

The Language of Social and Emotional Learning



Self-Care

Mindfulness • Self-Efficacy • Optimism • Self-Compassion • Self-Advocacy • Healthy Boundaries

Teacher to Student(s)	Teacher to Self
<p>Let's practice mindfulness and take a moment to each check in with our mind and our body.</p> <p>We can practice self-efficacy by journaling to reflect on the goals we have accomplished (or completed). Be specific and take a moment to celebrate yourself.</p> <p>Let's take a moment to acknowledge all the hard work we've done on this assignment. We should be proud of ourselves!</p> <p>When an assignment feels difficult, pause, and listen to what the voice in your head is saying. Are you compassionate with yourself? Treat yourself with the same kindness you might show to a good friend.</p> <p>Let's practice self-compassion by taking a brain break and thanking ourselves for all the hard work we've been doing.</p> <p>Even though this activity didn't go the way we expected it to, I want to celebrate how we _____.</p> <p>In this class we understand the power of YET. We say, I don't know how to do that YET, rather than I can't do that.</p> <p>Thanks for speaking up and letting me know what you need to do well in class. Asking for what you need shows self-advocacy.</p> <p>It's okay to tell a friend what you need or don't want. It's important to set healthy boundaries.</p> <p>I feel overwhelmed when everyone is talking at once. Let's refer to our class agreements to ensure that everyone can be heard.</p>	<p>I'm mindful of the fact that my patience is short just before lunch. I'm going to try some strategies to keep my body regulated.</p> <p>I know that I can help students be successful because [cite specific evidence where you have affected student learning].</p> <p>Today's lesson didn't go as planned, but I worked hard on it, and I have ideas to make it better for next time.</p> <p>I am struggling to get my students to engage in this learning. I will reach out to my colleague for support.</p> <p>I am doing the best I can and accepting that it is enough. Educating students is the work of a community.</p> <p>It's okay to take time to take care of myself.</p>
	<h3 data-bbox="1045 980 2003 1052">Teacher to Colleague</h3> <p>I'm struggling to provide meaningful one on one instruction when students are getting pulled from class so frequently. Can we discuss ideas for solutions?</p> <p>Thank you for identifying the obstacle. Let's talk about potential solutions.</p> <p>I hear your frustration, but please don't talk about students in that way around me.</p> <p>I'm feeling exhausted today. Can we continue this conversation tomorrow when I have more bandwidth?</p>

Strategies for Community Circles

Community Circles are an integral part of creating a safe and caring classroom where all members of the class experience a sense of belonging and a belief that their presence matters. A Community Circle provides a place to connect where all members of a classroom can be seen, heard, and respected.

PURPOSE

Community Circles serve a range of purposes, including building trust and connection among class members, checking in on the wellbeing of all members, addressing conflict and harm, and modeling and practicing social and emotional learning (SEL) skills.

In some classrooms, circle gatherings may be used for taking attendance, sharing the day's schedule and announcements. While these activities are worthwhile, they are typically teacher-directed activities. In order to create a safe and caring classroom, Community Circles must provide a place where all members have an equal voice. During a Community Circle, the role of the teacher is the same as the other members of the community of learners.

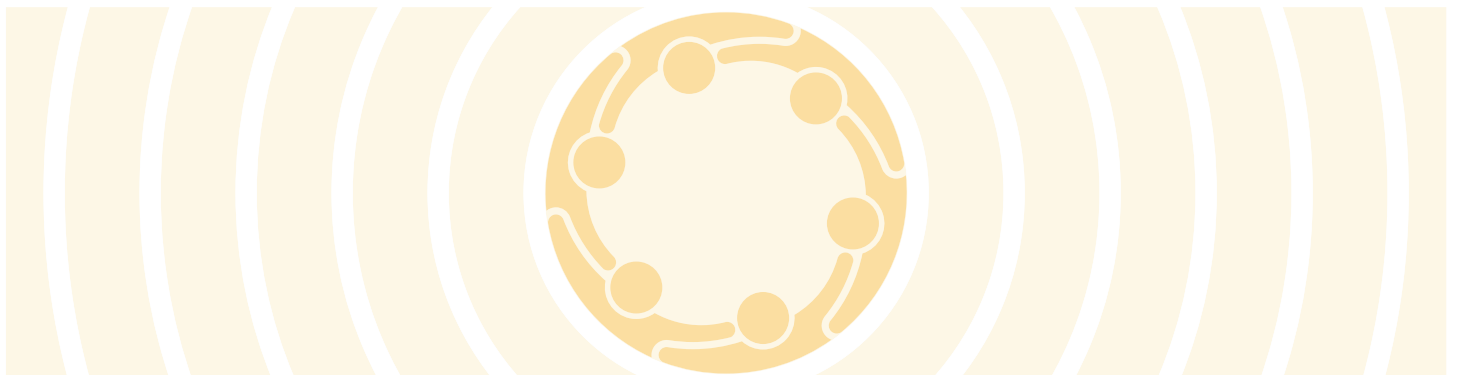
It is recommended that Community Circles become a regular classroom practice in order to establish trust and connection and to check in on the wellbeing of each member. These circle gatherings may include fun questions or topics to discuss, such as asking students to share:

- one positive/one negative thought about a topic (i.e. Rose / Thorn or Glow / Grow),
- two adjectives to describe how they're feeling,
- their favorite movie, book, activity, etc., or
- a memorable childhood event.

Once community has been established, these circles can be a safe place to process and/or resolve:

- misunderstandings or arguments between students or groups of students,
- experiences of inequity or exclusion among students or groups of students,
- exciting, challenging, or difficult events,
- confusion about an assignment or class agreement that warrants a discussion, or
- questions or curiosities around a lesson or topic of study.

In addition, Community Circles can provide a restorative alternative to punishment when a member of the class has broken an agreement or caused harm. Instead of resorting to punishment, which can isolate and marginalize students, often disproportionately impacting Black and Indigenous students and students of color, restorative practices treat harmful behavior as an opportunity for learning.



PRINCIPLES

A Community Circle is an intentional space where members grow and change through self-awareness, social connection, empathy, conflict resolution, and restorative justice. In order to be a safe place for all members, Community Circles embrace some common principles.

Principle 1: A Community of Learners

The Community Circle challenges the tradition that places the teacher as the holder of all knowledge in the classroom. Instead the Community Circle is a place where every member is recognized for having knowledge to share. All members, including teacher and students, see themselves as learners, taking both the responsibility for their own learning and pride in their contribution to the learning of others.

Principle 2: Value of Individuals

While the Community Circle is committed to the collective growth and development of all its members, it simultaneously embraces the inherent worth of each individual. Diversity is celebrated as each member is welcomed and supported in their own journey toward understanding their unique abilities and challenges.

Principle 3: Core Values

The Community Circle is a place to honor, practice, and support core values, including connection, trust, honesty, respect, confidentiality, and authenticity. Each member of the community has a responsibility to uphold these values with compassion toward themselves and others.

Principle 4: Space to Grapple

The Community Circle is a safe space for navigating difficult conversations, embracing discomfort, and moving beyond discomfort to experience social and emotional growth as all members. Community Circles allow for contradiction, complexity, and nuance, recognizing that not all conversations end in agreement. The Community Circle strives to ensure that every member feels seen, heard, understood, and respected.

Principle 5: Common Goal to Restore and Transform

Instances of harm in the classroom must be addressed when they arise and approached with care and compassion. When conflict or harm occurs among class members, Community Circles provide a place for all members to share their experience so that a fuller picture can emerge. The Community Circle is a place where all members seek to restore relationships and grow as individuals.



PRACTICES

The Circle

Establishing a meeting place and a routine for gathering in a circle is essential for building community. The circle formation, with every member at the same level, allows anyone at any point of the circle to be the focal point or the speaker. The circle formation also allows the role of speaker to shift easily from one speaker to the next.

Primary teachers may already have a circle established on a rug. Other classes may need to determine a quick and simple routine for moving chairs, desks, or bodies into a circle. Providing personal space for each member, using carpet squares, dots or other markers on the carpet, chairs, or desks is important for all members to feel included. The teacher and other adults should be seated as members of the circle. In the case of a community member requiring sitting accommodations, an effort should be made to organize all members at the same level.

Agreements

Agreements are standards that all members agree to in order to communicate effectively and respectfully in the Community Circle. All members of the community collaborate in creating agreements and assume the responsibility of following and maintaining those agreements with one another. The agreements should be fluid and changeable, able to be added to or changed as needed. Agreements may extend to all classroom interactions but are especially important to establish and adhere to during the Community Circle.

One way to allow all members to participate in the creation of the circle agreements is to ask students to think about how they would like to be treated as members of a community of learners. Make a list of the students' responses. Use the students' language as much as possible. Once the list is exhausted, ask students to group similar responses together and work together to agree on language that all members are comfortable with. Consensus must be reached before an agreement can be established. Invite students who are struggling with a proposed agreement to suggest an alternate agreement until all members agree.

Once the initial agreements are determined, they should be made visible to all members during a Community Circle. Consider inviting interested students to work together to create posters or a bulletin board, highlighting the community agreements.

When first introducing the Community Circle, it may be helpful to review the agreements at the beginning of each circle. Revisit the agreements as needed. Encourage all group members to take responsibility for adhering to the agreements and, when necessary, gently reminding others to do the same.

Talking Piece

A talking piece can be a helpful tool to aid the discussions in the Community Circle. A talking piece can help to establish and direct focus to the speaker as the speaker changes during a discussion.

A talking piece may be anything – feather, stick, rock, etc. – that can easily be passed from one member to another. Some classes choose an item based on a classroom theme or subject (i.e. a magnifying glass in a science class or a stuffed octopus in class with an ocean theme). Other classes keep a basket of talking pieces and allow a piece to be chosen prior to the circle discussion.

SUGGESTED FORMAT

Because all Community Circles serve different purposes, they also may have different components. The following is a sample format that may be adapted to meet needs of the circle and the community.

Intention

Setting an intention for each Community Circle helps to set expectations for the circle for everyone. The intention can be set by any member of the community. Empower all members to request a Community Circle to talk about anything that they feel needs to be addressed by all class members. The intention should be stated at the start of the circle by the member setting the intention.

Warm Up

Prior to beginning the discussion, invite all group members to focus on the intention. The purpose of the warm-up is to prepare all group members to be fully present during the Community Circle. Depending on the intention, the Community Circle may begin by:

- answering a silly or inspiring question,
- taking a few deep breaths,
- noticing the emotions in the body,
- freezing and melting into a calm mindset, or
- sharing a quote,
- wiggling or stretching the body,
- tensing and relaxing different parts of the body,
- listening to music, podcast, or visualization

Discussion

During the discussion, the group addresses the intention. Open discussions can build trust and lead to surprising learning moments. The role of the teacher during Community Circles is to participate as a member of circle and avoid correcting misconceptions or guiding the conversation. Instead all members should be allowed to work through concepts amongst themselves. Allowing all members to grapple with the topics without intervention by the teacher can help set the expectation that there is not always one easy or correct answer. The only time that teacher intervention is appropriate is to intervene when something harmful, such as racism, sexism, or homophobia comes up. Interrupting harmful statement by calling members in, rather than calling them out, models for students strategies to interrupt harmful attitudes wherever they occur. Some ways to call members in include posing questions such as:

- What was your intention when you said that?
- How might your words be misunderstood by someone else?
- What assumptions are you making about _____ ?
- How might your words affect someone else?

Closing

The group member who set the intention should also initiate the closing and suggest a way to close the circle. A closing may include:

- a summary of what was discussed,
- thanking each member for their participation,
- asking each member to share one takeaway from the discussion,
- a closing activity such as shake it off or rose, bud, thorn,
- reciting or listening to an inspirational song, poem, statement,
- noticing and accepting the emotions that may have surfaced during the discussion, or
- taking a moment of silence to reflect on the discussion.

ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

Encourage all members to have patience during a Community Circle. Not all Community Circles will flow smoothly. It takes time to build trust and it takes practice to develop the communication skills to have transforming discussions. The following are some additional strategies that may help to facilitate a Community Circle discussions:

- Encourage members of the group to use nonverbal motions like thumbs up, thumbs down, and thumbs sideways or the American Sign Language motions for applause or thank you to engage in the conversation without speaking or interrupting the speaker.
- Consider setting a timer for some conversations to allow equal time for members to speak.
- Encourage respect for all members' right to pass. Remind all members that trust takes time to build, and no one should feel pressured to share until they feel comfortable doing so.
- Consider providing a signal that cues members that it is time for the Community Circle. For example, the community may use a clapping rhythm or a song to move in and out of each circle time.
- Be mindful of the attention span of the members of the Community Circle and bring the circle to a close as determined by the time you have available or the interest of the members.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING SKILLS

The Community Circle should be a time of authentic and equitable sharing among all members of the group. Community Circles are a useful compliment to Rethink Ed SEL lessons, as they provide an organic environment for students to practice the SEL skills that they are learning. Communities Circles can provide a space for practicing:

- active and reflective listening skills,
- listening with curiosity,
- non-judgmental listening,
- using the 'I-message',
- communicating through body language,
- empathy and compassion to better connect with another person's experience,
- self-control while waiting to speak,
- identifying and managing emotions that come up in a difficult conversation,
- self-advocacy to get needs met ,
- taking turns,
- speaking from personal experience,
- apologizing, forgiving, and shifting behavior,
- embracing discomfort as a sign of learning, and
- standing against racist, sexist, homophobic, or other harmful language.

While the Community Circle is a great time to model these skills, it is not the time to provide instruction on these skills. Instead, make a mental note of the interactions of the members of the group and use that information to inform you about the social and emotional skills that may be helpful to teach and/or reinforced in your class. During an explicit lesson on an SEL skill, it can be helpful to call out healthy communication that you noticed during a Community Circle. For example, calling attention to students who used the 'I-message' during a discussion or a student who showed self-advocacy to get their needs met.