this and demonstrate prior to having them move.

**Open the Circle (after the circle has formed)**

**3-5 minutes**

- **Explain** “Besides the shape of the circle, we put something in the center. As we do more circles together we’ll decide as a class what we should put in the center to symbolize what we want our community to be.”
- **Set up Center** After students are seated, place something in the center of the circle: a colorful piece of cloth can be placed on the floor or a low table, and decorated with flowers or a small bowl containing water or stones. Do this in a mindful manner, with a touch of ceremony.
- **Dedication** Return to your seat and read an appropriate poem or ring a bell. Announce that the circle has begun.

**Check in Round**

**10 minutes**

- **Focusing Question** “Tell about a time you have met in a circle, such as around a dinner table, campfire, for a game, or in other classes or situations. Take turns sharing, going around the circle.”  
OPTION: Choose another question from the list of prompts on page 12 or use your own prompt.

**Core Activity**

**25 minutes**

- **Circle Guidelines** “Circles work best when we follow important guidelines. We will use the same guidelines every time we meet in circle. The more we use them, the more we will come to understand and appreciate how they support the time we spend together in the circle.”

Describe the following four circle guidelines.

1. **Speak from the heart:** This means speaking for yourself, talking about what is true for you based on your own experiences. When we speak from the heart we are aiming for eloquence, for choosing words that accurately communicate what we hold to be important.
2. **Listen from the heart:** We are used to judging other people. Sometimes without even knowing anything about another person we will make assumptions about them. These assumptions can keep us from really hearing what they have to say...and what they have to say may be something important and helpful. Therefore, when we listen from the heart we are trying to set aside any assumptions and judgments we may hold about the person. This opens up the possibility of making wonderful discoveries about each other.
3. **No need to rehearse:** In circles, we discover we can trust that we will know what to say when it is our turn to speak. We don’t have to mentally rehearse while we are waiting for the talking piece to come our way. When we find we are rehearsing (everyone does) we remind ourselves “no need to rehearse” and gently bring our attention back to the person who is speaking. This guideline is sometimes referred to as “be spontaneous.”

4. **Without feeling rushed, say just enough**, keeping in mind the limits of time and making room for everyone to speak. This intention is also called “**lean expression**.” It is related to “speak from the heart” because we often find that when we speak carefully we can express ourselves with fewer words than we would normally use, and that when we do our words often have more impact. One way to think about this is, when you are considering what to say, ask, “Does it serve the circle?”

○ **Introduce the Talking Piece**

This activity teaches respect for the talking piece. It invites sharing from imagination. Everyone gets to practice silence, and they experience speaking toward the center of the circle. For this activity choose a talking piece that has an interesting shape and textures, such as a piece of driftwood.

○ **Explain**

- In our circles we will frequently use a talking piece. (Show them the talking piece they will be using in the next activity). Only the person who is holding the talking piece may speak. The person who is holding the talking piece has a responsibility to maintain the integrity of the circle by speaking from the heart.”
- “It is sometimes important to be silent when holding the talking piece; this can help us to listen to our hearts and discover what is true for us.”
- “When we speak, we speak into the center of the circle, adding our voice and our wisdom to the voices and wisdom of everyone else. “
- “Pass the talking piece respectfully from one person to the next.”
- “Sometimes we won’t use the talking piece”
- “Let’s practice passing the talking piece around the circle silently and respectfully.”

○ **Activity**

Demonstrate passing the talking piece by passing it first with the person sitting next to you, and having them pass it back.

Next, pass it around in silence. As each person receives it, ask them to hold and look at it until they notice something about it...something they see in it, or something that it reminds them of.

Do another round in which each student can share what they saw in the talking piece. Ask them to speak into the center.

○ **Agreements**

“Besides the guidelines, when we meet in circles we might ask for additional agreements. Anyone can ask for an agreement. Common types of agreements cover things like treating what is said as confidential (not gossiping about what is shared in circle), agreeing not to tease each other later when something serious has been shared, and so on.”

○ **Focusing Question**

Don’t use a talking piece for this; invite brainstorming. This approach will help to clarify any questions that students hold about agreements.

“Next time we meet in circle we will see if we can come to some agreements. What are some agreements that you think might be good for us to discuss.”

**Closing Round**

**5 minutes**

- **Focusing Question** Use the talking piece: “Share three words that describe your experience of the circle today.”



## Lesson 2 Overview—Agreements

Objectives	Students will be introduced to the importance of agreements. Students will learn the “fists to five” process for consensus. The circle will have an opportunity to make agreements.
Time	30-45 minutes
Purpose	The primary purpose of agreements is to protect the safety and integrity of the circle. This circle can help to build trust, safety and integrity by inviting students to work together to come up with agreements.
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talking Piece</li> <li>• Something to put in the center of the circle</li> <li>• A poster of the circle guidelines, or write the guidelines on the whiteboard</li> </ul>
Preparation	Select an activity to open the circle; perhaps ask a student to read a poem.

### Activities

Open the Circle	Ring a bell, read a poem, etc.
Check in Round	Using the talking piece, each student shares a time when an agreement was made and how it worked out
Guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the circle guidelines</li> <li>• Review appropriate use of the talking piece</li> </ul>
Consensus and Fists to Five	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain what is meant by consensus</li> <li>• Teach the “Fists to Five” method for working toward consensus.</li> </ul>
Making Agreements for the Circle	<p>Invite students to propose agreements; use the “Fists to Five” consensus method to make group agreements.</p> <p>Explain that “the rules” about agreements include these “meta-agreements”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anyone can ask for an agreement at any time.</li> <li>• Anyone can ask to modify an agreement at any time.</li> <li>• If there is no consensus about a proposed agreement, it is not an agreement, and it is the responsibility of each member of the circle to be mindful of this fact.</li> <li>• Maintaining the agreements is everyone’s responsibility.</li> </ul>
Close the Circle	Using the talking piece ask students to share about their experience in the circle today.

## Lesson Plan 2—Agreements

### Purpose and Objectives

Each classroom makes its own unique agreements above and beyond the universal circle guidelines introduced in the previous lesson. **The primary purpose of agreements is to protect the safety and integrity of the circle.** They are not prescribed by the circle leader. Agreements that are prescribed by the classroom teacher are not agreements; they are rules. While rules are important, they are not the primary focus of this circle. The circle leader has the responsibility to ensure that the group has opportunities to discuss their needs, to come to agreements, and to revisit and make new agreements as needed anytime the circle meets.

### Objectives

- Students will be introduced to the importance of agreements.
- Students will learn the “fists to five” process for consensus
- The circle will have an opportunity to make agreements.
- Students will learn about “meta-agreements”—the rules that apply to agreements.



### Materials

- Talking piece
- Something to put in the center of the circle
- A poster of the circle guidelines, or write the guidelines on the whiteboard

### Open the Circle

5 minutes

Move students into the circle. Put something in the center and open with a bell, poem or some other way. Students may have ideas about ways to open the circle; encourage them in this to help them begin taking ownership for the circle.

### Check in Round

10 minutes

- **Focusing Question** “What did you notice about the process of getting into the circle today? Do you have any suggestions about how we can do it more smoothly next time?”

### Core Activity

5 minutes

- **Explain Consensus** “Agreements in circle are always by consensus. Consensus does not mean that everyone is 100% in agreement. When someone proposes an agreement you can either (1) support the agreement, (2) accept it (which means you may not

totally agree but can live it), or (3) block it. If even one person blocks the proposal then there is no agreement.”

“Often when people block a proposed agreement it is because they have a question or are thinking about something that the whole circle has not yet considered. So we use “fists to five” to check for the level of agreement. The procedure is: someone makes a proposal for an agreement. People discuss it. You don’t have to use a talking piece; this can be done by calling on people who raise their hands. After the proposal has been stated, the leader waits a moment then says ‘Fists to Five.’ Each person holds up a hand; five fingers mean full agreement, a fist means no agreement. Any number of fingers in between means partial agreement.”

○ **Practice**

“Let’s practice. I am going to make a proposal. Think about if you agree. My proposal is: **That anyone can propose an agreement any time we are in the circle.** Are there any questions or discussion? Raise your hand.” Answer questions and if needed, revise and restate the proposal, asking them to not respond just yet but to be ready to when you say ‘Fists to Five.’ Repeat the (possibly revised) proposal, pause, then... “Ready? Fists to Five.”

“My role and how I problem-solve has changed; I’m less likely to get angry as quickly. Circles allow me to come from a more loving and caring place.”  
--4<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher

Have students keep their hands up and look around the circle at each other to see the entire range of opinions. Ask outliers (those who hold up less than five fingers) *why* they held up the number of fingers they did. Often they will have important points to make or questions that are important to answer. After attending to these concerns the proposal can be repeated (often in a modified form) for another round of Fists to Five. Only those proposals that eventually receive Fives all the way around are adopted as agreements.

**Make Agreements for the Circle**

**20 minutes**

○ **Focusing Question** “Are there ways in which agreements are different than rules?”

○ **Brainstorm** If agreements are not reached by consensus simply acknowledge that fact, remind the group that agreements can be requested at any time, and in the meantime each person is responsible to keep in mind what has and has not been agreed upon when they share. For example, if there has been no agreement about confidentiality, then each person is responsible to remember that what they share in the circle might be shared by others outside the circle.

Write down any agreements that are reached. Ask students for ideas about how the class can remember them.

○ **Meta-Agreements** Explain to students that many circles also have agreements about the agreements (meta-agreements). These are listed below. Read each one in turn and ask for Fists to Five to check for understanding and invite consensus.

1. Anyone can ask for an agreement at any time.
2. Anyone can ask to modify an agreement at any time.
3. If there is no consensus about a proposed agreement, it is not an agreement, and it is the responsibility of each member of the circle to be mindful of this fact. For example, if even a single student does not agree to keep things shared in the circle confidential, then there is no confidentiality agreement and all students should keep this in mind when they share.
4. Maintaining the agreements is everyone's responsibility (not just the teacher's).

**Close the Circle**

**5 minutes**

○ **Focusing Question** Using the talking piece, ask students to share about their experience in the circle today. If time is short you can ask them to choose two or three words about their experience.

**Notes: An Alternative to Fists to Five, and "Chronic Blockers"**

Another common way to work with consensus is to use "Thumbs Up" for agreement, "Thumbs Sideways" for the neutral position and "Thumbs Down" for blocking. As with Fists to Five, view the Thumbs Sideways and Thumbs Down as opportunities for further discussion, exploration, and refining of the proposal.

It sometimes happens that one or two students block many proposals. It is useful for the leader to simply name this out loud, in a neutral, "observer" voice. Often this will encourage students in the circle to speak to how this behavior is affecting them. The "blocker(s)" may then respond with an explanation of their thinking; if they feel heard and seen they may become more willing to go along with more proposals. This is how a well-functioning circle is supposed to work: a real issue that actually affects the circle (such as a student blocking the way forward) is discussed and the circle itself either resolves it or does not.

### Lesson 3 Overview—Restorative Justice and the Chips Scenario

Learning Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students will understand the difference between retributive and restorative justice</li> <li>• Students will be able to identify people who are affected by a hypothetical situation and will be able to explain how they were affected.</li> <li>• Students will learn how “making things right” differs from punishment.</li> </ul>
Time	45 minutes
Purpose	Introduce Restorative Practices and key concepts
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the lesson plan thoroughly and be prepared to tell a story of restorative justice, using one from the appendix to the lesson or one of your own.</li> <li>• Post the Circle Guidelines.</li> <li>• Post the agreements made by the class (optional: post meta-agreements.)</li> </ul>
Materials	Some teachers find it helpful to have a digital camera to record the final chips scenario as it is drawn on the whiteboard at the end of the circle.

#### Activities

Review the Circle Guidelines	Refer to posters to review guidelines and agreements. Review use of talking piece.
Check-in Round	Choose a prompt from page 12 or create one of your own.
Tell a Motivating Story	See example stories in appendix to this lesson. Tell one of these stories, or if you have experience with restorative justice tell one of your own stories.
Compare and Contrast	See chart in the lesson plan below. Draw chart on whiteboard to compare and contrast punitive and restorative justice.
Class Discussion Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using the punitive method, what would have likely happened to the wrongdoer in the story I just told?</li> <li>• What would have happened to those who were harmed?</li> <li>• How does this compare to what actually happened?</li> </ul>
The Chips Scenario	<p>This important lesson teaches the concepts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who is affected?</li> <li>• How are people affected (which includes what we mean by “affected”)?</li> <li>• What are restorative actions—things that can make things right without over-reliance on punishment?</li> </ul>
Closing Round	Using the talking piece invite students to share three to five words about how the circle was for them today.

## Lesson Plan 3—Restorative Justice and the Chips Scenario

### Purpose and Objectives

Introduce restorative practices and key concepts, including: (1) many people are affected by our actions; (2) there are many ways in which people are affected; and (3) if we understand how people are affected we can figure out what needs to be done to makes things right.

#### ○ Objectives

- Students will understand the difference between retributive and restorative justice
- Students will be able to identify people who are affected by a hypothetical situation and will be able to explain how they were affected.
- Students will learn how “making things right” differs from punishment.

### Preparation and Materials

This lesson plan requires you to be prepared to tell a story that illustrates restorative practices. What is an experience you’ve had of how restorative practices have helped to make things right? Anyone who has used restorative practices many times will have some great stories to tell. It’s completely possible to tell these stories in ways that preserve the anonymity of the participants, often by just changing some of the details to disguise the event. See notes at the end of this lesson for some true stories you can borrow. You can also search the internet to find more stories, using the search phrase “restorative justice stories.”

Post the circle guidelines. If your class has made a poster of agreements, post those also. You will need a talking piece for this lesson. You are encouraged to have materials to create a center for the circle.

You will be using the whiteboard extensively during this circle.

#### ○ Move into Circle and Set up Center

### Check-in Round

5 minutes

Pass the talking piece and invite students to respond to a check-in prompt. See page 12 for ideas.

### Core Activity

30-40 minutes

- **Motivating Story** Tell a story that illustrates restorative justice in action.
- **Restorative Justice** Explain the difference between punitive and restorative approaches. Draw a chart like the one below on the whiteboard to support your explanation.

Punitive	Restorative
Only deal with the wrongdoer	Include those who are affected by the incident in the response
Focus on what rule was broken	Understand how people were affected and what harms occurred
Punish the wrongdoer	Agree on actions to make things right
Exclude wrongdoers through suspension, expulsion, etc.	Find what actions can be taken to repair harms and get right with the community

○ **Discussion**

With the chart visible to the class, ask these questions:

- Using the punitive method, what would have likely happened to the wrongdoer in the story I just told?
- What would have happened to those who were harmed?
- How does this compare to what actually happened?

○ **The Chips Scenario**

Restorative dialogue requires its participants to shift their thinking about wrongdoing from “who is wrong and how should they be punished?” to “who is affected by what happened, and how?” The ability to ask and answer these questions is the essential prerequisite for coming to agreement about how to make things right.

**Key Questions**

- Who is affected?
- How are people affected (which includes what we mean by “affected”)?
- What are restorative actions—things that can make things right without over-reliance on punishment?

**Instructions for the Chips Scenario**

1. Draw three circles on the whiteboard, each representing a student in the scenario. Label them students 1, 2, and 3 (see illustration, next page).
2. Explain: “Student 1 brought a backpack to school with a bag of chips<sup>3</sup> in it. When he was not looking, without his permission student 2 took the chips from his backpack. Later student 2 shared the chips with student 3, and did not tell student 3 where they came from. “
3. Ask: “Who is affected and how?”
4. Record answers, asking prompts as necessary. Most circles will have many answers for each of the students.
5. Ask (some classes will already speak to this): “Who else, not on the chart, is affected, and how?”
6. Record answers. Allow students to think of parents, teacher, principal, and others.
7. Ask: “What can be done to make things right?”
8. Record answers.

Modify the scenario as necessary to be relevant to the grade level and social situation of your students. Some classes have found this activity to be very helpful and have applied it to actual situations, using it as a form of peace-making in the classes whenever issues and conflict emerge, by charting maps of those who were affected, how, and what can be done to make things right.

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<sup>3</sup> Depending upon the grade level and the culture of your school and classroom, substitute any other item for chips. For example, cell phone or iPod.



Close the Circle

5 minutes

- **Focusing Question** (With talking piece) "Share a few words about your experience of the circle today."



**Left:** the chips scenario. Begin with the three circles representing the students in the scenario, tell the story, and ask: "Who is affected, and how?"

Typically the chart will become much more complex than the one shown here, with many more ideas about how people are affected.



**Appendix to Lesson Plan: Stories of Restorative Circles in Action**

**“I’m going to take that family for everything they have!”**

That’s what the insurance company agent said after 4<sup>th</sup> grader Marcos lost control of a bottle rocket while playing with it on school grounds on a Saturday. The bottle rocket lit up a bush next to a classroom, starting a fire that caused \$300,000 worth of damage to the building and its contents. He was arrested and also suspended from school. The authorities who reviewed his case offered him and his mother a choice: restorative justice, or take his chances with the courts. They chose restorative justice.

The restorative circle included Marcos, his mother, the school principal, and the insurance agent. Her job is to recover as much money from people who caused the problem as possible, thus reducing the amount the insurance company had to pay. Before she came to the circle she was determined to make Marcos and his family pay the whole amount, even if it took years. Others in the circle included three firemen who had put out the fire, the police officer who arrested Marcos, and a leader trained in restorative justice who facilitated the circle.

The restorative circle was the first time the insurance agent actually met Anthony and his mother, Maria, a single parent with a part-time job. As she listened to them talk, she came to understand their situation. She saw how sincerely remorseful they were, how much Anthony regretted the accident—and that, indeed, it was an accident. She understood how sincerely he wished he could fix this situation.

Maria said she would do everything she could to make it right. She had only a part-time job at minimum wage, but over the years she had saved up \$4,200. She offered it as a first payment.

The insurance agent got up from her chair, walked across the circle, sat next to the mother and said, “Don’t take out that money. Together we’ll find a way to work this out.” Marcos agreed to help at the fire station and to help with the landscaping at the school to repair some of the damage to the grounds. He was still on probation, which everyone (including him) agreed was fair, and he had a lot of work ahead of him catch up on classwork after his suspension. But he did not have to go to juvenile hall, and his family (which could not afford it) did not have to pay a huge fine.

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**It was the perfect crime**, carefully planned by four seventh grade boys.

They waited until the teacher was out of the room. Two boys stood as lookouts at opposite ends of the hallway. A third boy waited by the classroom door with an open backpack. The fourth went in and took Ms. Jackson’s laptop computer from her desk. He put it in the waiting backpack and signaled the lookout. The boys dispersed. Nobody had witnessed their crime.

Ten minutes later they were all under arrest, waiting with the campus police officer in the principal’s office while their parents were being notified. The teacher had immediately alerted the principal when she discovered the laptop was missing; he called in the police; the campus was closed and backpacks were searched. The laptop was quickly found and the boy in whose backpack it was hidden immediately confessed, and told who the other boys were.

The principal and teacher decided to have a restorative circle. It was attended by the four boys, their parents, the principal and Ms. Jackson, the teacher. There were also two facilitators who had been trained to lead restorative justice circles.

One of the first questions asked was “What happened?” This gave the boys a chance to explain what they did and what they were thinking. They felt embarrassed and ashamed as they told their stories. The “reasons” they had for stealing the computer sounded pretty lame when they had to share them, and they knew it. The teacher told the story of how she came into the room and discovered her laptop was gone. At first she didn’t believe it; she wondered if maybe she had left it at home. It was hard for her to believe that it might have been stolen by students. Then she went to the principal’s office to report the theft, and that’s what led to the arrests.

The next question was “How have you and others been affected by this?” The boys spoke first. They talked about being embarrassed; they were also mad at each other. Ms. Jackson spoke next. The boys sat slumped down in their chairs, arms folded in front of them as she told how she had lost trust in her students and didn’t feel safe in her classroom anymore. They boys didn’t seem very affected by what she was saying. Then the facilitator asked her, “What has the hardest thing for you?”

Ms. Jackson started crying. The feelings she was having right there in the circle were so strong that for a few moments she could barely speak. Finally she was able to explain: “I was so terrified as I was walking to the principal’s office. You see, I had not followed our school policy of keeping laptops locked to the desk. I just knew he was going to fire me. I felt my whole career crashing down on me... I just felt stupid, and so much despair.”

As she tearfully explained, tears also appeared on the faces of the boys. They sat up and uncrossed their arms so they could wipe away the tears. Finally, they understood. For perhaps the first time, they realized that what they do affects other people in very important ways. They did not expect that their actions would be so hurtful to Ms. Jackson, and they didn’t understand until just now, when she shared. It was a huge moment of realization for them.

After Ms. Jackson shared, the restorative circle was able to make agreements about what the boys could do to make things right. What do you think should have been in the agreement?

## Lesson 4 Overview—The Issues that Affect Us

Learning Objectives	Students will have an open and honest discussion of the issues affecting their class's functioning as a learning community.
Time	30-45 minutes
Purpose	This circle gives students an opportunity to name the things that are bothering them. It provides a foundation for restorative discussions in future circles.
Preparation	It is often a good idea to do a community building circle between lessons three and four; you do this, it would make Lesson four follow two weeks after Lesson three. "Something Special" (described in the Circles for Connection section of this manual; see page 25) is recommended.
Materials	Be prepared to record students' answers during the brainstorm, in a way that allows the list to remain displayed for several weeks or more.
Review Guidelines	Ask students to remember circle guidelines. Stay with this until they remember the four guidelines and respecting the talking piece. Review the class's agreements as well.

### Activities

Check in Circle	Invite students to check in with one thing they look forward to today or this week, and one thing they dread or do not look forward to.
Brainstorm	Invite students to brainstorm a list of the things that happen at school that bother them. After the first list has been made, make a second list. Ask the students to list some of the things that others do that they really appreciate. When both lists have been made, ask the class to name the lists without using "good" and "bad."
Closure and Remembering Agreements	Explain that in future circles they will be invited to discuss the issues that affect them in greater detail, and that you will show them a way that has helped many classrooms reduce some of the more annoying and disruptive behaviors. Use this time to remember agreements as well.
Closing Round	Use the talking piece. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If most students have been engaged and are sharing openly invite them to share the one thing from the list made during today's discussion that is most relevant to their personal experience of the class.</li> <li>• If students are not sharing openly yet ask them for a less risky check-out question; two or three words about today's circle experience is generally a good bet for a check out.</li> </ul>

## Lesson Plan 4—The Issues that Affect Us

### Purpose and Objectives

This circle gives students an opportunity to name the things that are bothering them. They find they are not alone. Teachers are sometimes surprised to learn that the things they are frustrated by are also a source of distress to students...even those who misbehave. This activity provides a foundation for restorative discussions in future circles.

### Objectives

- Students will develop a list of things that affect them or other students in negative ways.
- Students will have an open and honest discussion of the issues affecting this class's functioning as a learning community.

### Preparation and Materials

- You will need to have a talking piece and materials.
- For this circle do NOT post the guidelines.
- Have a poster of the class agreements ready to post, but reserve it for the end of the circle.

### Introduction

**3 minutes**

- Ask students to raise hands if they remember a circle guideline and call on them to share what they remember. Stay with this until the four guidelines and respect for the talking piece have been remembered. You will review circle agreements at the end of this lesson.

### Open the Circle

**10 minutes**

- Move into the circle.
  - Invite students to set up the center. Check to see if any of them would like to offer a dedication. If they decline or do not feel ready, offer one yourself.
- **Focusing Question** Passing the talking piece around the circle ask, "What is an example of a time when something someone did affected the feelings of others around them. Don't use names."

### Core Activity

**25 minutes**

- **Brainstorm** "A ripple is what happens when you drop a pebble into a pond of water. Long after the pebble has settled to the bottom, it still sends out a series of rings that reach to the edges of the pond. Every action we take also sends out ripples into our lives. People are affected in different ways, depending upon what type of ripple we are sending out. What are some examples?"
- "Let's make a list of things people do that send ripples out into our classroom and school."
- It's a good idea to write the list on a large piece of paper so you can save it and refer to it in future meetings.

- Ask the students to help you divide the list into ripple effects they like and ripple effects they don't like.
- This can be a lively activity and some strong feelings may emerge. Let students know that they will be working with this list in the next circle to begin discussing how they are affected by some of the behaviors, and where the effects are painful or harmful, to begin working toward making things better.

### Review Agreements and Close

5 minutes

Let the students know that in future circles they will be invited to discuss the issues that affect them in greater detail, and that you will show them a way that has helped many classrooms reduce some of the more annoying and disruptive behaviors.

Explain that for these upcoming discussions the group agreements that have been made will be very important. Display these on the whiteboard or a poster. Call on students to see if they remember the “meta-agreements.” Likely you will have to remind them that:



1. Anyone can ask for an agreement at any time.
2. Anyone can ask to modify an agreement at any time.
3. If there is no consensus about a proposed agreement, it is not an agreement, and it is the responsibility of each member of the circle to be mindful of this fact. For example, if even a single student does not agree to keep things shared in the circle confidential, then there is no confidentiality agreement and all students should keep this in mind when they share.
4. Maintaining the agreements is everyone's responsibility (not just the teacher's).

It is possible that students may want to propose additional agreements at this time, or modify existing ones. If time permits go ahead with this; it is a great way for students to take more ownership. If not, consider scheduling an additional circle just for this purpose.

- **Focusing Question** For a check out round, use the talking piece. If most students have been engaged and are sharing openly, invite them to share the one thing from the list made during today's discussion that seemed most relevant to their personal experience of the class. If students are not sharing openly yet ask them for a less risky check-out question; two or three words about today's circle experience is generally a good bet for a check out.

**Notes about closure  
and other sharing**

When you close by asking the students to share three words about their experience in the circle today, be prepared for responses that may seem negative. As the talking piece goes around you'll likely hear a wide range of comments. Some of them will be negative: "Boring." "Pointless." It can be frustrating for a circle leader to hear these comments. You may even be inclined to take it personally, the equivalent of if they had said "*You* are boring and pointless." But this is a mistake. Circles are all about authentic sharing. If the comments are heartfelt and authentic, they are important. Is the circle boring? Is it pointless? If so, it's best to dive right in and have a circle discussion to explore why. Doing so can be a turning point for the circle, changing it from dialogue about topics that are hypothetical (and therefore risking irrelevance), to the actual hear-and-now reality felt by everyone in the room. Typically the first time we "get real" in a circle comes about precisely in this way: when the circle isn't going well and someone points it out.

Therefore, if criticism arises about the circle, make room to discuss it. You can invite open discussion with simple questions like, "What is it that makes it boring? What would make it more interesting?" You don't have to use a talking piece for this discussion, but a talking piece might help if not many students are sharing their thoughts. You'll likely be pleasantly surprised by some of the insightful and helpful answers that emerge.

So, they are saying it's pointless and boring. Is it? If so, congratulations! Your circle just "got real." Now *real progress is possible*.

### Lesson 5 Overview—Fishbowl Circle Discussions

Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students will use restorative questions to discuss issues affecting the classroom.</li><li>• Students will experience fishbowl circle format.</li><li>• Students will gain experience with asking restorative questions.</li></ul>
Time	30-60 minutes
Purpose	Directly engage students in using restorative questions and working in circles to discuss and begin to resolve conflicts and problems.
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Post the list of issues that the students identified in Circle 3.</li><li>• Post the restorative questions, preferably on at least two walls so students don't have to turn around to see them.</li><li>• This activity requires that the center of the circle be free of obstructions.</li><li>• Post guidelines and agreements</li></ul>

#### Activities

Check in	Using the talking piece, invite students to check in. You can create your own prompt, but by now students will be used to prompts and it may work well to ask them for ideas for a check-in question.
Fishbowl Circles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In small groups students will use the restorative questions to discuss how they are affected by incidents that occur in the classroom and on campus.</li><li>• In this activity they do not name specific people as they describe what happened and how they were affected by it.</li><li>• See lesson plan for detailed instructions.</li></ul>
Closure	Using the talking piece, conclude the circle with a check-out round. Try asking the whole class to share what this circle was like for them.



## Lesson Plan 5—Fishbowl Circle Discussions

### Purpose and Objectives

This circle will directly engage students in using restorative questions and working in circles to discuss and begin to resolve conflicts and problems.

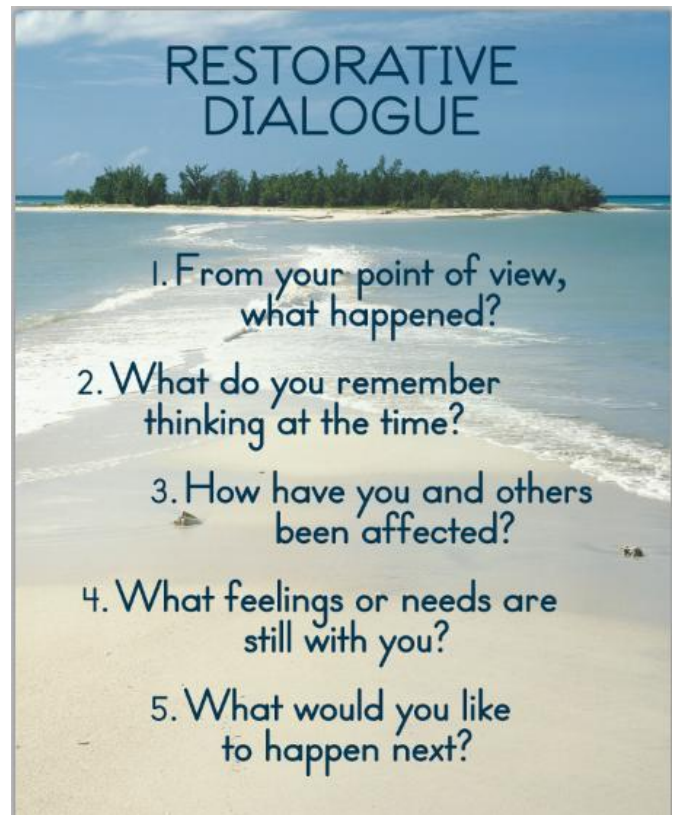
**Note: it is helpful to repeat this kind of circle for two or three (or more) circles, so that all students have an opportunity to participate and several issues can be discussed.** Some classes return to it again and again as a core tool for maintaining a positive class.

### Objectives

- Students will use Restorative Questions to discuss issues affecting the classroom.
- Students will experience fishbowl circle format.
- Students will gain experience with asking restorative questions.

### Preparation and Materials

1. Post guidelines and agreements.
2. Post the list of issues that the students identified in Circle 3.
3. Post the restorative questions, preferably on at least two walls so students don't have to turn around to see them.
4. This activity requires that the center of the circle be free of obstructions so that groups of three or four students can pull their chairs into the center for fishbowl circles.



### Activity 1: Check in

5 minutes

- **Review** Guidelines and agreements.
- **Focusing Question** Ask students for suggestions for a check-in question. Choose one (or combine a couple). Use the talking piece.

### Core Activity

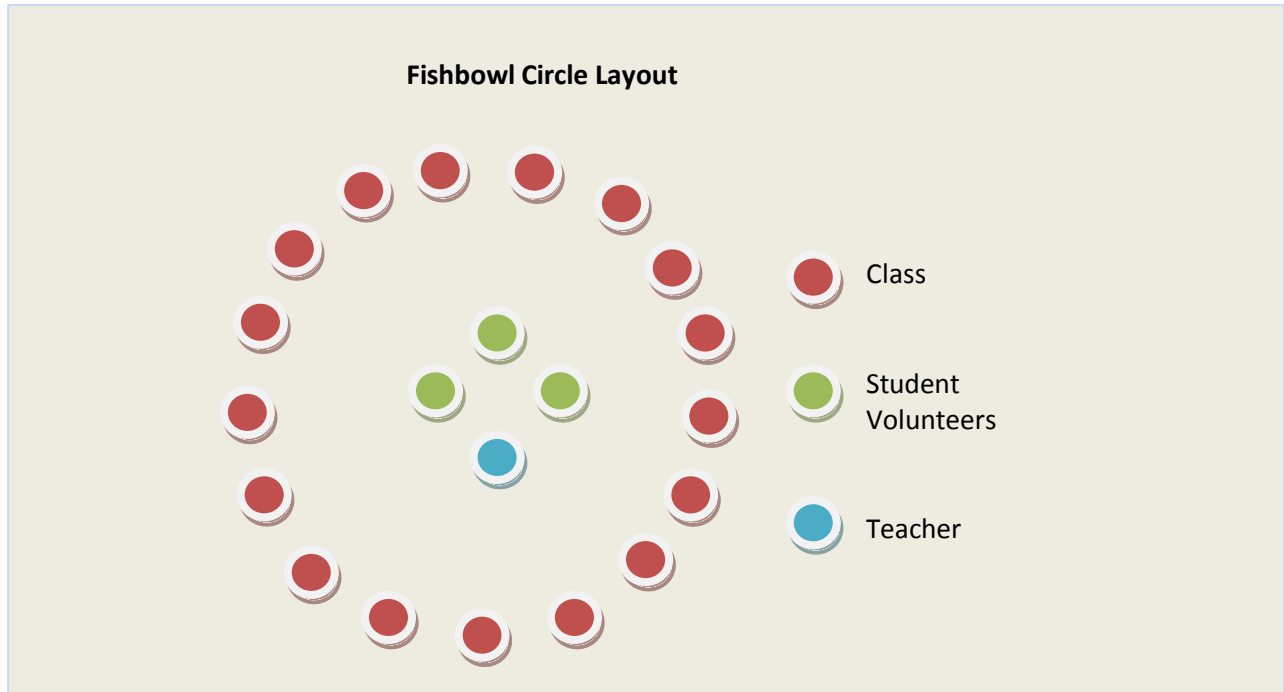
30 minutes

- **Review Issues** Read from the posted list of issues (identified by the class in the previous circle), asking about each issue, “How many students are bothered by this?” Invite the class to notice along with you which issues have the most response.
- **Choose Volunteers** Choose one of the issues and ask students to think of a specific event or circumstance that illustrates how they have been affected by this issue. Ask them to raise their hands when they have thought of something.



Ask for three volunteers who are willing to tell their stories of when and how they were affected by the selected issue, without using names or identifying the people who were involved.

- **Move into Fishbowl** When you have three volunteers, move your chair into the circle and have the volunteers also move their chairs in, so together you form a small circle of four people inside the larger circle of students (see diagram below). You will not need to use a talking piece in these fishbowl circles.



- **Explain** (to volunteers) “Each one of you will get to answer the restorative questions that you see on the posters, to tell about the incident or situation you have in mind. You will have the opportunity to ask the class for ideas if you wish.”
- **Explain** (to class) “This type of circle is called ‘fishbowl.’ The students who are not in the circle have an important role. Not only will you help hold a positive space for problem-solving, because of the distance you have from the circle you will likely see things differently, and may have ideas that are not obvious to the people in the circle. It’s important for each of you to listen carefully. If you have something you would like to contribute, you can raise your hand. The student who is the focus will decide if he or she wants to call on you.”
- **Volunteer 1** Ask who wants to go first. Ask this student the restorative questions, in the same order they appear on the poster. **Important: be obvious about looking at the poster and reading the questions exactly as they appear.** It is very important to model simply asking the questions (and perhaps a few prompts) so students don’t get the idea that the person asking the questions is trying to act as a counselor, mediator, or problem solver.

Watch for opportunities to involve the other students in the center fishbowl. Include students in the outer circle, particularly if the volunteer seems stuck. Let them ask for ideas and call on people who have their hands raised.

When their sharing seems complete, ask volunteer 1, “Do you feel complete for now?” If their answer is no, ask, “What do you need to feel complete?” This creates an opportunity to resolve anything that still needs attention.

Having our circles really helped the class gain trust in one another, and now we can share and work through problems...I have learned a lot about other people.

--Rane, 7th grade

- **Volunteer 1 Leads** Determine who will be the next student to answer the questions (**volunteer 2**). Turning to **volunteer 1**, say “You will ask the questions now.” **Your focus** will be on coaching the student who is asking the questions, while **volunteer 1** will focus on the student who is responding (**volunteer 2**).

- **Volunteer 2** You will coach and encourage volunteer 1 as necessary to ask volunteer 2 the restorative questions, in the same order they appear on the poster. **Important: encourage volunteer 1 to read the questions from the poster, exactly as they appear.** If necessary, you can add prompts. Continue to watch for opportunities to involve the other students in the fishbowl, and the students in the outer circle, particularly if the student who is sharing seems stuck. Let volunteer 2 ask for ideas and call on people who have their hands raised.

After volunteer 2 has responded to all the questions ask, “Do you feel complete for now?” If their answer is no ask, “What do you need to feel complete?”

- **Volunteer 2 Leads** Say to volunteer 2, “You will ask the questions now.”

- **Volunteer 3** Coach volunteer 2 as necessary to ask volunteer 3 the restorative questions, in the same order they appear on the poster. Continue to watch for opportunities to involve the other students in the fishbowl, and the students in the outer circle, particularly if the student who is sharing seems stuck.

After volunteer 3 has responded to all the questions ask, “Do you feel complete for now?” If their answer is no ask, “What do you need to feel complete?”

- **Close Fishbowl** Ask the three volunteers the “secret” sixth question: “What was it like for you to participate in this circle?”

- **Repeat** If time permits, ask for more volunteers and go another round with those who agree to come into the center. You have two options:

- Ask for four volunteers, give your seat to one of them, and coach from outside the circle. Your initial role will be to sort out which student will ask

the questions first, and which student will tell their story first. This approach is very empowering of students.

- Or do it the same as for the first circle.

### ○ **Brainstorm**

Ask for ideas about what procedures to adopt to request a restorative circle when there is an issue that is affecting the class (e.g. “Circle Suggestion Box”). If you don’t have time, remember to come back to this later.

### **Closing Round**

**5 minutes**

Using the talking piece, ask students to share what today’s circle was like for them.

### **Notes about Fishbowl Circles:**

You can use this type of circle repeatedly, but some classes will become impatient with it after a couple of weeks because those who are in the outer circle may feel like they have a marginal role. It’s a great thing when the students start complaining because they want to be more involved in the circles! You can ask them if they will stay on task if they work in small groups, and see how that goes. You can also have a circle discussion with the class on the question, “When, and for what situations, should we as a class use fishbowls?”

Fishbowls can also be used for the positive behaviors that the students listed along with the troubling issues. Try focusing on the positive one week, using the exact same questions. Some classes will take to this readily. Others will not want to participate; for these classes, kindness and affection may be socially riskier than confrontation!

### **Appendix to Lesson Six, Part 1: Restorative Questions with Optional Prompts**

Circle leaders can use optional prompts to help students answer questions and tell their stories more effectively. Some useful prompts are listed here:

1. From your point of view, what happened?
  - a. This isn’t about proving what happened; it’s about hearing each person’s story.
  - b. Think back to the event and just tell how it happened, as you experienced it.
2. What do you remember thinking at the time?
  - a. What thoughts went through your head as it happened?
  - b. What have you thought about the incident since?
  - c. (After others have shared): How have your thoughts changed after hearing what others have shared?
3. How have you been affected? How have others been affected?
  - a. What kinds of impacts has this had on you? On others?
  - b. What has been the hardest thing for you?
4. What would you like to happen next?
  - a. What can be done to help make things right?
  - b. Is there anything you would like to ask for? Anything you would like to offer?
5. What feelings or needs are still with you?

In addition to these questions, when the dialogue is coming to a close, we ask a final question that is not on the poster. The final question, which helps us reflect on our experience, is:

6. What was it like for you to participate in this dialogue?

### Appendix to Lesson Six, Part 2: Overview of a Restorative Circle Dialogue

A restorative circle dialogue is different than the circles the class has done so far because instead of practicing on hypothetical situations (the chips scenario), it focuses on specific conflicts between people. They can be small or large conflicts, and these circles can be brief—a matter of a few minutes—or, if the circumstances are serious and there has been significant harm, they can meet for an hour or more.

Restorative circles generally have **three phases**. You can explain these phases and what happens in each of them to students. Teaching restorative practices, skills and concepts using this curriculum will support each of these phases; it will increase the likelihood of successful outcomes.

**First phase—before the circle:** The main tasks in the first phase include:

- Figuring out who was most affected and inviting them to participate in the dialogue
- Making sure that everyone understands what to expect.
- Supportively listening to each person—especially those who are affected in harmful ways—to help them begin the process of telling their story.
- Managing the logistics of setting up a meeting.

Sometimes the first phase happens very quickly, on-the-spot, as in impromptu circles that are called immediately when a conflict arises. Many circumstances involve taking more time, sometimes meeting individually with each person involved.

**Second phase—the circle dialogue:** This is the actual circle, where the restorative questions are used to help people come to understanding and make things right.

- Use the restorative questions. Ask each person in turn.
- Facilitate and prompt as necessary.
- Avoid going into counseling mode.
- Also avoid solving the problem for the participants. Allow those who are affected to define the issues and develop their own plan for making things right.

When preparing students for the circle dialogue, clarify that it is not like a courtroom drama. Nobody is on trial. Even if people's stories about what happened differ and seem to contradict each

*I thank all of you, students and parents alike, who worked hard to establish understanding and agreements, and address the hurtful and damaging behaviors that took place. It was a time of heightened emotions; each one of us, me included, came to a new understanding. This is the heart of being a human being-- how we grow and learn in order to become more effective in the world."*

--High School Principal,  
after a restorative circle

other, more often than not as people share there will be more clarity and areas of agreement, and this will be sufficient to create understanding and come to agreements.

- Provide active guidance on documenting any agreements that are made, with attention to clarifying the specifics: who, what, how many, by when; what support will be needed; and how accountability for completing the agreements will be handled.

**Third phase—after the circle:** The main focus here is on accountability and support.

- **Accountability** means following up on the agreements and keeping track of their status. This may also include letting everyone who was in the circle know when they have been completed.
- **Support** means providing resources to help people complete their agreements. Sometimes completing agreements challenges the skills and resources of students. For example, writing an effective letter of apology may be a stretch for a student’s literacy skills. The person(s) who are monitoring plan completion will need to be sensitive to these challenges and help to arrange for tutoring or other support as needed.

### Using Punitive and Restorative Approaches Together

Adopting restorative practices does not mean that you will stop using punitive approaches. It is important to explain this to your students. For example, you might say:

○ **Explain** “One of the ways that restorative dialogue is different than punishment is that participation is by invitation. You can choose not to be in dialogue with the people who have been affected. Instead you can submit to the system of discipline based on punishment.

“Also, as your classroom teacher I may decide if I think that restorative dialogue is the best approach for a situation, or if punishment is. Restorative dialogue takes more time and in some ways is more challenging for everyone involved, although over long run it is often the best approach. So before using restorative dialogue we consider if there is enough time and if the people who are involved are likely to participate in a way that is respectful and leads to good results.”

Invite discussion and clarification of how restorative and punitive approaches co-exist in the classroom and in the school.

Punishment can have a positive psychological effect. By enduring a reasonable amount of fair punishment a student may feel that she has earned their way back into the good graces of the school community. It is important for teachers and disciplinarians who are using restorative practices to be clear about this point, and to form ideas about what it means operationally. So, gather with your colleagues in a circle and pass the talking piece around. Here are a few high-quality questions to get you started?

- What have been our experiences with using punishment to manage student misbehavior? How is it working out for us?
- What are some situations we’ve encountered where our efforts to manage misbehavior have been frustrating and not had the results we hoped for?
- How can restorative practices fit in with other methods we use?

## Lesson 6 Overview—Exploring Conflicts, Expressing Affection

Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students will use restorative questions to explore and move toward resolution of conflicts with other students.</li> <li>• Students will use restorative questions to express appreciation of other students.</li> </ul>
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Time	30-60 minutes
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Purpose	In this circle students begin using restorative methods to repair and improve relationships. Through repetition, a restorative classroom climate may emerge.
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Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post the list of issues that the students identified in Circle 3.</li> <li>• Post the circle guidelines and class agreements.</li> <li>• Post the restorative questions, preferably on at least two walls so students don't have to turn around to see them.</li> </ul>
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### Activities

Check-in	Ask the students for ideas about a check in question for this circle. Choose one that has the qualities of a high-quality question.
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Give students an opportunity to review and discuss guidelines and agreements.

Restorative Dialogues	Follow instructions in the lesson plan. Participation is by invitation and students are free to accept or decline any invitations they receive.
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Witness Round	When this activity comes to an end, an interesting circle question is, "For those of you who sat in both seats---as someone who was invited up, and someone who invited another person up---how would you compare your experience of each role?"
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Closure	Using the talking piece, ask students to share about their experience of today's circle.
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## Lesson Plan 6—Exploring Conflicts, Expressing Affection

### Purpose and Objectives

At this stage you may experience the wonderful circumstances of students who are impatient and irritated about the circles because they feel they are taking too long to get to the real conflicts. Students may say, “You are wasting our time.” How wonderful! This means that at least some of them are ready to engage in real dialogue. The method described here can support them with this goal. In this circle students begin using restorative methods to repair and improve relationships. Repetition will help a restorative classroom climate to emerge.

**An important caution:** If students do not trust each other, and if unpleasant social consequences befall those who volunteer to share (either in the class or outside it), this activity may need to be temporarily suspended for a week or two until the circle can identify and deal with the risks. This may entail revisiting and recreating agreements, and/or giving more attention to connection activities. *Circle 7: Maintaining Our Community*, may be an appropriate and effective way to support a fruitful discussion of this matter.

### Objectives

- Students will use restorative questions to explore and move toward resolution of conflicts with other students.
- Students will use restorative questions to express appreciation of other students.

### Preparation and Materials

1. Post the list of issues that the students identified in Circle 3
2. Post the circle guidelines and class agreements.
3. Post the restorative questions, preferably on at least two walls so students don’t have to turn around to see them.

### Check-in Round

5 minutes

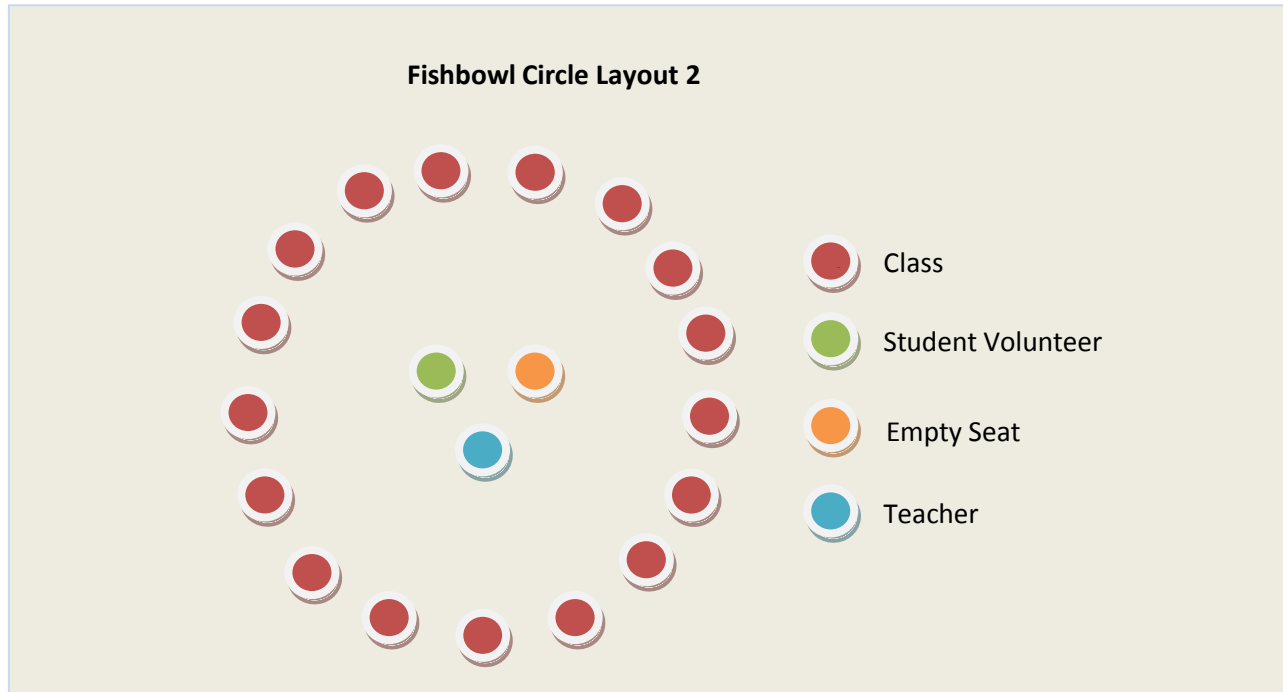
- **Review** Guidelines and agreements.
- **Focusing Question** Ask the students for ideas about a check in question for this circle. Choose one, or combine two or more into one high-quality question.

### Core Activity

30 minutes

- **Explain** “In this circle we will have an opportunity to set things right with each other, or to express appreciation, as we choose. Participation is by invitation and students are free to accept or decline any invitations they receive. It will be a different type of fishbowl.”
- **Fishbowl** Move to the center of the circle and ask for a volunteer who would like to invite someone else in to either set things right or express appreciation. Bring the volunteer into the center; the two of you will sit as two corners of an equilateral

triangle. The third corner is left open for students who will be invited to participate.



- **Establish Purpose** Ask the volunteer, “Is this about making something right, or is it about appreciation?” After they answer the question, ask who they would like to invite to the dialogue. Tell them to speak directly to that person and invite them in.
  - If the invitee accepts, have them bring their chair to the center.
  - If the invitee declines, ask if there is anyone else they wish to invite.
- **Restorative Dialogue** When the invitee comes in to the center, ask the volunteer the first four restorative questions. Even though you are asking the questions, they should direct their responses to the other students, as if that student were asking.
 

After the volunteer has answered the first four restorative questions, ask the invitee the questions. Even though you are asking the questions, they should direct their responses to the other students, as if that student were asking.

After both have responded, ask the fifth question, “What feelings or needs are still with you?”

Remember to ask the secret sixth question, “What was it like for you to participate in this dialogue?”
- **Rotate Participants** When the dialogue is complete, ask the volunteer to return to the circle, but give the invitee the opportunity to invite someone else up. This will often lead



to an unbroken chain of people who come up as invitees, then take the opportunity to ask someone else up.

- **Closure Question** When this activity comes to an end, an interesting circle question is, “For those of you who sat in both seats---as someone who was invited up, and someone who invited another person up---how would you compare the two roles?”

**Closure Round**

**5 minutes**

- **Focusing Question** Using the talking piece, ask students to share about their experience of today’s circle.

**Notes**

From time to time a student will come into the center and will have nobody accept their invitation. This is likely to happen with students who are socially awkward and who have alienated most of their classmates. We’ve seen this have a positive effect on behavior afterwards; being declined by several classmates sends a powerful message that may be exactly what is needed to spur self-reflection and social growth.

After students gain experience you may not need to ask the questions. They will catch on to who should ask the questions, and when. Allow them to move into this role as soon as they are ready. This is where restorative practices begin to be internalized and become incorporated into the students’ repertoire of social and emotional skills.

## Lesson 7 Overview—Maintaining Our Community

Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This circle can be used anytime that is necessary to review guidelines or agreements. For example, when there has been an increase in disruptive behavior, in students being disrespectful to each other, when there is more exclusion and mean behavior, and so on.</li> </ul>
Time	30-60 minutes
Purpose	One of the aims of this circle is to increase the ownership students feel for the circles and the functioning of the classroom community.
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Post the circle guidelines.</li> <li>Post the class agreements.</li> <li>Post meta-agreements.</li> </ul>

### Activities

Check-in	Use the talking piece; invite students to check in with a “weather report” that describes what their day has been like so far and how they forecast it will be going into the evening.
Introduction	Explain the purpose of the circle.
Student Assignments	Ask for three student volunteers to be witnesses. Explain that they will not participate in the main part of the circle, but will instead simply watch what happens. Before the check-out round they will be asked to share what they observed.
Maintaining Guidelines and Agreements	The Spiral Circle format can be good for this. Explain that the purpose of this circle is simply to check on how the class is doing with the guidelines and its agreements. Invite students to share their opinions.
Modifying Agreements (if necessary)	While the guidelines are non-negotiable, the agreements can be modified. Students may ask for modifications of existing agreements; often they will do this because experience has highlighted the shortcomings of how some agreements were worded, and clarifying the wording will support better success.
Witness Round	Ask for students who were given the role of witness to each briefly share any observations they have about the circle.
Closure	Using the talking piece, ask students to share about their experience of today’s circle.

## Lesson Plan 7—Maintaining Our Community

### Purpose and Objectives

This circle will help to maintain positive changes made through restorative dialogue and other activities that have a positive effect on classroom climate.

### Objectives

- Students will evaluate their class’s compliance with the guidelines and agreements.
- Students will identify issues with guidelines and agreements and propose solutions.
- Students will have the opportunity to directly confront each other on behaviors related to guidelines and agreements. (Note: this applies only if students have had experience with lessons 6 and 7, where they have gained experience using the restorative questions.)

### Preparation and Materials

- Post the circle guidelines.
- Post the class agreements.
- Post the meta-agreements (see page 40 ).

### Introduction

**2 minutes**

- **Explain** If they are to remain healthy, every relationship, group and community needs ways to revisit, renegotiate, and maintain agreements. Your class is no exception. This circle is an opportunity to check in about how we are doing with the agreements we have made, and to see if they need revising.

### Check-in Round

**3-5 minutes**

- **Focusing Question** “Let’s say that you are a doctor, and this class is your patient. It shows up at your office for a routine examination. You take its pulse, run a few tests, ask it a few questions. Then you give your diagnosis. When the talking piece comes to you, share your diagnosis and recommendations.”

### Core Activity

**30 minutes**

- **Witness** Ask for two or three students to volunteer to be witnesses during the circle. Explain: “As a witness your job will be to watch how the circle functions. You may interrupt at any time to share an observation about the circle. However, your job is not to respond to the questions we use during the circle discussion.” Clarify as needed. It is helpful to agree upon a signal that the witness will use if they wish to interrupt the circle to make a witness comment (e.g. raise hand, ring a bell, etc.)
- **Circle Discussion** Use Basic Circle or Spiral Circle. Use these prompts (modify them as needed for your class):
  - What have you noticed about how this class is doing with the circle guidelines?

- What have you noticed about how this class is doing with its class agreements?
- (If problems have been identified): Who do you think is affected by these issues, and how?
- What is the hardest part for you personally?
- What do you think can be done to make things right?

○ **Agreements**

If it becomes apparent that there are agreements that need to be discussed and modified, or if students want to make new agreements, remind students of the meta-agreements. Then use the “Fists to Five” method to support students’ exploration of agreements (refer to Lesson Plan 2).

○ **Witness Round**

Ask students who were assigned to the role of witness to briefly make any “witness comments” about the circle. Restrict responses to what they share to “Thank you.”

**Closure Round**

**5 minutes**

○ **Focusing Question**

Using the talking piece, ask students to share about their experience of today’s circle.