



# Restorative Circle

A restorative circle is a technique to help restore trust that may have been fractured or as a way to proactively bring people together to understand each other, to strengthen community bonds, and address important issues. The primary goals of a restorative circle are to understand everyone's perspective, address any harm that may have occurred, and develop a plan to repair relationships and prevent future conflicts.

## Facilitator's Role

The facilitator's role is to maintain the structure of the circle, guide the conversation, and ensure each participant feels heard and respected. They must maintain impartiality and should encourage dialogue, promote empathy, and help create an environment conducive to resolution and healing.

## Process

1. *Set the tone.* At the beginning of the circle, the facilitator establishes ground rules to promote respect, active listening, and nonjudgmental communication. The purpose will also be set during this time. It is possible to introduce a talking piece, an object that is passed around the circle to show who has the floor.
2. *Dialogue.* The facilitator will promote the conversation through guided questions.
  - a. *Share perspectives.* Discuss the event or issue, allowing everyone to share their perspective and experience. Some guiding questions include:
    - i. What happened from your perspective?
  - b. *Reflect.* Explore how the incident affected individuals personally and the wider community. The facilitator guides participants to express their feelings and needs.
    - i. How did it affect you and others?
  - c. *Resolve.* The group works together to develop a plan to repair the harm and prevent future issues. It should be something that is practical, realistic, and specific.
3. *Conclusion.* It is important to complete the circle discussion to signify the transition from the circle to their regular social interactions. It is also an opportunity to share feelings of gratitude for the shared experience.



Challenge	Description	Potential Solution
Resistance to participation	Some participants may be hesitant or resistant to engaging in the process. This could be due to many factors including fear, distrust, or discomfort with vulnerability.	Build rapport and trust with each participant prior to the beginning of the circle. Explain the restorative circle process and answer any questions or concerns they may have. Remind them that the circle is a safe space and participation is voluntary.
Dominating participants	There are some people who dominate in conversations, making it difficult for others to engage.	If you know ahead of time that there are talkative participants, introduce a talking piece. This can help manage the conversation and ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to share their feelings and thoughts.
Escalation of conflict	Emotions can run high which can lead to heated exchanges or increased conflict.	Use de-escalation techniques like taking a break, redirecting the conversation, and reminding participants about the ground rules set at the beginning. Validate the emotions, do not ignore them, but guide the conversation towards understanding and resolution.
Difficulty reaching resolution	It is possible that consensus on creating a plan does not come easily.	Encourage participants to develop multiple options and discuss the pros and cons of each. If needed, take a break and return to the issue later or arrange a follow-up to allow time for participants to process.
Lack of follow-through	Participants may fail to carry out the agreed upon resolution plan.	Create clear, actionable steps during the resolution planning. Designate someone, or create a committee, to follow-up. Schedule a follow-up meeting to check on the progress and address any challenges that may be occurring in implementing the plan.