Core Assumptions of Circle Processes

As outlined in *Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community* and shared by many traditions from around the world, these are assumptions about what makes human beings tick. They form the rationale for why there is power in the circle. We invite you to reflect on them and examine your own core assumptions.

1. The core self in everyone is good, wise, and powerful
2. The world is profoundly interconnected
3. All human beings desire to be in good relationship
4. All humans have gifts and everyone is needed for what they bring
5. Everything we need to make positive change is already here
6. Human beings are holistic
7. We need practices to build habits of living from the core self

Guiding Principles of Circle Keeping

Understanding these guiding principles allows the circle keeper to tap into the power of circle practice without robotically following a set of instructions. It will make circle keeping more authentic and enjoyable, unleash your creativity to experiment and adapt circles to new settings and purposes, and allow you to respond dynamically to unanticipated challenges.

Circles are a special space to share from the heart and the core self; to promote equality as humans and break down social hierarchies.

Circles welcome emotional expression as a natural and healthy part of being human and connected to others with no responsibility on anyone else to change or fix a person who is experiencing emotions.

Circles prioritize relationships and long-term transformation over short-term, unilateral problem solving.

In Circles, we work towards shared understanding, accountability, leadership, power, and decision making. We slow down and reflect, to be fully present to the experience.

Circles are all inclusive, inviting everyone's participation as a human who is part of a community; there are no observers or "neutral" facilitators.

Circles are non-coercive, offering participants informed choice around whether and how they will share, participate, or even attend.

Circle keepers are entrusted to care for the integrity of the process, not determine the outcome.

Circle keepers are most active in guiding the process when participants are unfamiliar, increasingly allowing the circle to govern itself as participants become more familiar and invested.

Circles, and its elements, are one effective strategy for human connection, however an experienced keeper or the consensus of participants can intentionally change or choose other strategies that are judged to better serve the underlying purpose and group

When in doubt about how to handle a situation as a circle keeper, wait calmly to determine whether the situation really threatens the integrity of the process and/or the circle self-governs to come back to the process; if not, then guide the group back to the basics of the process, the purpose of the circle, and/or its own values/ guidelines; then, if needed, name the situation in observational terms and ask the group what their experience is and/or what to do about it.

1. **Circles are an effective, but not exclusive, strategy for human connection**

2. Circles are a special space which value:

    a. **Speaking and listening from the heart**
        i. Emotional expression
        ii. Slowing down
        iii. Presence with hard emotions over "fixing" them

    b. **Relationships over unilateral problem solving**

    c. **Sharing power, leadership**
        i. Equality of people, participation as humans not titles
        ii. Inclusion, no observers or "neutral" facilitators
        iii. Consensus decision-making and mutual accountability
        iv. Informed choice, lack of coercion, voluntariness

3. Circle keepers:

    a. Care for the **integrity of the process**, not the content or outcome

    b. Are **most active when participants are unfamiliar with process**

    c. **Allow the circle to govern itself** as participants become more familiar and invested

4. **When not sure what to do:**

    a. **Breathe, wait calmly**
        i. Is the **integrity of the process** threatened?
        ii. Is the **Circle coming back** to the process by itself? If not,

    b. **Guide the group back** to
        i. Basics of the process, and/or
        ii. Purpose of the Circle and/or
        iii. It's own values/guidelines

    c. If needed,
        i. **Name the situation**
        ii. **Ask group about** their experience of the situation, and/or what to do about it