

PEACE CIRCLES DESIGNED FOR MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS

Peace circles are a restorative justice practice based on ancient indigenous customs practiced throughout history. Peace circles provide a safe environment for schools to bring together diverse groups of people to share their experiences so that they will have a greater sense of understanding for one another. Participants will learn to appreciate similarities and respect differences. The goal is to break down barriers and stereotypes and facilitate honest dialogue. The Peace circle event is designed to promote equality, respect and tolerance. Participants will share life experiences and work toward creating a caring community and experience a feeling of connection.

Trained facilitators help identify needs of the students and, through well crafted inquiry, they can help students explore ways of resolving conflict, create a positive, non-discriminating school atmosphere, and build understanding relationships amongst peer groups. Peace circle is a story telling process that gives equal voice to all participants.

Purpose of peace circles

- To build community within the student population
- To help students learn about the school culture and traditions and develop a sense of belonging at their school
- To create an opportunity for all peace circle participants to get to know each other

What we hope to get out of it

- Create an opportunity for people involved to get to know one another
- Encourage open honest communication between all parties
- Create understanding among all participants
- Help all to accept differences and acknowledge commonalities
- Help lessen social tension at the school

Circle format:

After the circle is gathered and the guidelines are understood and agreed upon, the talking piece is introduced. The facilitator models the type of answers desired by participants, by introducing a low level non-threatening inquiry question and demonstrates by sharing a personal story. The day progresses and the types of questions increase in vulnerability and higher risk. School-related or issue-based questions are introduced once the group has established a sense of safety. Facilitators are trained to listen for themes and the energy of the group. Closure is an integral part of the circle process for completion, summary and acknowledgement of the day.

Pre-conference objective:

We brief every participant; student, teacher and community member, about how circle is conducted. We also inform them that the circle is intended to improve relationships and build community with a wide variety of students learning to respect differences, while getting to know others whom otherwise they may not have gotten a chance to know.

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