

# **"Calling a circle "**

extracts and inspirations from  
" Calling the Circle by Christina Baldwin  
compiled Monica Nissén.

**Below are descriptions of some elements and roles that can aid in making the circle work.**

**It is important that these suggestions do not become empty rituals – but are meaningful ways of being together and that each circle finds out what works for them.**

" As the quality of relationships increases, so increases the quality of discussion, so increases the quality of decisions, so increases the quality of results, which further increases the quality of relationships. "

## **Calling the circle – the role of the host**

"To start a circle, somebody needs to make the suggestion, offer the basic structure, and be ready to model circle skills while others become accustomed to how a circle works. This person is the "caller of the circle". "

"before the first meeting, three preparatory steps are helpful: setting intention, gathering feed-back and envisioning the group."

## **The components of the circle.**

- welcome
- check-in / establish Center / shared purpose
- agreements
- Intention
- Three practises
- guardian
- Farewell / check-out.

## **Welcome**

The host can ask if anyone wants to offer a welcome – a poem, song, piece of music or whatever seems a good way of offering a welcome.

## **Check-in / Establishing the Team Center**

At the beginning of each meeting, a period of time is set aside for checking in and establishing 'center'.

Center represents, and is a visible demonstration of, the sense of 'highest intent' for the circle. As each person contributes an object, a thought or a word to 'center', he/she is making a commitment to highest intent of the group, and to being truly present to engage in the group's work.

To do this, individuals bring to the meeting an object (or a thought or word ) that is a symbol of what's going on in their lives and work, or a message they'd like to bring to the group.

The team may also want to agree on some permanent articles that are placed in the center at the beginning of each meeting.

One at a time, each person places his/her article or message in the center and takes a minute or two to talk about the symbol - what it represents, and anything else that will help him/her to become present to the group and focused on work of the circle for that day.

The process starts with a volunteer and proceeds clock-wise around the circle.

If an individual is not ready to speak, the turn is passed and another opportunity is offered after others have completed their check-ins.

It helps get the circle into a frame of mind for "circle" work, and also reminds all of their commitment to highest intent for their work together. It insures that people are truly present for the meeting, in mind as well as in body.

### **Setting circle agreements:**

The agreements are like a container for the circle which allows us to have a free and profound exchange – and to hold a diversity of views.

One suggestion or example for agreements could be:

- what we say in the circle is confidential
- we listen with compassion, avoiding judgement
- from time to time we will pause to gather our thoughts
- we ask each other for what we need and offer what we can

The above agreements seem to have been working well for many circles – but each circle should make their own agreements.

### **Intention**

The intention of the circle - is the highest shared purpose of the circle.

### **Three principles:**

"The circle is not a leaderless group: It is an all leader group"

These three principles can serve as a foundation:

- rotating leadership
- sharing responsibility
- relying on inspiration (spirit).

### **Three practises:**

"Our ability to pay attention to each other in whatever form of council we find ourselves is largely dependent on three practices:

- speaking with intention
- listening with attention
- self-monitoring our impact and contributions.

### **Forms of council:**

"We commonly use three forms of council: talking piece, conversation and silence"

*Talking piece* is described below.

*Conversation* - in conversation, people pick up on what others are saying, react, interact, brainstorm, agree and disagree, persuade, and interject new ideas, thoughts and opinions. The energy of open conversation stimulates the free flow of ideas.

*Silence* - Depending on the setting and purpose of the circle, people may speak of group silence as waiting for guidance, time-out or centering. Silence gives each member time and space to listen to and reflect on center or highest purpose.

### **Guardian**

"The single most important tool for aiding self-governance and bringing everyone back to center is the role of the guardian. The guardian is a person who volunteers to watch and safeguard group energy. ...."

At a circle meeting one of the circle members can be appointed 'guardian' of the circles' process.

The guardian has the group's permission to interrupt and intercede in group process for the purpose of calling the circle back to center, to task, or to respectful practise, or suggesting a needed break".

The guardian can suggest use of the 'taking piece' (see below) when conversation gets hurried, jumbled or unproductive.

Call for time out or a break when needed.

Call for the checkout at meeting end.

It should be noted that anyone can call for a time-out, or ask for the talking piece - but the guardian should be especially looking for these opportunities.

### **Talking Piece**

An object (a pen, Kooshball, something someone has placed in center, etc.) is used whenever discussion needs everyone's input. A team member, often the guardian, suggests using the talking piece. One member picks it up, shares his/her thoughts or opinion, and then passes it on. No one is allowed to interrupt at this point. The job of the individual with the talking piece is to speak his/her view as clearly as possible. And the job of the other individuals is to attend to the speaker so intently that each could state (perhaps even more eloquently) what the speaker presented.

The talking piece progresses around the room, either in sequence or by volunteering, until everyone has had an opportunity to contribute. As in check-in, one may pass a turn and then speak after others have spoken. Questions may be asked of another when one is holding the talking piece, or later when the team shifts back to a normal discussion mode.

### **Checkout**

This is the last item on the agenda. Each person in turn reclaims their symbol from center, and as they do so each has the opportunity to comment on the meeting - what they learned, what is staying with them or simply what they're thinking as they leave.

Closing the circle or checking out gives a formal end to the meeting, a chance for members to reflect on anything that has transpired

"As we shift from "ceremonial" space to social space or private time, we release each other from the intensity of council, and let the rim expand."