

Circles for Difficult Times

A relational talking circle guide for moments of uncertainty, grief, or disruption grounded in care, dignity, and belonging

For use in classrooms, homes, and community spaces



Why Circles?

Talking circles offer a way to pause, listen, and be together when difficult moments affect individuals or communities.

This guide provides a flexible structure for creating space where people can share what is present for them, feel heard, and name what they need in order to continue through the day with care.

Research consistently affirms that sharing within community during times of trouble supports the processing of grief and disruption and should not be overlooked or avoided.

The purpose of a talking circle is to nurture connection, relational safety, and belonging by creating space for listening, presence, and shared humanity.

Relationships First Newfoundland & Labrador

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Important Considerations Before You Begin

- Circles are most supportive when facilitated by someone participants know and trust.
- Facilitating circles during difficult times calls for care and attentiveness to those present.
- Talking circles create relational space for collective listening and shared understanding.
- People experience and process difficult moments in different ways and at different paces.
- Participation looks different for everyone. Passing is always welcome, and listening is a form of engagement.

Circles support shared listening and care within a group and are not intended to replace counselling or other professional supports.

For more on the basics of a talking circle, see www.rfnl.org/circles

Preparing the Space

- Arrange seating so everyone can see one another.
- Create a simple centrepiece using an object, cloth, plant, or candle, as appropriate to your setting.
- Choose a talking piece that feels gentle and meaningful to the group.
 - For children, a soft object or stuffed toy may support comfort and ease.
 - For adults, a pillow or smooth object can help set a tone of care and calm.

Circle Check-In

A quick round to hear everyone's voice and acknowledge everyone's presence

Choose one open-ended prompt or design your own:

- *On a scale of 1-10, how ready do you feel to begin learning or working today?*
- *If you were a colour today, what colour would you be?*
- *In three words or fewer, how would you describe your morning so far?*

Round 1

A time to notice what is present for the group

This round can help you sense whether people are preoccupied with a difficult event or are unaware of it. This is especially important with younger children who may have seen the news, overheard adult conversations, or have no awareness at all.

Choose one:

- *What is one thing on your mind as we begin this time together today?*
- *What is something happening in the world today that you've heard about?*

If no one mentions a difficult or troubling event, you may choose to do a final round such as:

- *What are you looking forward to today?*

If only a few mention the event, consider offering a smaller circle later in the day with that group.

If many people mention the event, continue with the following rounds.



Round 2

Introduce the topic with a brief synopsis of what is happening for those who may not be aware. Encourage those who have not heard about it to listen as others share their thoughts.

Display or read the following questions. Participants can respond to one or all of the prompts as they choose:

- *What have you heard about the situation that is happening?*
- *What were you thinking or feeling as you heard this?*
- *What story about the incident has been most on your mind?*

Round 3

Display or read the question:

- *What is the hardest thing about all of this for you?*

After this round, thank everyone for sharing. If people remain engaged and want to continue, you may offer another round that allows participants to add to what they said or respond to what they heard others share.

Round 4

Guide the conversation toward needs, grounding, or hope by choosing one:

- *What do you need, or what do you need to do, in order to continue through today in a good way?*
- *What is a final thought you have as we leave this circle?*
- *What is one thing you need right now to feel safe?*
- *What can we do to support each other in the days ahead?*

Closing

Thank everyone for coming together and for the care shown in the circle. Let participants know when you will offer a follow-up circle, whether tomorrow, later in the week, or at another time.

Looking for Support?

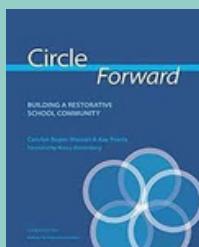
If you are feeling drawn to bring circle practice into your classroom, workplace, family, or community and would welcome support, Relationships First Newfoundland and Labrador can help connect you with experienced circle facilitators across the province. Sometimes it helps to talk with someone who can listen to your context, think alongside you, and support next steps in a way that fits your setting.



Find more on our website or reach out to us via email.

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Recommended Resources



Circle Forward offers additional guidance for those who wish to deepen their understanding of circle practice. Module 6 is particularly helpful for supporting conversations during difficult times and offers practical considerations for facilitating circles with care.

