

EMPATHY CIRCLES

Building Skills in Speaking, Listening, and Connecting

Empathy Circles are in the Restorative Practice family. They provide a hands-on experience in practicing empathy. It helps us express ourselves in a non-threatening, non-confrontational forum, while enabling others to exercise deep listening skills. Empathy Circles are a great way to start building relationships that can, as they grow, enable the discussion of more difficult issues.

Rules of Engagement:

- Everyone gets a chance to speak and be heard.
- Each speaker is limited to 3 minutes.
- Each participant has a role and honors that role.
- Group sizes generally range from 4 -6 people. The ideal size is 4. No group should be larger than 6. Large groups limit the participation of each individual. Form another group if more than 6 people are involved.
- No questions are asked of the speaker.
- No rebuttals are given to anything a speaker says.

Roles:

- **Facilitator** (time keeper, monitors for pauses, is also participates as a Speaker)
- **Speaker** (time is limited to 2 - 5 minutes of sharing, the length is determined before the Circle begins) Once the Active Listener reiterates what was said, the Speaker may clarify or say, "I feel fully heard."
- **Active Listener** (retells what the speaker was saying, may dot down notes to help recall Speaker's statements. Once the Active Listener reiterates what was said that person then asks, "Do you feel fully heard?")
- **Silent Listener(s)** (remains "in the moment," listening and processing meaning)

How to do it:

- The Facilitator welcomes everyone and explains how an Empathy Circle works.
- The various roles are explained as listed above.
- The topic of the Empathy Circle is introduced.
- Speakers are allowed to share their thoughts about the topic. "Please share your thoughts about ... (the topic) or share "What's live for you today?" Speakers are always given this choice.
- The first to volunteer to share is the initial Speaker.
- The Speaker asks a circle member to be their active listener.
- The active listener can be anyone in the circle.
- The Speaker begins and occasionally pauses to allow the Active Listen to reiterate what was said. The Active Listen may ask, "Do you feel fully heard?"
- The Speaker may clarify something that was said.
- Once the Speaker has been accurately quoted, that person will say: "I feel fully heard."
- The Active Listener then becomes the next Speaker and asks someone else to be the Active Listener. The process continues until the group is ready to dismiss or runs out of time.