

CHEC PD: Circle Facilitation Questions, Answers, Comments, and Suggestions

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Questions and Answers

Are there RESOURCES to help teachers make their own outlines for circles?

Yes! Check with the CHEC RS Team to see the [Circle Forward book](#) which has hundreds of outlines already pre-made. We encourage you to start with Module 1 that focuses on building Values/Guidelines/Relationship and customize them to you and to your group.

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The goal this year is to progressively have the circles be student-led. We will write to you more about this. We will be using the model of "self-led circles" where you can distribute roles of facilitation to your students once you feel that you - and they - are ready. We will provide these outlines to you by mid-week before each new week/circle. And you can always modify/customize them. YOU are the experts on your relationship with your students and will know where you are at in terms of creating trust, safety, invitation of voice in circle process. As we often say in restorative circles (Dominic Barter), "this is a work too urgent to be rushed", so if the topics seem to be going too fast, too far (or not fast enough, not deep enough), please modify to follow your own rhythm and relationship-building tempo.

Find the blank template for you to create-your-own self-led circles attached in the follow up email.

How do you create a meaningful experience in the circle with a short amount of TIME?

That is a great question to ask yourself. Building relationships does not have a one-circle-creates-it-all solution. It will be in the consistency and persistence of your own curiosity and invitation of student voice that will progressively open up and build trust with each other. Time is often what appears to be most limited especially in the educational setting with so many other mandates and agendas to hold. Our recommendation is: do the smallest and most connecting round each time and repetitively. One round done with care, curiosity, truth and patience will have more impact overall done 10 times than any "well-designed" circle.

Will there be different circle outlines for MIDDLE vs. HIGH SCHOOL? They have different needs.

Yes, middle schoolers will have outlines designed for their needs that will explore the PBIS character traits and values. Consider it ESL and connection circles for them. High schoolers will have a tandem of College Preparation and Advisory Topics.

The first round of circle outlines are focused on introducing circles and building a space of trust and familiarity with the process itself. These circle outlines will be the same for middle and high school. Again, please modify as needed to best meet the needs of your class.

In depth exploration of seven core CORE ASSUMPTIONS AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES? / How do students view these ideas I don't know how to communicate core assumptions to my students?

These core assumptions and guiding principles are offered as a base for exploration towards common agreement making. The exact ones we shared yesterday come from Kay Pranis and Carolyn Boyes-Watson, authors of Circle Forward as their own. A lot of Restorative Justice practitioners share them or have slightly varied beliefs and principles.

We invite you to use them as a base of reflection for you and your peers to discuss and find commonalities or disagreements until you fine-tune what the "CHEC Core Assumptions and Guiding Principles [about relationships, students, self, etc..]" could be. They are great "quotes" to use in the opening ceremony in order to open up a round on

- i. "What comes up for you hearing this?"
- ii. What do you agree with about it?
- iii. What do you disagree?"

and let everyone's wisdom and voice explore. Adjust them to reflect the language and insights of your group. Use them to come up with your own group's guiding principles and assumptions.

What happens if there is no DISCIPLINE in the circle?

Most likely your first circles will NOT go perfectly. There will be students who will speak out of turn, there will be students who go on tangents on topics not pertaining to the guiding questions, there will be students (as well as adults) that think this is stupid and a waste of time. This is expected and requires transparency, patience, and trust in the process from the circle keeper (you). You'll see in the outlines that they are meant to build up safety/trust/inclusion with shared values, co-authored guidelines, and warmth/care (not diving into hard topics right away). Here are some suggestions:

- Experiment and expand opportunities for "F.A.I.L."s (First Attempt In Learning) and see if the group can self-regulate their behaviors so you are not in the position of judge but invite the whole circle to hold Circle with you.
- Name that this is new and uncomfortable and encourage the right to pass;

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- If a circle ends early, show a video from the resources listed in the email about circles done in other cities in the U.S.;
- Take your time. If you can only get through the opening round for the first 10 circles, that is ok;
- Stop. Acknowledge. Reflect. If someone says or does something name the impact. "I noticed that the mood and the room change. Let's do a round to talk about what happened....Now let's do a round of how we can support each other in preventing x."

How do we respond if SERIOUS STUFF comes up? Cutting, abuse, etc.

Refer to your school's guidelines on legal/mandatory reporting and be transparent ahead of time and with reminders to your groups about these mandates.

We want you to feel the power to reach out for more resources. Support doesn't only come from you.

It shows tremendous trust that anyone would open up to share thoughts or behaviors that are serious cries for help. In the long run, think about the impact that not opening safe space for these to come out would do to the person and larger community.

In short: stretch only to what you can hold. Check with your gut to know what feels right or wrong to you. Ask for support/guidance. And check your legal mandates.

Some students need translation / difficulty of holding BILINGUAL CIRCLES / How to create cohesion with language barriers?

In complete transparency this is a problem we need help on. In circles we have had the circle keeper go back and forth between spanish and english for every round. One thing that could help is having scripts sent to you, translated into spanish so that students can read along and also facilitate. You will still need someone to translate the responses, but this allows for ELLs to take ownership of the circle process.

This does come at a cost of speed and [honestly} flow, but created full inclusion and care. Still, there might be other strategies such as having bilingual students sitting next to spanish-only or english-only participants and allowing for in person translation support (meaning not full silence).

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We invite you to discuss this together as part of setting your guidelines on how you want to run these circles. Let students come up with ideas, trials and errors, and readjustments to find a solution that works for all.

Again follow your own pace of the outlines/rounds and do not hesitate to stage them over several more circles than proposed in what we send.

How do I introduce SPECIAL ISSUES?

The outlines are meant to progressively build community, safety, warmth, and care before diving into hard-to-talk-about topics. Yet sometimes something will come up in the news that you may want to address. In the past, we have sent some [circle outlines such as the one recently on DACA](#) that you can use as a template and edit and events you want to talk about.

Suggestions and comments:

Exploring the holistic nature of self both wise and ignorant, powerful and weak

Great suggestion of rounds to explore with your group and challenge them to speak what feels true to them about this and what doesn't!

“Have students write anonymous responses to questions then share out”

Yes! You can expand on this idea on many levels. Have a place in your room/school where students can write questions on post-its so that hardships can be known anonymously. Often, this technique helps develop shared common humanity.

Once trust and safety is built, sharing with each other can be very impactful to create a community of care.

A comment box is also helpful.

Having a centerpiece / The centerpiece aid actually writing on it

Centerpieces can be very anchoring for the eyes, and be used as an active creation of what your group is building. Be creative and invite students to add things that are important to them to the community centerpiece.

They are great spaces to place value cards (ideally written with/by all circle participants), objects of values from everyone, objects used as talking pieces. Sometimes a representation of what the rounds/topics maybe about (e.g. fall leaves can be great representation for things we lose/let go/grief, a water container can represent fluidity, flexibility, resilience (water always finds its way to the ocean, etc..), a fake candle can have great meanings around fire/burning/light/etc...

Examples of meaningful talking pieces: small puzzle boxes (things that look unsolved now that we are holding together) - or rubicube - a faucet (to open up the flow), a brain-teaser, a feather, a rock, a soft animal or piece, a glitter wand, a tornado-making tube, use your imagination to get or create your own with your group

Prioritize relationships

Yes. This is the goal at the end of the day.

Having possible prompts

In the attachment in the follow up email there are sample prompts you can use. Also refer to Circle Forward for hundreds of outline examples you can ask individuals from the RS team to make a copy of an outline from the book. There are quite a few books floating around the school.

Start with light topics first so that everyone builds comfortability and trust

Follow your own pace, add FUN in your prompt, 'warm up' your group. Use collaborative circle games too (special PD on this), art, improv games, etc.. to create connection.

Practice VALUES and perception of everyone in the circle

Circle can be a great time to add on special
ESL/empathy-building/communication skill building activities in between rounds
(a pause into a learning exercise/game)

Space to have CIRCLES WITH CO-WORKERS

Yes! Come and gather on Tuesdays 3:30pm to create more connection with your
co-workers and discuss RJ or any topics that are of importance to you. We will
start these in October.

How to STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS with students

Come to Staff Circles and explore this with us!

Additional Training Requests

17. Training on how to engage reluctant students
18. Training on trauma awareness, mindfulness, grieving, and celebration
19. Workshop on creating new activities for building community in the classroom
20. Training on how to use affective statements in the moment
21. Math ;)
22. How to run intensive support circles
23. Training on formal responses for example when addressing harm or serious
behavior issues
24. Facilitating bilingual circles
25. How to deal with tough issues (rape, suicide, abuse, underage sex)
26. Acknowledging difference of gender and race
27. More practice with specific scenarios
28. Training on formal circles and responses to harm (appropriate skills for different
positions)

Suggestions and comments about the workshop

- 29. Comfortable setting
- 30. More time
- 31. Interactive activities
- 32. Less lecture, and if lecturing make it centralized
- 33. Invite students
- 34. More time to complete experiential circles
- 35. Improve time management to provide in-depth explanations on objectives of workshop
- 36. Smaller groups, perhaps break out into classrooms
- 37. Time to discuss concerns and ask questions