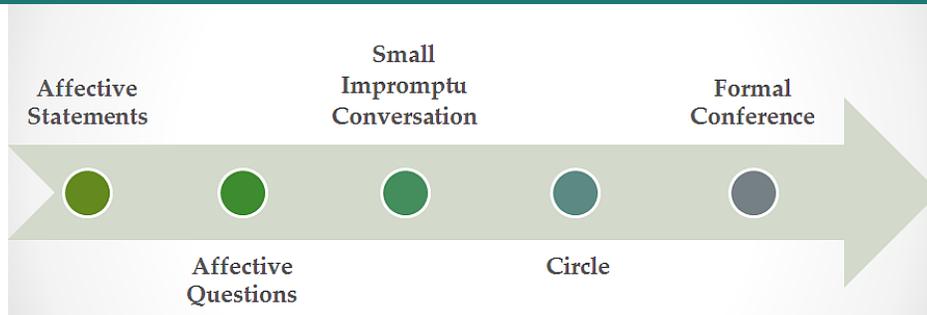


# Circles



The circle is a powerful symbol of community, inclusion, equality, and wholeness. Seated in a circle, individuals are placed on a level playing field and all voices are equal. The shape of the circle is crucial; everyone in the circle should see each other, and not sit behind others or lean forward. The inside of the circle needs to be clear of chairs, tables, or other obstructions.

Within the context of Restorative Practices, circles have many uses from proactive and preventative to restorative and reparative. The purpose of a circle can include: getting to know each other, building community, addressing issues, and taking action. It is important to begin with circles that build community and trust before addressing deeper issues so that students are familiar with the circle process. Circles can also be used with school staff for a variety of purposes from community building to problem solving.

Circles can cultivate students' social emotional skills and improve school climate. Within the circle, students feel that what they say matters; they are respected by authority figures and peers alike. The circle process supports students to take responsibility for their actions. Students learn to cooperate with one another and give each other support.

### Examples of when to use circles:

- Getting acquainted
- Building trust and relationships
- Discussing academic topics
- Addressing issues in the classroom (respect, bullying, stealing, disruption, etc.)
- Welcoming students back after an absence
- Following a disaster or death at school

### The Talking Piece

The talking piece is a circle tool that keeps individuals focused and the circle running smoothly. It is usually an object that has special meaning to the class. The primary rule of the talking piece is that whoever has it is the only one permitted to speak and everyone else must give their full attention and listen.

\*Costello, B., Wachtel, J., & Wachtel, T. (2009). Restorative Circles in Schools: Building Community and Enhancing Learning. Canada: International Institute for Restorative Practices.

Circle Structure Guideline:

1. Open the circle
2. Create Ground rules/Agreements (Created together as a class)
3. Introduce talking piece
4. Introduce Check-In
5. Discussion topic
6. Check-Out
7. Close the circle

To get started, listed below are some examples of prompts for circle go-arounds. You may want to develop your own prompts. These prompts help students to get to know each other. They are useful as a warmup for higher-risk questions and prompts.

- Say something nice about the person to your right.
- What makes you sad (happy)?
- What is your favorite food?
- If I could be any animal, I would be...
- What makes a good friend?
- What is your favorite thing to do?
- What are you grateful for?
- What do you do well?
- Name someone in this class who helped you this week.
- What do you want to be when you grow up?
- Whom do you trust?
- What is something you know how to do that you didn't know how to do last year?
- What other student worked hard today?

For circles that respond to incidents, using the affective questions helps students discuss the classroom or school campus issues. See the "Affective Questions" document in this series.

For more information on circles and circle formats, a great resource is: "Teaching Restorative Practices with Classroom Circles," which can be found on the Restorative Practices Resource webpage under Circles:

[http://www.ocde.us/HealthyMinds/Pages/RP\\_Resources.aspx](http://www.ocde.us/HealthyMinds/Pages/RP_Resources.aspx)