



Talking Circles

A talking circle is a method used by a group to discuss a topic in an egalitarian and non-confrontational manner. The group members sit in a circle and make comment on the topic of the discussion following three rules:

- Only the person holding the talking stick (or other item) may speak.
- Listen as you would want others to hear you when you are speaking.
- Speak from your heart.

The talking stick passes around the circle.

Ideally, a seated circle is formed shoulder-to-shoulder, so that all participants can see everyone's face, including those on either side of them. A ceremonial opening (and closing) is used in some circles.

Each person is given the opportunity to speak in turn, holding the talking stick. The speaker should speak loudly enough for the person on the opposite side of the circle to hear what is being said.

Unlike meetings, speakers are not interrupted by other participants in a talking circle, though this 'rule' may be broken by a request to "address the stick," particularly if something is factually incorrect or controversial. It is the speaker's decision to allow or disallow the interruption. Interruptions generally slow down the process. Some people take notes so they can address particular points that have been raised by others when it is their turn to speak. In international circles, a translator may also be involved in the process. As the speaker completes their turn, they pass the stick to their neighbor, who may speak or may, in silence, pass the stick on.

Discussion continues until consensus is reached, that is, no one objects to the proposed decision or until the stick has been passed around the whole circle once in silence. It may be obvious that consensus has been reached, or the speaker may "test for consensus," with silence denoting agreement. While highly decorated ceremonial talking sticks are often used, in some circles it is the practice to use a stick found on the ground and to burn it at the end of the circle.

Confidentiality is a key element to all talking circles and an expectation. Attendees are reminded of the requirement and sensitivity of the information being shared.

Additional resources:

Creating Circles: www.peerspirit.com