

# Relational and Restorative Approaches

Newcastle City Council

# Circles



**‘The art of sharing power and responsibility to create community’ (Dominic Barter, Restorative Circles; 2012)**

**Newcastle Children's Social Care** **Child Centred** **Working Together** **Family Solutions**  
**Safely at Home** **Balanced Response** **Challenge and Support**



# **The History of the use of Circles**

**The symbolism of circles is ageless. A circle can represent wholeness, continuity, universality, unity, inclusion, equality and protection. The power of circles radiates out to all.**

Using a circle formation as a means of social interaction is also historical and cross-cultural.

The North American medicine wheel is just one example of how traditionally indigenous communities have used circles as means of decision-making and conflict resolution.

The 'Quality Circle' initiative, first developed by Kaoru Ishikawa in Japan in the 1960's (Ishikawa, 1985) has been used widely in a business environment. It is based on the principle that full participation in decision-making and problem solving improves quality of work.

Circles are now an essential feature of the restorative justice movement, involving all who have been affected by an offence, including the offender.

Taken and adapted from Roffey (2006)

### **The benefits of using a circle includes...**

- Equality as everyone has equal seating
- Safety and trust as you can see everything, so nothing is hidden. It's encouraged laptops are put away to prevent a barrier
- Responsibility as everyone can play a role
- Facilitation, the circle reminds the facilitator to lead the circle and share the leading with the participants
- Connections are built as everyone listens to everyone's responses
- Shifts power dynamics as reduces hierarchy

### **Where might you use a circle...**

- Care team and core group meetings
- Team around the family (TAF)
- Child protection conferences and child in need reviews
- Team meetings
- As a learning opportunity
- Circles can also be used in a classroom setting
- To problem solve

### **When you proactively use circles in your settings you....**

- Build community through empathy
- Develop, maintain and repair positive relationships
- Develop, teach and model skills such as empathy, mutual respect, active listening, patience, tolerance, being-open minded and non-judgemental, seeing other's point of view, managing conflict
- Develops confidence in speaking aloud

## Strands for a successful circle

- Be respectful
- Be positive
- Recognise it's OK to feel what we feel
- Accept that we may have different points of view
- Be understanding
- Encourage responsibility
- Allow quiet voices to be heard

## Talking Objects

- A talking piece can be anything that can be safely passed around the circle
- It's a way of reinforcing the fact that one person talks at a time and that person should have the groups attention
- It can also give people something tactile to do while speaking
- Sometimes using a personal object with significance for you adds value and respect to the talking object



# **The Restorative Circle Structure**

## **For Reflections and Learning**

### **CHECK IN**

- Establishes good listening
- Opportunity to communicate and find out about each other
- Develops relationships
- Everyone has the opportunity to speak or pass
- Establishes mood and readiness for learning
- Should be a non-threatening start to a session

### **MIXER**

- To separate groupings and create new pairings
- Builds new relationships
- Helps with the equality of the circle

### **FOCUS ACTIVITY**

- A teaching point, new topics etc
- Problem solving

### **ENERGISER**

- To create energy
- To relax people
- To have fun and explore connections

### **CHECK OUT**

- Clear end to the session
- Opportunity for reflection on learning
- Can be used to check understanding / learning / accountability

## Circle Planning Sheet

**Check In**

**Mixer**

**Main Focus**

**Energiser**

**Check out**

## Check In Questions

It is encouraged to choose a check in question which focuses the circle to the content of the circle. It's a good opportunity to get creative.

If having a meeting with children and families', its inclusive to ask the child and/ or family member what they would like the check in question to be.

It's also encouraged to sit in a circle, when possible, for meetings taking place with children and / their families, for the reasons explained above.

Remind everyone to only share what they feel comfortable sharing, and if they would like to pass this is OK too.

We know from research that if people are given the opportunity to contribute at the start of a meeting, they are more likely to actively contribute throughout the rest of the meeting.

Below are some examples for you to use, and it's encouraged you develop your own too:

## Check In Ideas

### Working with families:

- Thinking about the child/ren what's the thing you like most about them, what's that?
- What's one thing [Name] has done well over the last 4 weeks?
- What's one thing [Name] has done to make you feel proud over the last 4 weeks?
- What's been a strength / positive / good thing over the last 4 weeks?
- What do you think a good outcome is from today's meeting?
- What does challenge mean to you? How does it make you feel / what does it make you think?
- What does support look like for you? How does it make you feel / what does it make you think?



## Check In Ideas

### Working with each other:

- Thinking about this family today what's one thing you think they would be proud of?
- Thinking about another member of the care team what do you admire about them?
- What's the favourite thing about your role?
- What do you think the best outcome could be for this family?
- Thinking about this family what positive things do you think they might say about the care team?
- What does challenge mean to you? How does it make you feel / what does it make you think?
- What does support look like for you? How does it make you feel / what does it make you think?

Any of the following questions can be used with children and their families, however it's encouraged you are mindful of which questions you choose as to not make any children and their families feel any blame or shame. Such as if you're talking about things which require a level of financial stability, and you are aware the family you are working with are struggling financially, it wouldn't be fair to talk about your favourite holiday destination.

## Check In Ideas

### Praise

- Thinking about a time when you gave praise and how did it feel / what did you think?
- Thinking about a time when someone has given you praise and how did it feel / what did you think?
- When you last gave praise, how did you do it?
- Say something you like about the person on your left (for circle's who already know each other)
- If you had to give a praise to the person on your right, what would it be? (for circle's who already know each other, or if using towards the end of a circle when the participants have developed a relationship)
- What have you done well this week?
- What's something that's gone well this week?
- What do you think your team member does well?
- What do you appreciate from/about someone else in the team this week?
- Proudest moment of [Year]?
- What's your achievement this week?
- What is something that you did well/you are proud of this week?
- What's something somebody has thanked you for?
- What's a strength of the person to the left of you?
- Name one thing you have done this week that has made you proud at work?

# Check In Ideas

## Challenge

- What have you struggled with this week?
- Tell us about a challenge you have overcome?
- How can you/do you refresh your energy and passion at work?
- How have you felt when you've had a challenging conversation, and did it feel better than expected?
- What have you found difficult this week?
- What was the last thing you struggled with and how did you overcome it?
- If you needed to be challenged, how would you want someone to do this?
- What do you think this person could improve on?
- Something you would like to do that is out of your comfort zone.
- What is something you'd like to get better at?
- What challenges do you want to achieve in [Year]?
- If you could rewind your workday, what is something you'd do differently?
- Name something that has not gone so well this week.
- An area where you think the person next to you could develop.
- Describe a challenge you have faced/overcome in the last few months at home or work.
- What have you found hard this week.

## Check In Ideas

### Support

- In what ways have you been helped by colleagues or helped them this week?
- What's something you are thankful for (support you have received from a colleague)?
- What things do you think would help someone in your team when they are having a bad day?
- Who do you/ can you go to for support and why?
- Who or what supports you?
- Share an example of when you have felt supported, professionally or personally, how did that feel / what did you think?
- Who is someone who you feel has supported you recently?
- Who has influenced you the most?
- Give a shout out to a member of the team who helped you this week and give an example
- Something you have done to support a team member?
- Where you think things have gone well?
- What does support look like for you?
- What does support feel like for you?

## Check In Ideas

### Reflective

- What's one thing you have learnt or one thing that has surprised you?
- A piece of work you've done recently – what went well and what could have been better?
- When was the last time that you did a random act of kindness?
- What was the last piece of inspirational work you've seen a colleague deliver?
- What's an intervention that's worked well for you this week?
- Think of four words to describe your week so far?
- How do you think that went?
- What is something you are grateful for this week?
- Something you said or did that you feel could have been done differently?
- Thinking of your favourite memory how does that make you feel?
- Highlight a family you've been working with where things went well? Or if things could have been different?
- Name one thing you could have done differently this week?
- How have you supported a colleague this week?

## Check In Ideas

### Self-Care, Health and Wellbeing:

- Something you are going to do this weekend to re-charge?
- What are the things you could do or already do that would enhance health and wellbeing?
- Tell us about a wellbeing goal that you want to achieve?
- What could you do or already do in your team to take care of each other?
- What's made you smile this week?
- How are you feeling today?
- What emoji are you today?
- If you had a broken bone what would you want people to write on the cast?
- What has made you laugh out loud this week?
- What have you done this week to make you feel good/well?
- What is something you did this week for self-care?
- What do you like to do to relax?
- How would the team know if you are not ok?
- What is the weather like today for you?
- What was the last healthy thing you did?
- How are you going to practice self-care this week?
- What strategies do you have for self-care?

## Mixer Ideas

(Always remind the circle that if they don't feel comfortable sharing their personal information, they can make this up. You can be creative with using a mixer in your circle)

### Change places if:

- You have an 'E' in your name (use any letter)
- You have a brother (use any family / friends / neighbour)
- You have a four-legged pet
- Etc (try not to use something which may result in people feeling upset, sometimes age and height can do this)

### Mix up by getting in a certain order:

- By house number
- Birthday
- Hair colour
- Favourite / lucky number

### Give each person name of a fruit, season, colour, animal etc

- Apple, orange, banana (as example) change places. Same for others

### Line up

This is a useful activity for groups larger than 16. If much larger groups they can be reduced into smaller groups. Explain that when they are asked to line up in a particular way they need to get into lines as quickly as possible. When they have finished the line up the groups members should do something they have chose (such as clap, dance, hum, sing to indicate that they have finished)

### Line up options:

- Line up in order alphabetically by first name
- Line up in order alphabetically by last name
- Line up in order by date of birth from January to December
- Line up in order by length of time in your current role

## **Energiser Ideas**

If you are delivering a circle which is for a full morning or whole day you might like to add an energiser. An energiser is a fun way to bring some energy back into the circle and re-focus the participants. You are encouraged to get creative with bringing some energy into your circle, these are some ideas which you could use:

### **Switch:**

The facilitator begins an action such as hand clapping, tapping knees, clicking fingers. The rest of the class do not follow the action until the facilitator says 'switch'. After a short while the facilitator changes the action and the rest of the circle continue to do the first action until the leader says 'switch'.

### **Word Association:**

The facilitator or first person begins with any word they wish I.e. yellow. The next person repeats the first word and adds another word which links to the first I.e. sunshine. The next person repeats the previous word and add another word link I.e. summer and so on. Each person has a time limit (around 3 to 5 seconds) and no words can be repeated.

### **Clap and Point:**

The facilitator sends a clap all the way around the circle, first in one direction, then in the other direction. The facilitator then shows participants how they can change the direction of the clap, by pointing the clapping hands in the opposite direction. Repeat this until the clap is running smoothly around the group and changing direction without missing a beat. Finally, show how you can 'throw' the clap by pointing the clapping hands at someone across the circle.

### **Zip Zap Boing:**

Everyone stands in a circle and one person starts by throwing a suitable object (this could be the talking piece if suitable). If you throw the object to one of the two people either side of you, you say 'Zip'. If you through it to anyone else in the circle you say 'Zap', and if you throw it back to the person that threw it to you, you say 'Boing'.



## **Energiser Ideas**

### **Impossible Connections:**

Have the group begin to wander around the room. When the facilitator calls out a command like 'three left elbows' then as quick as you can, the participants should gather in groups of three with left elbows touching. Follow with any combination such as 'two right feet', 'two shoulders' 'seven left hands' etc.

### **The Name Game:**

Have all the participants stand in a circle. Then ask the participants to use an adjective that begins with the same letter as their name. Such as Jovial James, Smiley Susan, Outgoing Olivia etc. Once everyone has done this ask the circle to pick the person to either their left or right and then go around the circle in the chosen direction saying the name of that person. So Jovial James may say Smiley Susan and so on.

### **Stretch Break:**

The facilitator can demonstrate from simple stretches to activate the muscles and bring some energy back into the body. Always remind participants not to try a stretch if they have injuries and keep the stretches simple, offering alternatives to ensure everyone feels they are able to participate.

# Problem Solving Circles

## To set up a problem-solving circle:

- You will need a pen and some paper for the person sharing the problem
- Set up chairs in a circle, enough to seat the whole group (we recommend no more than 12 people)
- Set two chairs facing each other in the centre of the large circle
- The problem sharer (person sharing the problem) will sit in one of the inner two chairs for the duration of the process. The other chair in the inner circle will remain empty at the start.

## The process of a problem-solving circle:

### **1. Problem / Story Sharing Phase (2 minutes):**

- Problem sharer explains the issue or concern they are looking to resolve to the whole group
- During this time the group should actively listen to what is being shared and remain silent

### **2. Questioning Phase (5 minutes):**

- Participants from the outer circle, should be invited one at a time (depending on numbers) to sit in the empty chair in the inner circle and ask clarifying questions
- The problem-sharer answers these to further unpick the story
- Once each person has asked a question, they are encouraged to return to their seat in the outer circle allowing others an opportunity to come forward and ask questions.
- To maintain focus and a fair process participants can only ask questions while seated in the inner circle.

### **3. Solution Phase (5 minutes):**

- Participants from the outer circle should be invited one at a time to start offering potential solutions to the problem-sharer based on the original issue and information gathered from the questioning phase
- Once each person has offered a solution, they are encouraged to return to their seat in the outer circle to allow others an opportunity to offer solutions
- The problem-sharer should note down all solutions offered but should not comment on the solutions themselves, including 'I've tried that before'

### **4. Reflect / Review Phase:**

- After the solution phase the problem sharer should reflect on the solutions provided by the other participants
- From the list of solutions, the problem-sharer should choose three solutions that they intend to try
- The problem-sharer should thank the group for their contributions as the process as now ended

## Check Out Ideas

What is one take away from today's circle?

Did anything stand out to you from today's circle?

One thing I have enjoyed today was?

Something I have learnt today has been?

How might what we have spoken about today influence your practice?

One thing I will remember from today is?

What have I found most useful from today's circle is?

My next steps around this area of learning will be?

The thing I found hardest / easiest to understand today was?

If I could describe today's circle using one-word it would be...

Before the next meeting I will be mindful to...

Document created and published by Relational Practice Leads

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