

Circle Keeper Roles & Responsibilities

What is a circle keeper?

Circle keepers are known as facilitators, servants, and other names, but whatever name is used, the role is the same. Keepers are the caretakers of the circle process. As a keeper, you must ensure that everyone takes responsibility for helping keep the circle, and for making the circle a safe place for open discussion and reiterating that confidentiality is respected. Keepers have responsibilities before, during, and after the circle.

Qualities of circle keepers:

- Compassionate
- Patient
- Nonjudgmental
- Empathetic
- Confidential/Trust worthy
- Passionate
- Entertaining/Interesting
- Exciting (when appropriate)
- Knowledgeable on topics that interest others
- Talkative/able to spark conversation
- Good listener
- Humble
- Self-Aware
- Tolerant
- Trusting
- Reflective
- Inclusive
- Courageous
- Approachable
- Supportive
- Flexible
- Open to other opinions
- Respectful
- Encouraging
- Honest

Roles/responsibilities:

- Maintain positive attitude
- Commitment
- Share honest opinions
- Role model for others
- Maintain “safety” of the circle
- Keep the peace
- Gain a better understanding of people in the circle
- Have fun
- Keep agreements
- No bad attitudes
- Provide reminders
- Don’t rush the process
- Show equality
- Don’t act/think you’re better than others
- Don’t judge/blame/scold
- Don’t add to problems/disagreements

Circle Keeper Responsibilities before, during, and after the circle:

Before the Circle

- ❖ Determine suitability
 - Is the circle process the best to use with this situation or topic?
 - What will be the goals of the circle?
 - Are there available people who will want to be in the circle?
 - Are there resources to support a circle (space, circle keeper, supplies, etc.)?
- ❖ Preparation for the circle
 - Ensure you can explain how circles work, your role as a keeper
 - Handle logistics (time, place, talking piece, materials-if needed, centerpiece, and shared agreements)
 - If using a topic, meet ahead of time with staff advisor to plan icebreaker, questions, etc.

During the Circle

- ❖ Ensure that circles have an opening and a closing
- ❖ Knowing the phases of the circle:
 - Phase 1: Introductions
 - Welcoming everyone
 - Opening
 - Introductions and check-in
 - Shared agreements (seeking consensus)
 - Clarifying the purpose of the circle
 - Phase 2: Building Trust
 - Ice-breakers-help participants get to know one another; team building activity or non-threatening question
 - Storytelling-questions should ask participants to tell of a life experience related to the topic/issue
 - Deepening-this go-around may focus on expressions of needs, interests, and strategies
 - Phase 3: Issues
 - Depending on why the circle was called, this phase may focus on what can be done to make things right, promote healing, or encourage positive growth
 - Phase 4: Solutions

- Decision-making phase
- Reaching consensus/agreement
- Helping participants to identify areas of disagreement
- Encouraging participants to explore and understand one another's perspectives
- Work with participants toward final consensus that are inclusive as possible and respectful of differing viewpoints
- Closing-this brings a sense of closure to the circle

After the Circle

❖ Follow-up

- If strong emotions are shared, affected individuals need to be contacted
- Determine whether another follow-up circle is needed
- Circle keepers responsibility to ensure that follow-up is occurring when needed, not necessarily do it all

TIPS on Circle Keeping

When responsible for keeping the circle, pay close attention to:

- ✓ Setting the tone
- ✓ Building trust, creating a safe place
- ✓ Balancing interests and perspectives
- ✓ Protecting integrity of the process
- ✓ Regulating the pace of the circle
- ✓ Maintaining focus
- ✓ Participating as yourself
- ✓ Ensuring self-care and community care
- ✓ Attending to culture/ethnic concerns
- ✓ Using rituals
- ✓ Using talking pieces