

Sunshine Coast Elder College

Restorative Justice – September 23 / 30 Classes

Nancy Denham – Circle Keeper & Community Justice Forum Facilitator

Ian Cochran – Circle Co-Keeper

Peacekeeping Dialogue Circles

The Dialogue Circle is a carefully constructed process of communication designed to create a safe space for all voices. In a healthy community all members feel respectfully listened to and valued.

The practice of Dialogue Circles enables us to have those difficult conversations which arise in conflict or dispute, when there is need for change, or if challenging questions arise which unsettle or disturb relationships within our homes, work places, or communities.

Peacekeeping Dialogue Circles

Through structured elements participant interaction is organized for maximum understanding, empowerment, and connection, while maintaining a sense of positive possibilities to resolve differences.

“The Circle is a simple structured process of communication that helps participants connect with appreciation of themselves & others. It is designed to create a safe place for all voices... We believe that the practice of Circles is helpful for building & maintaining a healthy community in which all members feel connected & respected.”

From Circle Forward by Kay Pranis & Carolyn Boyes-Watson

Elements of Peacekeeping Dialogue Circles

The Circle Keeper

The job of the Keeper is to keep the Dialogue on track by helping to prepare the Questions or Topics for consideration:

- by arranging the seating around a Centre Piece,
- by managing the time, and
- by modeling the pace of the discourse.

The Circle Keeper is always a part of the Circle; no one is 'outside' the Circle.

The Keeper shall begin the Circle with the invitation to listen through explaining how Circles allow for a rare opportunity to truly hear the voices of others by enabling each participant to give voice to their ideas, concerns, and perspectives without critique.

Elements of Peacekeeping Dialogue Circles

The Circle Keeper (continued)

Common and challenging group dynamics sometimes cause participants to veer onto a tangent and off topic. If this happens, the Keeper's job is to gently remind the whole group of the question or topic that is being considered for the Round. If someone succumbs to the desire to talk back or comment on another person's statement, this may create a lack of focus... So again, the Keeper will remind the group that everyone is here to listen without comment, conjecture, or criticism while the person holding the Talking Piece is speaking.

Elements of Peacekeeping Dialogue Circles

The Centre Piece

The Centre Piece is a focus point for the participants, around which the Circle seating is arranged. It also represents the values of the group and in so doing, supports speaking and listening from the heart. There are various tokens or symbols which people may be asked to bring to the Circle to be arranged as a Centre Piece.

Elements of Peacekeeping Dialogue Circles

Centre Piece Example

Pieces of fabric are set on the floor representing:

- the four directions of the world - North, East, South & West;
- the four seasons of the year - Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter; or
- the four Stages of a person's life - Infancy, Childhood, Adulthood, Elder-hood, etc.

The pieces overlap to show our inter-connectedness.

Elements of Peacekeeping Dialogue Circles

The Centre Piece (continued)

On the four pieces may be laid out four symbols or tokens such as a bowl of water to represent the rain, creeks, rivers, lakes, and oceans of our world reminding us of the water within which we all began within our mother's womb and with which we can not live without drinking. It is also to remind us of our tears that help us show our feelings though sadness, grief, pain, or anger and even sometimes when through laughter.

On another piece place a flower, plant or branch from a tree to represent the flora of the land and the value of Nature and the Environment within which we all live and thrive.

On another, place a rock or container of soil to represent the land upon which we walk and live and from which we grow the food we need to sustain our lives.

And then, on another piece, place something to represent the other living beings with which we share the earth...

Elements of Peacekeeping Dialogue Circles

The Talking Piece

The Circle Keeper, while holding the Talking Piece, explains how it is used.

Examples:

- “_____ shall be presenting to you and then there shall be a Round of Dialogue” or,
- “We have just experienced together something which is worth spending time on together for reflection, to share our thoughts and perspectives.”

Elements of Peacekeeping Dialogue Circles

The Talking Piece

The Circle Keeper shall then explain the process.

Example:

“We shall each take our turn when the Talking Piece comes round the circle. As Circle Keeper, I shall speak first and then pass the Talking Piece to the person beside me, whose turn it will be to express a personal perspective or thought. We shall all remain quiet while the one holding the Talking Piece speaks. This is an opportunity for every participant to listen. Of course, you can always say ‘pass’ & then forward the Talking Piece on to the person seated next in the Circle...”

Elements of Peacekeeping Dialogue Circles

Rounds

Designed carefully to construct the Dialogue, the questions or statement for reflection or consideration for each round are developed by those who have called the Circle. The job of the Circle Keeper is to present each question or statement and to begin with a personal heart-felt response.

Elements of Peacekeeping Dialogue Circles

Rounds

This is a brief description of a Circle Keeping Process.

Circles can be used to support dialogue, resolve conflict, proclaim celebration, promote healing, enhance ceremony, etc.

Sitting in a Circle allows everyone to see one another and to be accountable face to face because all body language is obvious to everyone.

The Circle emphasizes equality.

A Circle of Trust...

sitting quietly & waiting for the shy soul to show up.

Like a wild animal, the soul is tough, resilient, resourceful, savvy, & self-sufficient; it knows how to survive in hard places. I learned about these qualities during my bouts with depression. In that deadly darkness, the faculties that I had always depended on collapsed. My intellect was useless; my emotions were dead; my will was impotent; my ego was shattered. But from time to time, deep in the thicket of my inner wilderness, I could sense the presence of something that knew how to stay alive even when the rest of me wanted to die. That something was my tough & tenacious soul.

A Circle of Trust...

sitting quietly & waiting for the shy soul to show up.

Yet despite its toughness, the soul is also shy. Just like a wild animal, it seeks safety in the dense underbrush, especially when other people are around. If we want to see a wild animal, we know that the last thing we should do is go crashing through the woods yelling for it to come out. But if we will walk quietly into the woods, Sit patiently at the base of a tree, breathe with the earth, & fade into our surroundings, the wild creature we seek might put in an appearance. We may see it only briefly & only out of the corner of an eye ~ but the sight is a gift we will always treasure as an end in itself.

A Circle of Trust...

sitting quietly & waiting for the shy soul to show up.

Unfortunately, community in our culture too often means a group of people who go crashing through the woods together, scaring the soul away. In spaces ranging from congregations to classrooms, (on couches in living-rooms & around dining-room tables, in community halls and council chambers) we preach & teach, assert & argue, claim & proclaim, admonish & advise, & generally behave in ways that drive everything original & wild into hiding. Under these conditions, the intellect, emotions, will & ego may emerge, but not the soul; we scare off all the soulful things, like respectful relationships, goodwill, & hope.

A Circle of Trust...

sitting quietly & waiting for the shy soul to show up.

A Circle of trust is a group of people who know how to sit quietly “in the woods” with each other & wait for the shy soul to show up... In such a space, we are freed to hear our own truth, touch what brings us joy, become self-critical about our faults, & take risky steps toward change ~ knowing that we will be accepted no matter what the outcome.”

“A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life”
Parker J. Palmer a Euro-American and activist, educator, author.

Peacekeeping Dialogue Circles

The Restorative Justice Program of the Sunshine Coast has trained Circle Keepers who are available to prepare a circle process.

Contact: Nancy Denham; Circle Keeper & PMC Trainer
604-740-6400

Dialogue Circle Question

“Given that the Canadian Government has completed The Truth & Reconciliation Commission, the Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, and has promised to pass the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples all of which have Calls to Action for Canadians, where and how do we see reconciliation happening in our Community and Country?”

Dialogue Circle Talking Piece



Thank you

Restorative Justice Program of the
Sunshine Coast

Nancy Denham:

Circle Keeper & Community Justice Forum Facilitator

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