Overview of Circle Process in the Peacemaking Circle Tradition

Purpose: Found in the traditions of many indigenous cultures and adapted to new contexts, circle processes promote openness and shared voice amongst individuals of a group in order to celebrate, build community, make decisions, or address harm/conflict.

Key Features:

Circular Seating (without any high tables) emphasizes equality and connectedness. It improves focus and visibility amongst the group.

The Keeper facilitates the circle, holding a collective space and process that encourages participant to be present, open, vulnerable, reflective, and compassionate. The keeper may contribute their own voice to the circle, but does not control the issues raised by the group or try to move the group toward a particular outcome.

Opening and Closing Ceremonies mark the Circle as a special, even sacred, space in which participants are present with themselves and one another in an interconnected way that is different from other settings. They may include mindfulness moments, readings, quotations, movement, music, lighting candles, and/or ringing bells. Openings set the tone of the Circle and closings transition participants back to the their ordinary lives.

The Centerpiece sits on the floor in the center of the open space inside the circle of chairs. Typically, a cloth or mat, the centerpiece holds talking pieces and other items of personal and collective significance such as the group's written values and vision of the group, as well as candles, bells, pens, or other objects used during the Circle. The group can be involved in collectively building the composition of the centerpiece over time.

The Talking Piece is an object of personal or shared significance used to support the sanctity of the space, full expression of emotions, thoughtful reflection and listening, an unhurried pace, and equal voice. During rounds, it is passed from person to person around the rim of the Circle. The person with the talking piece is invited to speak (but can pass at any time) while all others to listen.

Values to hold the space are elicited from the group early on and often memorialized in written form on the centerpiece. They can be the basis upon which participants adopt **Guidelines** of what will make the space safe and encourage openness. Three important guidelines that the keeper may propose are speaking and listening from the heart; respecting the talking piece; and confidentiality.

Guiding Questions are open-ended prompts that stimulate deep sharing during rounds.

Model Circle Flow

Welcome

Opening Ceremony – Mindfulness moment, poem, reading, quotation, song, activity, visualization, meditation, yoga.

Explain and Introduce Centerpiece/Talking Piece (as needed)

State the Purpose – Remind participants of the purpose of the Circle.

Opening Round – For participants to get acquainted (for groups with individuals that are new to each other) or check in on how everyone is doing.

Generate Values/Guidelines – During the first session, the group shares grounding values and agrees to guidelines that will help bring these values to life. Ask "what proposed guidelines to you have for yourself and others to help bring out these values?" then seek consensus on each request. Write down the values and guidelines, making them a visible reminder at subsequent sessions.

Storytelling Rounds – To prompt the sharing of personal stories for greater understanding and connection in the Circle.

Exploring the Topic of the Circle – This is where the primary topic or purpose of the Circle is addressed through rounds and/or activities.

Closing Round – To provide closure by asking participants to reflect upon their experiences in the Circle or share how it may carry into the future.

Closing Ceremony – Mindfulness moment, poem, reading, quotation, song, activity, visualization, meditation, yoga.

Seven Key Assumptions Underlying Circle Processes:

The core self in everyone is human, wise, and powerful

Everything we need to make a positive change is already here

The world is profoundly interconnected

All humans have gifts and everyone is needed for the gifts they bring

Behind our defenses, all human beings desire to be in good relationship with others

Human beings are holistic

We need practices to build habits of living from the core self

Adapted by Tarek Maassarani from Circle Keepers Handbook – Kay Pranis

Sample Guiding Questions and Prompts (See also *Circle Forward*, Appendix 1, p. 323-327)

Opening round:

- What brings you here today?
- How are you doing today?
- Describe your mood as if it were the weather (sunny, cloudy, etc)
- What would you like to get off your chest to be more present here?

Exploring values:

- What value do you think would help us have this conversation best?
- Imagine you are in conflict with a person who is important to you. What value would guide your conduct as you try to work it out?
- What principle do you keep returning to in your life?
- What quality do you have to offer this Circle?
- What value would you like manifest in Circle today?

Establishing guidelines:

- What agreements would you like to make for our Circle to fully live out our values?

Getting acquainted:

- What is something we wouldn't guess about you?
- What do you do to release stress?
- Share a funny story from your work/school.
- What do you appreciate about your work/school?
- How would your best friend describe you?
- What would you not want to change about your life?
- If you had an unexpected free day, what would you like to do?
- What is your cultural heritage and what role does it play in your life?

Storytelling prompts from our lives to share who we are and what has shaped us (to build understanding and empathy)

- A time when you had to let go of control.
- A time when you were outside your comfort zone.
- A life experience when you "made lemonade out of lemons."
- An experience of transformation when, out of a crisis or difficulty, you discovered a gift in your life.
- A time when you had to hear something very difficult from someone and afterward were grateful that it happened.
- An experience of letting go of anger or resentment.
- An experience of causing harm to someone and then dealing with it in a way you felt good about.
- A time when you acted on your core values even though others did not.
- A time you discovered that someone was very different from the assumptions you first made about them.
- An embarrassing moment that you can laugh at now.
- An experience of feeling that you did not fit in.

Making decisions:

- What values or other criteria should guide our decision?
- What objections or concerns do you have about any given idea?
- How will you know if things are better or have worked?
- What are possible solutions or strategies?
- What needs to happen, by whom and when to implement this decision?

Exploring issues, concerns, conflicts:

- How have you been affected by this situation?
- How do you feel about this situation?
- What's been the hardest part of this situation for you?
- What can be done to make things better?
- Does anyone have anything to clear up with someone else in the Circle?
- How have we each contributed to this situation, and how can each of us, by taking responsibility, act differently now?

Addressing an incident of harm:

- What happened? How did you experience the incident?
- Who has been affected by the incident and how?
- In your experience what supports healing?
- What were you thinking and feeling at the time?
- What do we need to do now to repair the harm that happened and to make sure it doesn't happen again?

Closing round:

- Is there anything you came with that you would like to leave behind?
- What are you taking from this Circle that supports your healing?
- Where do you see yourself moving forward?
- What have you learned?
- What can you take away that is useful to you?
- How will these insights help you in the next two weeks?

Links to Sample Resources for Opening and Closing Ceremonies (See also *Circle Forward*, Appendix 2, p. 329-394)
Readings: http://www.keepinspiring.me/positive-inspirational-life-quotes/ or http://www.doc.state.mn.us/rj/Inspirational.htm
Sample activities: Help Increase the Peace Program manual (http://afsc.org/resource/hipp-manual).