



TOOL RESTORATIVE CIRCLES

Adapted from [The Little Book of Restorative Justice for Colleges and Universities](#) and [The Little Book of Restorative Justice for Communities](#)

For more in depth Restorative Justice Facilitator Trainings check out the [Restorative Justice Colorado or the Colorado Coalition](#) or the [Restorative Justice Practices \(CCRJP\)](#)

OVERVIEW

The Restorative Circle is a structured dialogue tool grounded in restorative justice principles. It supports communities in addressing harm, conflict, or division by centering relationships, dignity, accountability, and collective problem-solving. The tool emphasizes inclusive engagement, shared responsibility, and healing-oriented outcomes, aligning directly with the Dialogue phase of the Community Learning Model.

This tool draws on circle practices borrowed from Indigenous traditions and adapted for community dialogue and conflict transformation contexts.

WHEN TO USE

When This Tool Is Appropriate

Restorative Circles are most effective when:

- A community is experiencing conflict, harm, or breakdowns in trust
- Multiple perspectives or lived experiences need to be heard and honored
- Solutions require shared ownership rather than top-down decisions
- The group seeks healing, accountability, or reintegration rather than punishment
- Underlying community conditions contributing to harm need to be surfaced

This tool is especially useful when outcomes must address both individual and community-level needs

Not recommended when:

- Immediate safety concerns are present

- Participants are unwilling to engage respectfully
- The situation requires formal investigation or disciplinary action first

This expanded training toolkit is intended for **facilitators, trainers, community leaders, and staff** who are building foundational skills in restorative practices. It offers step-by-step guidance, facilitation language, preparation tips, and reflective prompts to support both learning *and* application.

Use this toolkit to:

- Train new facilitators in restorative dialogue
- Prepare for upcoming restorative circles
- Build shared language and consistency across facilitators
- Support co-facilitation and peer learning

This guide assumes **no prior restorative experience** and is written to be used alongside practice.

HOW TO USE

The Restorative Circle is **not always linear** and should remain responsive to the group and context. Facilitators should prioritize psychological safety, respect, and inclusion throughout the process.

Circle Structure: Facilitator Responsibilities

A Restorative Circle typically unfolds across multiple rounds of dialogue. While the structure provides consistency, facilitators should adapt pacing, prompts, and depth based on group readiness.

Facilitator Responsibilities Include:

- Preparing participants in advance (purpose, expectations, consent)
- Establishing psychological and emotional safety
- Explaining agreements and circle elements clearly
- Monitoring group energy and dynamics
- Intervening when harm occurs during dialogue

Participants sit in a **physical circle** to reinforce equality and shared ownership of the conversation. The **talking piece** ensures that everyone is heard without interruption.

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Core Components (Facilitator Checklist)

Facilitator(s)

- Reviews purpose, agreements, and flow before beginning
- Maintains a calm, grounded presence
- Names patterns, themes, and transitions

Talking Piece

- Chosen intentionally (neutral or meaningful)
- Used consistently throughout dialogue rounds
- May be paused if emotional regulation is needed

Centerpiece (Optional)

- Represents shared values, intention, or care
- Can support focus and grounding

Physical Setup

- Chairs in an unbroken circle
- Minimize barriers (tables, technology, status markers)
- Ensure accessibility and comfort

Restorative Circle Rounds: Detailed Facilitation Guidance

ROUND 1: CONNECTION – ESTABLISHING SAFETY

Training Objective: Create relational grounding and orient participants to the restorative process.

Facilitator Preparation:

- Review agreements aloud (confidentiality, respect, listening)
- Explain the purpose of the talking piece
- Name that discomfort is normal

Sample Facilitator Prompts:

- “What name would you like to be called in this space?”
- “What brought you into this circle today?”
- “Share one value you hope guides our conversation.”



What to Watch For:

- Nervousness or hesitation
- Unequal participation
- Early signs of emotional activation

Why This Round Matters: Connection humanizes participants and creates the trust needed for deeper dialogue.

ROUND 2: CONCERN – UNDERSTANDING IMPACT

Training Objective: Surface experiences, feelings, and impacts without debate or accusation.

Facilitator Guidance:

- Encourage “I” statements
- Redirect blame toward impact
- Allow pauses and silence

Sample Facilitator Prompts:

- “What has your experience of this situation been?”
- “How has this affected you or others?”
- “Why does this matter to you?”

Support Tool: [SBII Framework](#) to Frame Dialogues

- **Situation:** Describe what happened
- **Behavior:** Name observable actions
- **Impact:** Share emotional or practical effects
- **Intent:** Reflect on perceived intention

Common Challenges:

- Story repetition
- Emotional escalation
- Defensiveness

Facilitator Response: Slow the pace, restate agreements, normalize emotion while maintaining boundaries.

Why This Round Matters: Honoring stories and perspectives creates a higher level of understanding that can spark new solutions

ROUND 3: COLLABORATION – RESPONSIBILITY AND REPAIR

Training Objective: Move from understanding to shared accountability and action.

Facilitator Guidance:

- Frame accountability as learning and repair
- Invite multiple forms of responsibility
- Avoid rushing to solutions

Sample Facilitator Prompts:

- “What responsibility do individuals or groups hold here?”
- “What would repairing harm look like in practice?”
- “What needs to change to prevent this in the future?”

Types of Actions to Explore:

- Individual commitments
- Relational repairs
- Policy, process, or cultural changes

Why This Round Matters: Co-created solutions are more likely to be sustained and honored.

ROUND 4: CLOSING – INTEGRATION AND COMMITMENT

Training Objective: Support reflection, learning, and closure.

Facilitator Guidance:

- Reinforce appreciation and effort
- Clarify any shared next steps
- Name follow-up processes if needed

Sample Facilitator Prompts:

- “What feels important to carry forward from today?”
- “Is there a commitment you want to name aloud?”

- “What are you appreciating as we close?”

Why This Round Matters: Intentional closure supports dignity, integration, and accountability beyond the circle.

Facilitator Tips for Beginners

- You are responsible for the *process*, not the outcome
- Silence is a tool—use it
- Intervene early if agreements are broken
- Debrief with a co-facilitator or supervisor after sessions
- Skill and confidence grow through reflection and repetition
- Restorative Circles are a practice, not a script. This toolkit provides structure while leaving space for facilitator judgment, responsiveness, and growth.

COMMUNITY LEARNING MODEL

Dialogue

Create a high-quality conversation that clarifies values, surfaces tensions, and taps into creativity; leading to concrete plans that achieve results. Establish conditions of genuine respect for the views and needs of the other.

Restorative Circles is a tool for the Dialogue phase of the Community Learning Model. To learn more about tools for dialogue and the other areas of the Community Learning Model, visit civiccanopy.org/clm.

