

# Healing circles essentials

## Agreements

Agreements form the foundation of a healing circle. They protect the safety of individuals as well as the integrity of the circle itself. Agreements also offer an opportunity for lifelong learning.

The healing circles agreements follow. Circles can add additional agreements if members choose.

- We treat each other with kindness and respect.
- We listen with compassion and curiosity.
- We honor each other's unique ways to healing and don't presume to advise, fix, or save one another.
- We hold all stories shared in the circle in confidence.
- We trust that each of us has the guidance we need within us, and we rely on the power of silence to access it.

## Silence

Silence, or a pause, can be a powerful ally in a circle. When a circle begins and ends, it calls members into presence.

Throughout the circle, moments of silence give members an opportunity to reflect on what was just shared, show compassion and respect for the speaker, and listen to their own inner guidance before speaking themselves.

A pause can also "reset" the circle if it moves too quickly or needs to return to the agreements.

A period of silence is often bookended by two bells, with one marking the beginning and the other marking the end. But a bell is not required.

## Roles

Healing circles are peer-led, with hosts and guardians performing roles of service, not leadership.

Hosts start and tend the metaphorical "fire" by helping each person "lay their log on" it in turn.

Guardians observe the energy of the group, determining whether someone is uncomfortable or has a need. They also protect the safety of circle members by ensuring that agreements are kept.

Circle members are responsible for their own healing and share responsibility for tending to the well-being of the circle.

## Practices

- Circle members are peers with an equal voice. They are all responsible for the safety and well-being of the circle.
- Members speak to the metaphorical campfire what is most essential in the moment, willing to be vulnerable, refraining from cross-talk, and respecting one another's time.
- Circle members honor their shared humanity, listening for what they have in common and harvesting collective wisdom.
- Members speak as they feel called to and pass when they choose.
- Healing circles are creative acts and can be adapted to our circumstances and cultures.



# The format of a basic healing circle

## Welcome

The circle begins with a warm welcome as people enter into the virtual or physical space.

To help transition into the circle space, the host invites everyone into shared silence. This invitation could optionally include:

- the lighting of a candle to symbolize the metaphorical campfire around which members gather
- the guardian ringing a bell
- a guided breathing or grounding exercise
- the reading of a poem or the playing of a song

Next, the guardian reads the agreements (see page 2), which help create a place of safety for circle members.

Then, the host asks a brief check-in question (usually a word or phrase) to get all voices into the room.

## Heart-sharing

Heart-sharing is the core of the circle. At its most sacred, it's a time for authenticity, vulnerability, and often self-discovery.

The host or guardian can choose whether to begin with a poem or a practice that can serve as a springboard for sharing. Then, the host asks a question that participants respond to.

The guardian keeps track of time and protects circle members by ensuring that the agreements are upheld.

## Harvest

Each member's sharing is a gift to the group. From the resulting collection of thoughts, experiences, and insights, participants are able to choose (or harvest) the ones that most help them on their own path.

The host can choose from three types of harvest:

- Personal (personal discoveries or aha moments that resulted from the previous round of sharing)
- Real-time (themes that arose during the circle that members can further reflect on)
- Pre-planned (such as a question based on an opening poem.)

## Close

The close helps people integrate what they've just experienced before they leave the circle.

It usually includes:

- Take-aways: such as a brief check-out question on what circle members could reflect on until the next circle
- Silence
- Blowing out the candle (if one was used)