

# Critical Issues in Using Circles

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Circles can be related to course content or interpersonal.

Circles help people take responsibility.

Circles allow quiet voices to be heard.

Circles allow leaders to emerge.

Many people will say, "I don't know" or, "Can I pass?" Make sure you have responses to these statements ready.

The shape of the circle is important.

Clear directions increase the likelihood of success.

Leaders should model appropriate participation.

Circles can help people explore issues on a deeper level.

Circles allow people to learn about each other and build relationships.

Circles encourage problem solving.

# Using Circles to Respond to Incidents

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When an incident occurs that affects a group of students or an entire class, a circle go-around is an effective tool for engaging the students in a discussion to resolve the issue. While not required, it is preferable for the students to already have experienced lower-risk circles. It is sometimes helpful to have any identified "offenders" make some preliminary statements accepting responsibility.

The circle should be used to address two critical questions:

1. What harm has been caused?
2. What needs to happen to make things right?

Older students may simply be able to answer these questions but for many students, particularly in lower grades, the following questions may be helpful:

- › What have you thought about since the incident?
- › How do you feel about what happened?
- › What has been the hardest part of this for you?
- › Who has been affected by this incident?
- › How have they been affected?
- › How did your parents react when they heard what happened?
- › What was your part in the problem?
- › What needs to happen to make things right?
- › What can we do to make sure this doesn't happen again?
- › How have you felt in the past when you were teased [or whatever the incident was]?

## Appendix: "Using Circles Effectively" Documents

If the circle has one or two identified offenders, be sure to praise them publicly for their courage in dealing with the incident in such a public way. Always look for ways to reintegrate them and allow them to reclaim their good name in the class.

# Getting Started with Circles

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Circle go-arounds are a great way to foster a sense of community among students. Also, they allow quieter voices to be heard and limit the amount of time that more talkative students have the floor. Arrange chairs in a circle (younger students may prefer to sit on the floor) and have students answer the question in turn. Frequently, a "talking piece" helps students wait their turn and gives a physical reminder of who has permission to speak. These go-arounds can be used during a separate circle time, as an opening ritual for class discussions or as a tool to process a problem in class. Use one of the following questions or create your own. Remember to start with low-risk questions until students get used to the format. Teachers should always answer the questions, too. Have fun!

- › Say something nice about the person to your right.
- › What makes you sad (happy)?
- › What is your favorite food?
- › What is your favorite color?
- › What is your favorite TV show?
- › If I could be any animal, I would be...
- › What makes a good friend?
- › Tell about a favorite vacation.
- › Tell something fun you did last weekend.
- › What is your favorite thing to do?
- › What do you do well?
- › Why should people follow the rules?

## Appendix: "Using Circles Effectively" Documents

- › How do you feel when someone laughs at you?
- › Name someone in this class who helped you this week.
- › What do you want to be when you grow up?
- › I like summer because...
- › What is your favorite room in your house?
- › Whom do you trust?
- › What do you like about this class (or school)?
- › What is something you know how to do that you didn't know how to do last year?
- › What other student worked hard today?

Remember to praise students for their participation — even if they struggle. Resistance (silliness, refusing to talk, interrupting and so forth) is usually a result of fear and will go away quickly if it is dealt with immediately in a firm but caring way.