

Creating guidelines together provides an opportunity for the group to experience finding common ground in spite of serious differences. A circle intentionally does not “get right to the issues.” Taking time to create a sense of shared space and connection in the group increases the level of emotional safety which allows deeper truth telling. It also promotes awareness of the humanity of all participants.

Balance in the Process



The importance of relationship building to the process is evident in the diagram above that divides the process into four parts based on the widely used Native American framework of the Medicine Wheel, which is a circle divided into four equal parts. One of the lessons of the Medicine Wheel is that the four parts must be in balance. In this case it means that, overall, as much time is spent on getting acquainted and building relationships as is spent on exploring the issues and developing plans.

In a school setting, getting acquainted and relationship building occur over time in many smaller Circles. One Circle may establish values and guidelines. Another Circle may be sharing stories. And another Circle may be discussing a difficulty in the classroom. The balance of the Medicine Wheel may be over time rather than each Circle. The critical understanding is that, without relationship building, Circles for difficult issues will be less successful.