

Using CIRCLES – Quick Tips Sheet

Circles allow people to learn about each other, build relationships, explore behaviours, and develop community.

Principles of a circle:

Equality – everyone has equal seating and a level playing field

Safety and Trust – can look everyone in the eye; nothing is hidden

Responsibility – everyone is offered an opportunity to play a role in the outcome

Facilitation – leaders are reminded to facilitate rather than lecture

Ownership – collectively, participants feel the circle and its outcome belongs to them

Connections – relational connections are built as all participants listen to and learn from each other

Type of Circle	Description/Structure	Examples
Sequential Go-around	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - question/discussion point raised (order of points is important) - everyone proceeds in turn - participation is expected - talking piece may be used - easiest to run - limitless applications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Check-in/Check-out <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o “How are you feeling today?” o “What is one of your academic goals for today/this term?” o “Make a commitment about your behaviour in school today.” o “What do you like about this class?” o “What does inclusion mean to you?” o “What makes a good friend?” o “Name someone in the class who helped you this week.” - To start a new unit/review for a test - Sentence Starters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o “I like it when my friend...” o “People should follow rules because...”
Non-sequential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - more freely structured - establish ground rules at beginning - conversation proceeds in no fixed order - participants speak when they have something to say - talking piece may be used - structure determined by maturity level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - brainstorming sessions - challenges or difficulties students had with homework or project - fundraising ideas for class - what you would like to learn in an upcoming unit - reaction to events, guest speakers, etc.
Fishbowl	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - inner and outer circle - only participants in the inner circle have permission to speak - can be structured entirely for the observers’ benefit - optional empty chair for inner circle - scribe may be used - effective with large groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - illustrating a class concept/discussion from different perspectives - saying goodbye to a classmate - restorative problem-solving

Circle Tips

- Set clear topics/goals for the outcome of the circle – increases success
- Remove extra chairs, ensure that everyone can see and hear each other, remove distractions
- Set a positive tone and model the response you seek. If you are confident and upbeat, students will follow your lead.
- Keep the focus in a kind and supportive way. Stick to the goals you have set. (backwards design)
- Make students your allies
- Have responses ready for “I don’t know” statements
- Always sit in the circle with students and participate fully

Circles for Educators

- circles need to be modeled with staff in order to ensure effective circle practice with students
- can be used to support and encourage each other as colleagues
- can be used when running department/staff meetings

Circles

- ... allow equal time for all voices to be heard
- ... allow leaders to emerge
- ... encourage problem solving
- ... can be interpersonal or related to course content
- ... can help people explore issues on a deeper level

Circles are not “special events”. They are a way of accomplishing things in the classroom whether it is getting to know each other, covering the curriculum, or addressing behaviour.

