

The Talking Circle

The talking circle, properly employed, allows and encourages people to speak from the heart in a safe place. This is a gentle and respectful way for people to be genuinely heard in a way that our society does not readily allow.

The power of the talking circle comes from the respect and safety experienced by the participants. The process and protocols of the circle develop and enhance this respect and safety, and allow people to speak and to listen deeply.

The Process

- \$ The symbol (stick, feather, rock, or other significant object) is placed in the centre of the circle. This is the signal to participants to focus their attention.
- \$ The first person who feels ready to speak picks up the object and begins.
- \$ When this person is done for that round, he or she passes the object, and with it the right to speak, to the person to his or her left. The object moves clockwise around the circle.
- \$ Each person speaks or passes the object silently, as he or she wishes.
- \$ The object goes around the circle until it makes one complete circle with no one saying anything.
- \$ When the last one who spoke passes the object to the next person, that person places the object back in the centre of the circle. This ends the circle.

Protocols of the Talking Circle

- \$ Speak only truth. This means no jokes or stories that are not true.
- \$ Speak from your heart, about how you feel. This is not a time for debate or discussion.
- \$ You tell your own story, not someone else's.
- \$ It is okay to leave temporarily for things such as to look after a child, to go to the bathroom, or to get a coffee.
- \$ It is okay to make a quiet comment or ask something of someone else in the circle
- \$ It is not okay to have a side conversation or make a side comment about something that has been said in the circle.
- \$ In general, don't make eye contact with the speaker. Allow him or her privacy to look inside and to speak his or her truth.
- \$ When you are empty, pass the object.
- \$ If you have nothing to say when the object comes to you, you may pass it on.
- \$ Do not offer advice or attempt to fix another person in the circle.
- \$ You may respond to something someone has said; this should be done with gratitude for what you have gained from their words.
- \$ If someone weeps, or laughs, weep or laugh with them if you are moved, but allow them to weep or laugh without interfering.
- \$ It takes as long as it takes.

Other ideas for the Circle

- \$ If this is the first time for the people in the circle, place the symbol beside you (do not hold it) and discuss the circle and its processes. Then place the symbol in the centre of the circle and pick it up yourself to begin the circle.
- \$ The symbol or object should not have any other purpose. It is good to avoid artificial objects of metal, plastic, glass, or processed wood.
- \$ Leave a space in the circle. This welcomes anyone who approaches to join the circle, and is a reminder of those who are not present. When someone joins the circle, create another space at a different place in the circle.
- \$ A circle may be open or closed. In a closed circle, what is given to the circle stays in the circle; it is not appropriate to mention or discuss what is given to a closed circle after the circle ends. In an open circle, discussions may continue afterward. If any participant asks for the circle to be closed, it becomes a closed circle from that point on.
- \$ There are reasons for all of these protocols; and all of them are flexible.