

Restorative Circles Closing Suggestions

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Restorative Practices is a powerful process for all of its participants. By their very nature, Restorative Circles can stir up deep-seeded emotions because of their organic and naturally evolving nature. Whether the purpose of the Circle is to: build relationships, repair harm, facilitate change, conduct a formal or informal conference, pave a road to new organizational habits, or improve the ways we relate to one another, the closing of a Circle is a very important part of the process as it brings a clear ending to the circle process. It is helpful to determine the group's needs regarding closure (i.e. summary? next steps? decisions? expressions of gratitude?, etc.)

Here are some suggestions as how to facilitate the completion of circle, so that participants are less likely to be left with a void and subsequent frustration. However, many of these suggestions can be used to open a circle as well. Again, these are mere suggestions and by no means exhaust the multitude of possible ways to close a circle. One key component of closing a Circle, however, is to thank the participants for their time, contribution, dedication to the process, and their willingness to be a part of a movement that is shifting a paradigm moving away from being punitive to being reflective.

Some Suggestions As How To Close A Circle Include, But Are Not Limited To:

1. Three Reflective Words (This can also be used to open a circle)

The Three Reflective Words technique asks participants to reflect on the Circle by sharing three words that express their thoughts about the Circle that just completed. This technique is particularly effective for large groups and when there is limited time.

2. Deep Breathing

Deep Breathing is one of the best ways to lower stress in the body. This is because when you breathe deeply it sends a message to your brain to calm down and relax. The brain then sends this message to your body. Those things that happen when you are stressed, such as increased heart rate, fast breathing, and high blood pressure, all decrease as you breathe deeply to relax.¹ For Circles that may be tense such as a Repairing Harm Circle, this is also a possible way to open the Circle. Participants can sit with their eyes either open or closed for a few minutes breathing deeply or sighing before beginning.

1. Murray MT, Pizzorno JE Jr (2006). Stress management. In JE Pizzorno Jr, MT Murray, ds., Textbook of Natural Medicine, 3rd ed., vol. 1, pp. 701–708. St. Louis: Churchill Livingstone.

3. The Relaxing Sigh” Breathing Technique

Sighing and yawning during the day are signs that the body is not getting enough oxygen. A sigh releases a bit of tension and can be practiced at will as a means of relaxing.

1. Sit or stand up straight.
2. Sigh deeply, letting out a sound of deep relief as the air rushes out of your lungs.
3. Let new air come in naturally.
4. Repeat this procedure eight to twelve times whenever you feel the need for it, and experience the feeling of relaxation.

(USF College of Education)

4. State a Color (This can also be used to open a circle)

Stating a Color to reflect how a participant is feeling is a great indicator for the facilitator to gauge both how the Circle went and get a sense of how participants are feeling in preparation for the next Circle.

5. State a Positive Hope and/or Expectation for the Next Circle

The technique of Stating a Positive Hope and/or Expectation for the Next Circle begins building momentum and anticipation for the next Circle. While it does not necessarily offer “closure” in the traditional sense, it lends itself to the anticipation of the next Circle by already creating both a positive and hopeful expectation for future Circle outcomes.

6. The Kinesthetic Close

The Kinesthetic Close works most effectively when there is a Kinesthetic opening. This technique involves the creation, any creation, of connecting to others in the Circle by some form of touch of the person to either the right or the left of you. For example, clapping your hands together and then uttering “whoosh” is a way to either open or close a Circle. The first person then designates that the person either to their right or the left goes next. A group of kindergarteners created their version of closing a Circle by clapping three times, then putting palms together with the person next to them, then moving their body in a side to side shoulder motion. A bumping of elbows, a smile and a nod, anything is acceptable as a Kinesthetic Close for a Circle. This technique is one that is created on the spot by one of the participants, not the facilitator. This technique is more “fun” in nature so you will have to use your discretion to determine its level of appropriateness based on the topic and level of intensity of your Circle.

7. The Honest Reflection

The Honest Reflection method to close a Circle allows for an honest and authentic verbal assessment from participants in the Circle. Each person in

the Circle gives a sentence or two of feedback about the themes that surfaced during the Circle. This approach may be higher on the risk Geiger scale, as it cannot be predicted how participants will respond, but it is precisely because of the higher risk factor that, in the long run, participants come to know and expect that the facilitator is open to hearing the true thoughts and comments of the participants paving the way for honestly both after the Circle and for the future conversations.

8. Best Practices

The Best Practices closing approach is a low-risk way to determine participants' thoughts after a Circle. The posed question, "What did you like best about today's Circle?" This question guides participants to focus on that which was specifically positive and redeeming about the Circle by encouraging positive feedback, a wonderful contagion.

9. Weather Report (This can also be used to open a circle)

The Weather Report allows the facilitator to get a pulse of how participants are feeling by using the analogy of a weather report. For example, a participant might share that at the close of the Circle, their weather report is sun-shiny, while another might indicate that their weather report is overcast with a chance of rain. Of course there is no one or correct response, rather an opportunity for participants to honestly express how they are feeling. The purpose is to assess the emotional status of the participants.

10. A Personal Thought

A Personal Thought closing allows participants to express a couple of sentences that reflect their feelings about what surfaced while listening to the other members of the group that surfaced during the Circle.

11. Holding Hands (This can also be used to open a circle)

The Holding Hands closing technique is a simple way for the group to connect and acknowledge the experience of the Circle. This can be done either by everyone joining hands at the same time, or, one person reaching out to her neighbor, then the next person, and so on until all hands are connected.

12. Silence (This can also be used to open a circle)

Everyone in the group holds a moment of silence and reflects silently on the process of the Circle, or holds a moment of silence to hold others in regard, or to silently acknowledge others.

13. Acknowledgment / Appreciation (This can also be used to open a circle)

The closing process of Acknowledgement / Appreciation provides the opportunity for each participant to make a statement of acknowledgment or appreciation for something someone else in the group shared during the Circle.

14. Snapshot

The use of the Snapshot method to close a Circle allows participants to capture one moment, the essence of a powerful statement or idea that was shared during the Circle as a reflection, a synthesizing idea.