

Guidelines For the Learning Circle:

Details for the Leader

- Everyone sits in a circle without tables or other obstructions blocking their view of one another.
- One person is the facilitator to pose the question or issue.
- Be aware that emotional topics can be overwhelmingly in large circles. If the facilitator believes a question will elicit strong feelings of sadness, depression, grief, or anger limit the number of participants to 8-10 and keep them apprised of the time allotted for the circle so they may adjust themselves emotionally. Keep the time per person fairly short (30 seconds is good.) Remember you will be opening it up for discussion immediately after, and it does not take too long to share the feeling. The interpretation or the reasons why would, in this circumstance, be better in general discussion so that people may support, motivate, placate, and cheer as needed.
- The facilitator poses the question or issue and asks for a volunteer. A volunteer in the circle responds with his/her thoughts on the chosen topic. The person sitting to the right or left or the first respondent goes next, followed one by one around the circle until everyone has spoken on the subject without interruption.
- No cross talk. The facilitator should have made this rule clear at the beginning so that they do not need to interrupt often to enforce the rule of no talking across the circle. (Involuntary laughter and simple words of empathy should not be quelled. But others may not add their thoughts or opinions on an issue until it is their turn to speak.)
- One may choose to pass rather than to speak when their time comes. But after everyone else in the circle has had their turn, the facilitator goes back to those who passed and allows each one the opportunity to respond. Of course no one is forced to speak, but there is the expectation that they will. (Usually, they do respond with gentle encouragement from the facilitator who may need to prompt the talkative to hold their tongue.)
- Open general discussion on the topic after everyone has had a chance to speak. While on the surface, the Learning Circle is simply a common sense technique for organizing meetings; there are subtle, underlying forces (of sharing, respect, and broadening one's perspective) at work that yield astounding results.

Guidelines For Great Circles!

(Great to have on hand during a circle)

Identify the facilitator who will:

- Pose a question.
- Ask for a volunteer to begin.
 - Go once around the circle.
 - LISTEN ONLY. No cross talk.
- Return to anyone who passed on round one.
 - Open up for discussion.
 - Encourage comments.
- LISTEN more than you TALK.
 - Wrap up

What are the guidelines for a successful Circle?

For all members to read prior to first meeting

1. General Learning Circles can be 10-15 participants. Depending on topic or intensity of emotions, number could be limited to 5-10.
2. Reading materials may be distributed prior to the Learning Circle, but their use, including AV presentations, should be minimized during the Circle in deference to participant sharing on the topic.
3. One person is chosen as facilitator. This person poses the (chosen) topic or question to the Circle, gives encouragement, and keeps the Circle moving in an orderly fashion.
4. Sit in a circle with no obstructions blocking the view of the other participants.
5. The process begins when the facilitator poses the question or issue.
6. A volunteer in the Circle responds with her or his thoughts on the topic.
7. The person sitting to the right or left of the first respondent speaks next, followed one by one around the Circle until everyone has spoken on the subject without interruption.
8. Participants may choose to pass rather than speak. After everyone else in the circle has taken a turn, the facilitator goes back to those who passed and allows another opportunity to respond.
9. Only after everyone has had a chance to speak is the floor opened for general discussion.
10. Average length of time for a Learning Circle may be 1-2 hours without interruption, but length will depend on the topic or needs of the group. Closure should be by group consensus.