

Quick Guide: Holding a Restorative Circle

Restorative circles are powerful tools for fostering dialogue, building relationships, and resolving conflicts within a group setting. Whether you're an educator, counselor, or community leader, here's a quick guide to help you facilitate a successful restorative circle:

1. Set the Stage:

- Choose a comfortable and neutral space conducive to open communication.
- Prepare snacks for “breaking bread” (see #7) ahead of time.
- Arrange chairs in a circle to promote equal participation and visibility.
- Establish ground rules for respectful listening, confidentiality, and speaking one at a time.

2. Introduce the Circle:

- Open each circle with a ritual (reading a poem or inspirational quote, etc.)
- Begin with an icebreaker question for building community
- Explain the purpose of the restorative circle, emphasizing its focus on understanding, empathy, and resolution.
- Encourage participants to share their perspectives, feelings, and experiences openly and honestly.

3. Establish the Talking Piece:

- Use a symbolic object, such as a talking stick or ball, as a "talking piece" to indicate the speaker's turn.
- Pass the talking piece clockwise around the circle, allowing each participant to speak without interruption.

4. Check-In:

- Start the circle with a check-in round where each participant briefly shares their name and how they're feeling in the present moment.
- Encourage participants to express themselves authentically, acknowledging both positive and challenging emotions.

5. Discuss the Issue:

- Introduce the topic or issue to be addressed in the circle, ensuring clarity and understanding among participants.
- Facilitate a structured discussion where participants share their perspectives, experiences, and feelings related to the issue at hand.
- Encourage active listening, empathy, and validation of each other's viewpoints.

6. Promote Reflection and Understanding:

- Ask open-ended questions to deepen the conversation and encourage reflection, such as "How do you think this situation has impacted others?" or "What do you need to feel heard and understood?"
- Encourage participants to reflect on the underlying needs, values, and intentions driving their actions and responses.

7. Facilitate Resolution and Closure:

- Guide the group towards identifying common ground, areas of agreement, and potential solutions to the issue.
- Encourage participants to take responsibility for their actions, apologize if necessary, and commit to making amends or changes moving forward.
- Ensure closure by summarizing key points, expressing gratitude for participation, and reaffirming the group's commitment to restorative principles.
- Invite participants to "break bread" (eat snacks) together after the circle (and while any behavior contracts or agreements are being printed).

8. Follow-Up and Support:

- Offer resources, support, or referrals to individuals who may need additional assistance or follow-up.
- Schedule regular check-ins or follow-up circles to monitor progress, address any lingering issues, and reinforce positive outcomes.

9. Reflect and Adapt:

- Take time to reflect on the circle process, noting what worked well and areas for improvement.
- Adapt your facilitation approach based on feedback, observations, and the unique dynamics of each circle.

By following these steps and embracing restorative practices, you can create a safe and supportive environment where individuals feel heard, understood, and empowered to resolve conflicts constructively.

Remember, the goal of a restorative circle is not just to address the immediate issue but to strengthen relationships, promote healing, and foster a sense of community among participants.



Staff Circle Questions

Here are 8 questions administrators can use to facilitate a restorative conference with staff members:

1. What are the key issues or concerns that have led us to holding this restorative conference today?
2. How have these issues or conflicts impacted your relationships and interactions with each other and the broader school community?
3. What are your perspectives and feelings regarding the situation, and what do you believe are the underlying factors contributing to the conflict?
4. What do you need from each other and from the school administration to feel heard, valued, and supported in resolving this conflict?
5. How can we collectively take responsibility for our actions and their impact, and what steps can we take to repair any harm caused?
6. What are your expectations and hopes for moving forward, and how can we establish clear agreements to prevent similar conflicts in the future?
7. How can we ensure open communication, empathy, and accountability in our interactions moving forward, both individually and as a team?
8. What support or resources do you require to implement the agreed-upon solutions and maintain positive relationships within the school community?

These questions are designed to promote reflection, empathy, and collaboration among staff members during a restorative conference, facilitating constructive dialogue and resolution of conflicts.