

Restorative Justice in Schools

A Whole-School
Implementation Process

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A circle is a place to be an individual within a collective space. Your voice is heard.

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Introduction

How do you implement restorative justice as a framework for improving school culture and climate in New York’s most underserved schools? How can you reduce a school’s reliance on exclusionary discipline, especially in schools with some of the highest suspension rates in New York City? Where do you even start, and whom do you tap to do the work?

This guide reflects the lessons learned from the Center for Court Innovation’s Restorative Justice in Schools Project. We tried to answer those questions as part of our own implementation of restorative approaches in some of New York City’s highest-suspending schools. Over the course of three years, our team worked in five different schools, helping them make a meaningful shift to restorative practices, for individual students and for the school environment as a whole. The hope was that restorative approaches would result in a safer and healthier school experience for all students.

Our theory of change was simple: strong relationships create a safe and healthy school environment. Whether we were responding in the aftermath of harm or trying to prevent problematic behavior from taking root in the first place, our team needed to build strong relationships with everyone in the school, and especially with students most at the margins of the community. This guide lays out our strategies for building those relationships, and for laying the foundation for the entire school community to build positive connections.

Approaching Restorative Justice

The Center for Court Innovation (the Center) first worked with restorative approaches to crime and conflict through its partnerships with Native American communities, where tribal peacemaking has been practiced for many years. We are deeply grateful to our many Native mentors, especially from the Navajo Nation, who taught us about creating kinship in this work. We are also grateful to our trainers from across the country who taught us the foundations of circle practice and who walked us through the real-life challenges of implementation in schools. Our approach to restorative justice brought all of these perspectives together and was further refined through our interactions with the students of our schools, who in turn became our greatest teachers.

How to Use this Guide

The aim of this guide is to assist educators, students, and community members in shifting their schools from a punitive to a restorative environment. Throughout this guide, we will share stories from our coordinators experiences and lessons learned from the strategies we undertook to make those shifts. The names of all teachers and students have been changed to maintain anonymity. Each school community is unique, with its own host of challenges and opportunities. We didn’t try every strategy in every school; rather, we tried our best to respond to the needs of each school environment. The most important lesson we can share is to pay attention to the actual needs of the school and to start there.

Where We Were

School Context

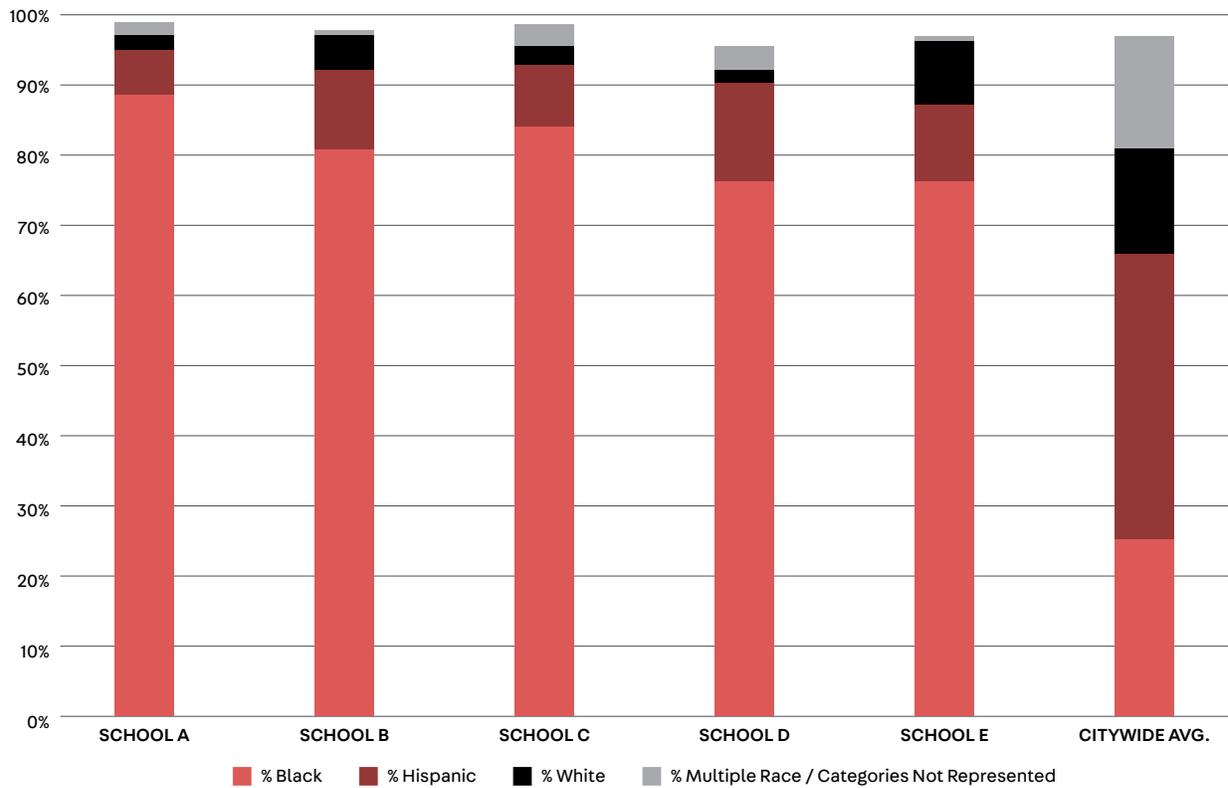
The New York City Department of Education is the largest school system in the nation, serving 1.1 million students. The system comprises over 1,800 schools in 32 distinct school districts. Despite the wealth and diversity of New York City residents, the public-school system primarily serves low-income students of color and is among the most racially segregated school systems in the nation. In 2019, 40.6% of public-school students were Hispanic, 25.5% were black, 16.2% were Asian, and 15.1% were white. Of those students, 13% were English language learners, 20% were students with disabilities, and 73% were economically disadvantaged.

We designed the Restorative Justice in Schools Project to meet the needs of five high schools within District 18, whose total enrollments each ranged from 264 to 460 students in the 2018-19 academic year. The district is one of the most racially segregated in the city, with African-American students accounting for 85% of the student population, but only 25% of all New York City public school students. Located in east Brooklyn, the district's student population is predominantly first- and second-generation African-American students of Caribbean descent. The district suffers from high suspension rates, disparities based on race and disability, and elevated neighborhood crime, including high rates of gun violence and gang activity (see below for further demographic breakdowns for each school).

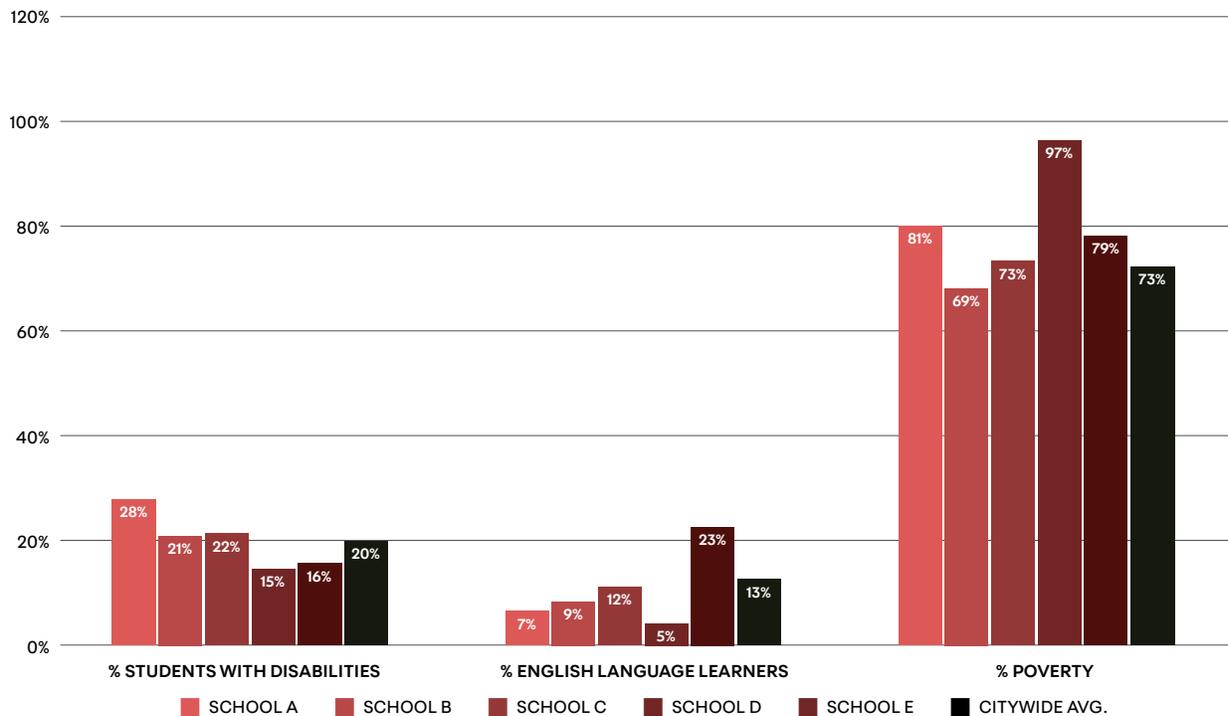
The five schools participating in the project were co-located on two campuses. In the early 2000s, many of New York City's large, failing high schools were closed and converted into educational campuses containing several small schools in one building. Our co-located schools were each assigned their own floor and then shared amenities such as auditoriums, gyms, libraries and cafeterias. Both campuses were designated full-time scanning sites supervised by the NYPD School Safety Division so all students, visitors, and their personal belongings, were subject to scanning upon entry via walk-through metal detector and x-ray machine.

Each of our schools struggled with overall culture and climate. Across the five schools, relationships were strained among administrators, teachers, students and parents. Administrators expressed frustration with their teaching staff, and educators complained about a lack of support from leadership. The schools suffered from cultures of isolation with limited opportunities for team building, mentoring, and coaching. They experienced high rates of teacher turnover and significant rates of burnout. Students openly shared dissatisfaction with their school environment including complaints about instruction, student activities, safety, and support. At each of the schools physical fights among students were common, as well as interpersonal conflicts between and among staff and students. Additionally, the schools had low rates of parent engagement and involvement. Some schools lacked Parent Teacher Associations (PTA), while others struggled to fundraise and fill positions on the PTA executive board. Despite the challenges, all five schools had individuals who desired to improve the overall culture and climate of the schools.

Racial Demographics 2018-2019



Student Statistics



How We Prepared

Hiring and Training

In staffing the project, we hired individuals whose personal and professional experiences demonstrated more than just an academic understanding of the principles of restorative justice. **The most important qualification was a deep connection to the work, as well as an ability and desire to authentically connect with the school communities in District 18.** We knew we could teach people about circle practice and restorative justice, but not how to love the students. We chose staff who had experiences supporting young people and were invested in building supportive communities for them.

Over the course of an entire summer, we provided our team—a cross-section of professionals from the fields of education, law, social work, school counseling, community organizing, and city government—with a foundational training in restorative justice, its origins, theory, practice, and implementation. Our team acquired practical circle facilitation skills with a focus on topics such as identity (race, gender, and sexual orientation), teen dating violence, masculinity, and relationship boundaries. Our trainers were more than restorative justice practitioners; they were mediators, educators, self-care experts, healers, and storytellers.

Through circle practice, team members developed relationships with one another that fostered self-awareness, mutual sensitivity, and honest feedback—all critical to the success of the project. Training provided the team with the knowledge and skill set needed to create buy-in, support teachers, and manage circle practice in a school setting, where time with students was often restricted to 40-minute periods.

Importantly, we did not approach training with a checklist mentality. We revisited topics when additional focus was necessary and enlisted a diverse set of trainers to provide multiple approaches to the work. **Restorative practices are deeply personal and must be tailored to the needs of the individuals you are serving, thus having a wide range**

of tools allowed us to be better positioned to meet the needs of a community.

The initial trainings included:

- *Intensive on Peacemaking Circles*: the foundations of circle process, with a focus on engaging school communities.
- *Navajo Peacemaking*: the history of peacemaking within the Navajo tradition, including the importance of ritual and ceremony.
- *The Art of Storytelling*: how to get comfortable with personal storytelling practices, learning boundaries around what to share, and how to share strategically to help others move through discomfort.
- *School-based Harm Circles*: how to build buy-in for school-based implementation and prepare for harm and reentry circles.
- *Self-Care*: ensuring a self-reflective space and building skills to advocate for a workplace that meets needs.
- *Trauma 101*: understanding trauma in student populations, including location-specific information on how to identify domestic sex trafficking.
- *Culturally Responsive Implementation*: understanding who our students are and how to best engage them.
- *Learning circles*: how to use circles to teach academic content within a classroom.

After launching our project, we felt that our team needed additional training to meet the extensive needs of students and to deepen their emotional literacy. These supplemental trainings included:

- *Harm Circle Practice*
- *Building Buy-In*
- *The Dynamics of Teen Dating Violence*
- *Research on School Safety*
- *Advanced Storytelling*
- *Advanced Self-Care* (ongoing)
- *Games, Movement, and Space*: theatre practitioners shared movement activities and games to help students explore systemic oppression and engage in social action. This was especially important for students who were not ready or able to verbalize their emotional needs.
- *Navigating Gender and Sex*: understanding gender roles and dynamics among young people and helping students identify, discuss, and navigate them
- *Sexual Education and Boundaries*: providing language to students around boundary setting, rejection, and needs.
- *Ending Clinical Relationships*: given our temporary position in the schools, we planned how to say goodbye to students, teachers, and others

Investment in Team Support

In addition to training, we focused on providing on-going support to our team. Restorative practices are difficult and challenging, and require a significant amount of emotional labor. **Thus, from the very beginning we established a team culture of open and honest communication and tried to build the foundation for a supportive work environment.** During the summer of intensive training, we provided opportunities for the team to get to know one another, share personal challenges, vent, and discuss concerns about the work. Throughout

the project, we held team and campus meetings, and did weekly one-on-one check-ins to troubleshoot personal and professional challenges. In addition, the project manager provided daily support and was available at a moment's notice to lend a hand in a crisis.

A crucial part of supporting the team was our investment in, and attention to, self-care. We emphasized the importance of taking time off to care for our mental, emotional and physical health. We regularly asked one another "what do you need?" and thought about what we could give each other. As a result, our team approached their colleagues in the school the same way. They offered ongoing support, listening to and affirming staff. Restorative justice requires us to lead with grace. If we are unable to give grace to ourselves, we will struggle to give it to others.

Acknowledging Race and History

Rooted in indigenous wisdom, restorative justice is also an exploration of one's ancestry; a journey into the past to understand the healing pathway forward. Given our work in deeply segregated schools with a majority Black team, the inquiry into ancestry led to conversations on how racism continues to shape this moment. (Click here to listen to our podcast). **We needed to acknowledge the oppressive context and conditions of our work.**

To fully engage on those levels, we hosted annual team retreats to reflect on restorative justice as a part of the movement for racial justice in America. Our first retreat was in Washington, D.C. where we visited the National Museum of African-American History and Culture. We immersed ourselves in the history of black people in the United States, appreciating the critical importance of restorative justice in our schools. Put simply, the trip reenergized us. For the second annual retreat, we visited the *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power* exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum. This reawakened our creative energy, as we brainstormed how to bring art and movement to our students. Our final retreat was in Montgomery, Alabama where we visited The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration, the National Memorial for Peace and Justice; and the historic landmarks of the Civil Rights movement in Selma. Our

retreats strengthened our understanding of how race operates in the United States, in our own lives and in the lives of our students and deepened our capacity to have meaningful conversations in our school communities with students and staff.

DIGGING INTO OUR HISTORY

While our students were on Spring Break, I traveled with the team to DC to deepen our connection to this work, our history, and one another. The National Museum of African American History and Culture begins in the basement, set in the 1400s, at the Atlantic slave trade. The brutality of the slave trade was vivid. But pity was not to be evoked. As I continued through the mile-long museum, which traced our history from the 1400s to the present, I was inspired by the stories highlighting perseverance, grit, and unwavering will. As a descendant of enslaved Africans, I should be proud. I am among the ones who made it. I am a descendant of strength and survival.

Throughout the museum, you could hear grandparents and great aunts and uncles talking to their little ones. "I was there." "I remember when he spoke." "That was a crazy day." The museum brought out organic oral histories. The museum and my fellow museum-goers reminded me that we need to look within our communities to learn about ourselves.

The museum emphasized why restorative justice is imperative to our schools and our communities. Through sharing stories, food, and valuing our time and conversations together we reinforce love and love is the greatest act of resistance we have at our disposal. It was this reminder that I took from our retreat to the hallways of my school.

Our Approach

Whole-school RJ implementation is a gradual process of working to shift school culture and climate on the continuum from retributive to restorative. Our approach was to first assess needs, and then provide the resources and human capital needed to make the shift.

To make the shift gradually and sustainably, we worked in four complementary ways. First, we took the time to get to know the schools and assess their needs, offering uniquely tailored support to school leaders. Second, we worked intensely to build buy-in, trust and understanding from staff and students. Third, we modeled what we expected from everyone, with an emphasis on building strong positive relationships rather than defaulting to punitive discipline. Fourth, we used a strengths-based approach.

Assessment

Our work began by completing a thorough assessment.

Assessing the school environment is the most important first step in determining the best approach to implementing restorative practices. This includes learning the written and unwritten norms around how things get done and whom to ask for what. This approach lays a foundation for mutual understanding, disarms defense mechanisms, and allows RJ practitioners to devise implementation strategies based on the particular strengths and needs of each school community.

Our assessment involved answering the following questions:

- What is leadership's vision for your school?
- What is the quality of the relationships between/among the administrators, teachers, staff, students and parents?
- What are the written and unwritten policies and rules that govern the school?
- What is the school's approach to discipline? How is discipline carried out and communicated within the school community?

- How do students perceive their school, its safety and capacity for fairness?
- How do staff perceive the school?
- What is the physical layout of the school? How does it affect everyone's well-being?
- What supports do students and staff need? What supports are available?
- What opportunities exist for school-wide community-building? What kind of investments has the school made to create a positive culture? Have they been successful? Why or why not?
- How can your school dedicate space for teachers and students to bond?
- To what extent does your school acknowledge, embrace, and celebrate its racial, ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity?
- Who are the natural allies for restorative practices? Who is already approaching their work with a restorative mindset?

These kinds of open-ended questions enabled us to thoroughly assess school culture and climate. We returned to them regularly and often throughout the implementation process, continually re-assessing where we were and what we still needed to do to institute develop restorative practices.

Buy-In

Next, we worked to build relationships and establish buy-in. Successful implementation requires buy-in from all school stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, support staff, school safety agents, and students. With that in mind, we started by observing, listening and offering support wherever it was needed. We knew that we were guests in somebody else's house

and showed our respect by making ourselves useful and available. We stood in the hallway in between periods and encouraged students to go to class. We broke up fights and aided students in crisis. We assisted with dismissal and chaperoned trips. We picked up garbage in the cafeteria. We helped with school events and supported fundraisers. Most importantly, we took the time to get to know all stakeholders in the school, especially the people who ensure the school's basic functioning, such as the janitorial staff, school safety agents, paraprofessional educators and kitchen staff. **In fact, support staff are some of the most important members of the school community and yield substantial power in setting the culture within the community.**

She really tries to become a part of the school culture and I found that to be something that we're all appreciating.

Modeling

Third, we modeled what we were asking from students and staff. More than any other strategy, modeling was the foundation of our approach. School cultures are entrenched with negative behavior patterns and are often hard to break, even with the best of intentions. Through modeling, staff and students are able to observe and experience how to use restorative approaches in building positive relationships, responding to harm, processing daily challenges and offering grace to yourself and others.

For the school staff, it was important to show that restorative practices are a viable alternative to traditional disciplinary systems and can foster strong, positive relationships in the school community. We demonstrated that you could build caring and lasting relationships with even the most challenging students when offering and modeling kindness, empathy, grace and mutual respect. When we caused harm or fell short, we acknowledged our shortcomings and strived to do better.

Modeling was particularly powerful for the students. Students in high-suspending schools are exposed to a punishment paradigm that tells them "do as I say, or else." There is little accountability for those at the top, and as a result, students can become distrustful of all authority. We found that modelling how to handle power responsibly—asking questions, apologizing when wrong and leading by example—were effective at counteracting deeply-embedded negative messages that students absorbed. This was particularly impactful for boys struggling to form and assert their identity without many role models.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

On my first day, I was handed a walkie talkie and assigned to lunch duty in the cafeteria where most of the 166 fights in the school the prior year had broken out. Lunch time was rowdy and understaffed. Students regularly threw food on the ground and at each other, and left trash on the table. The gym teacher came up to me, giddy with excitement, glad to finally have some help with the most frustrating part of his day. (He ended up quitting in early October, leaving me alone with 300 students.). I sensed the tension in the cafeteria immediately as a group of seniors started "slap boxing" near the vending machines.

*After weeks of playing cat and mouse failed, I tried modeling by showing care for the space and investment in the students. A month or so into the school year, I knew everyone's names and brought games and a speaker to play music. I would go around with a trash can collecting garbage and interacting with students. In these brief moments I tried to connect with everyone and demonstrate what it looks like to care for the space. Soon students stopped throwing food and fights were rare (20 in that year). **One of the school aides, inspired by my efforts, started helping me collect trash, taking the lead from then on.** By the end of the year, I didn't have to be present for the cafeteria to be clean after lunch, and the custodial and the kitchen staff noted the dramatic change.*

Strengths-Based Change

Fourth, we used a strengths-based approach to shift school culture. Change is best achieved when identifying and building on the strengths of the school community, since much of the wisdom needed to make change is already contained therein. School staff are often doing the best they can with limited resources, so we focused our energy on supporting and expanding their efforts. **Each community had unique opportunities, gifts, and talents that our team sought to build upon.** Whether it was better utilizing green spaces, donating baked goods to the quarterly fundraiser, offering to help chaperone a college trip, assisting teachers with school clubs, or helping to organize a school event, we found that the most effective way to change school culture and implement restorative practices was to pay attention to what mattered to the school community and find a way to add value there. del.

HIDDEN GEMS

In the center of our building, there was a beautiful courtyard with a greenhouse, picnic benches, and paved platform that was almost never used. We found ways to increase its use while creating an atmosphere of joy and play for the students. When weather permitted, we took groups of kids outside to play catch, soccer, and just sit in the sun. At first the students were wary, like swimmers dipping their toe in the pool before diving in. However, soon time in the courtyard became a regular part of their day and something they looked forward to. We also used the space to hold circles and play games that increased movement and refreshed our routine. Making use of the courtyard was an easy win for us. It was underutilized, so we leveraged it to the benefit of students.

REDIRECTING ENERGY

Dr. J approached me about the potential for a soccer club. He had been a national champion in his home country before immigrating to the US and wanted to connect with students outside of the classroom. However, he needed a few supplies and another adult to supervise students outside. With a \$150 investment from CCI and the natural talents of Dr. J, we created an international club that brought together Caribbean and Yemeni students to play during every lunch period. The game helped bridge cultural and language barriers, and became an incentive for positive behavior. When one of our participants was caught smoking in the hallway, suspension was the last thing on our mind. Instead he became soccer club manager and had to set up and take down the nets on the field. This communicated a completely different message: you are a natural leader, we expect more from you, and smoking in the hallway does not set a good example. In the end, he redirected himself towards his newfound responsibilities which gave him a more positive outlet for his energy.

A Team Approach

Finally, we relied on a team approach. On each campus, a team of individuals worked to implement restorative practices. Although one coordinator was assigned to each school, our members worked as a team moving throughout their campus. Coordinators were encouraged to stop by other schools' offices to meet with students and teachers and facilitate circles. When issues arose, this team approach allowed us to draw on the distinct strengths of each member. If a student did not respond to their school's coordinator, we tapped another team member to sub in. We met regularly as a group to discuss the work, troubleshoot issues, provide feedback to one another and hold each other accountable.

TEAMWORK

*We tapped team members whenever necessary for their expertise or the ability to connect with a particular student or staff member. For example, one of my fellow coordinators was assigned to an English class to conduct circles. Half of her students were recent Haitian immigrants who spoke little English, and the other half were from English-speaking Caribbean islands. As a Haitian-American who spoke fluent Creole, I facilitated bilingual circles with the students who spoke Creole allowing them to speak their native tongue and learn new English words and American concepts. Later I tapped that same coordinator for her help with a group of young women. **Our varied strengths allowed us to reach more students than we could have helped individually and prevented burnout.***

To support RJ implementation, we established either formal or informal RJ teams with staff. These teams allowed us to leverage the expertise of the staff and build internal RJ capacity to support the work once the Center for Court Innovation was no longer involved. These teams support the needs of the entire school community and assist with school-wide implementation and the needs of individual students. The choice to create formal or informal teams depends on the school's structure and needs.

The teams brought together a variety of individuals to appeal to the students' diverse identities and experiences. We intentionally tapped members of different races, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds, relying on staff with meaningful connections to various students. These relationships were critical when restorative processes were called for. No one person has strong relationships with every student. A team approach allows us to leverage everyone's relationships to address the community's needs.

INFORMAL TEAM

My school could not sustain a formal RJ team.

Despite starting one multiple times, the school day and structure made regular meetings almost impossible. However, an informal, organic crew of dedicated educators always found time to check-in with me about what they were seeing and hearing from students. Teachers would stop by our office routinely to let us know who was on their radar and why and we did the same. There were many advantages to this approach: teachers were able to safely process their experiences with an objective source, and we were made aware of various happenings across grade levels and content areas. Keeping the team informal made it feasible for people to participate even if they felt like they didn't have the time or bandwidth to commit to additional meetings.

FORMAL TEAM

The Principal, Assistant Principal, Dean, and RJ Coordinator would meet once a week after school to discuss any conflict that had occurred in that week. We not only addressed conflicts but reflected on the underlying causes of recurring issues and attempted to address those as well. Having this dedicated time made it easy for me to stay informed about conflicts, the resolution work that needed to be done, and the administration's behind-the-scenes efforts to address the problems. I was able to push for evaluation of school policies and procedures and advocate for systemic changes. We invited teachers, paraprofessionals, and students, unaccustomed to being involved in policy-making, to address harm in the community. Our expanded team promoted transparency and a sophisticated execution of restorative processes.

How We Shifted School Culture and Climate, and Built Buy-In

Positively shifting school culture and climate is a dynamic and iterative process and requires significant investment in both time and resources. **The process involves multiple components that together establish a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for educators and students.** While implementation processes vary by school, they all include key components designed to build community, create buy-in and provide much needed support to students and staff.

Supportive Spaces

Supportive spaces play a crucial role in meeting the needs of students and staff and contributing to positive school culture and climate. In each school, we established a multi-purpose RJ room in an office or classroom to serve as a drop-in space for **students, teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators.** In this intentional space, **the RJ team built meaningful and trusting bonds with members of the school community.**

A PLACE TO UNWIND

For students, the RJ office was a rest stop between class periods. Those few minutes served as an opportunity to remind students that they are valued and to ask about something they are proud of. When the junior English class wrote spoken word poems and were nervous to perform, they came to the office to practice. Building up students for a minute in the middle of the day and offering praise for schoolwork or accomplishments boosted everyone's mood.

For teachers and staff, the RJ office was a place to see a friendly face while sprinting to the bathroom between classes. We were a respite, a place to stop in for a snack, water, or tea. For schools without teachers' lounges, our office was a place to warm up your lunch and chat with another adult. Teachers would come to share their weekend updates with stories of their own families' latest adventures.

As a gathering spot for everyone in the building, the RJ room enabled us to socialize with one another outside of our roles in the school.

A PLACE THAT FEELS WELCOMING

The RJ room had snacks, tissues, pens and paper and ample seating. Each office had fidget toys and games, like a Rubik's Cube, Buddha board, yoga ball or a chalkboard setup with removable wallpaper. Some team members hung flags to honor their cultural heritage and invite students to share their own. Rainbow flags announced that the space was safe for LGBTQ students, as well as those questioning their gender or sexuality. All of our offices had student contributions: a green bench built and painted by students, dry-erase boards for students to draw on, or a simple piece of chart paper with the question "How are you doing today?" where students could express their feelings in writing. Our spaces reflected the school community and served as a respite for students and staff.



Our RJ rooms are welcoming, spaces, with open-door policies, where anyone could drop in. This created opportunities for students and staff to join in on conversations, build community with one another, and strengthen relationships in an organic way.

Small, informal groups of students and or staff allowed

us to model how to provide support and empathy to others in a variety of ways, fostering greater levels of support in the community and helping students develop important socio-emotional skills.

When necessary, the RJ room also becomes close-door spaces for confidential conversations with students or



A PLACE OF INSPIRATION

The office was a positive outlet for students' passions. "Afterschool, we were always in Mr. C's room," a recent graduate shared. This young man and his friends could always be found there expounding on their latest philosophies about how the world worked. Mr. C encouraged them to put that energy into making podcasts. They went on to win the NPR Student Podcast Challenge with their episode highlighting environmental racism and climate change. (Click [here](#) to listen to our podcast).

staff who want to discuss personal matters or difficult situations involving other members of the community.

Making the room available for both communal and private purposes requires communication, reassurances, and reminders. To establish this type of safe space, we established norms and expectations around the use of the RJ room. We reminded students that a closed door means knocking before entering and possibly coming back later. If a student came by during a private session, we would apologize for being busy, assess whether their concern needed immediate attention, and offer alternative times to speak. Gradually, students learned to respect others' needs and that they always had a place to go when they needed to talk with discretion.

A PLACE FOR SUPPORT

Students were often distrustful or uncomfortable with the idea of talking to traditional mental health professionals, like social workers and district psychologists. Students would say "I don't like to talk to people," or "I don't share with anyone," when we asked if they wanted to be referred for clinical services. Yet, they spoke freely and shared their feelings with members of the RJ team, some of whom were, in fact, mental health professionals. Through our relationships, we worked to break down the stigma against accessing mental health services : students were open to clinical referrals and were more likely to talk to adults they trusted. We reminded them how helpful it can be to talk about their concerns and highlighted the importance of communication and asking for help. For some students, more intensive and consistent care was necessary. In those situations, we worked collaboratively with mental health staff and administration to connect kids to clinical services.

While our door was always open, the RJ room had boundaries and expectations consistent with the educational goals of our schools. Students were permitted to stop by and hang out but not at the expense of class time. If students dropped in when they were supposed to be in class and were not in a crisis

or emergency, we required a note from their teacher approving the visit. Moreover, after meeting with a student, we would check-in with the teachers and provide updates when necessary. **It was imperative that the RJ room be a part of the larger school community and that educators and administrators viewed our work as supportive of their students' academic goals.**

To ensure that it thrived, we invested time in advertising the openness and availability of the RJ room. We spent a significant amount of time in the hallways, in the lunchroom, in the gym, at the scanners, at afterschool clubs, and in other communal spaces building relationships and proactively inviting community members into the space. This, in turn, supported our restorative work.

A PLACE TO RECHARGE

Offering snacks enabled us to keep on top of what was happening in our school. While dropping by to grab a bag of chips or a cookie, students would update us on their lives, their friendships, and their classes. In those quick interactions, we could squeeze in a quick question and glean whether a student had been late to school, was still struggling with a teacher, or had plans to cut class to see their 'boo'. These check-ins allowed us to hear from students who felt most comfortable with us, but also alerted us to the students we were not seeing. One time Danika stopped by to refill her water bottle and suggested we check in on TeeJay because he had been smoking a lot more. I relayed this information to two other adults who had strong relationships with TeeJay and we all reached out to him separately with different words of support, advice, and guidance. As a result of our interventions, TeeJay stopped smoking as much and spent more time with Danika and other positive peer influences. In our eyes, the snacks and water we keep in our office not only fulfilled basic needs, but also served as an early warning system. An excuse to stop by the office creates more opportunities for students to share things, big or small.



Our RJ rooms are always stocked with food and water because we know that it is hard for people to be their best selves when they are thirsty or hungry. **Having food for students and staff is also essential to building community.** Breaking bread is a communal experience and a key tenet of Native Peacemaking. **As such , we offered food** during prep sessions for harm circles, and as a salve for students who were on edge and needed to cool down. It shows we care about members of our community and reminds them to take care of themselves.

Though we had private funds to buy food, we found creative ways to have the school make it available for students as well. We worked with kitchen staff to have school lunches brought in for harm circles and lunch time clubs and arranged for fruit to be set aside for office spaces.

We used our supportive RJ spaces to lean into existing networks among students and staff while providing help in real-time and modeling empathy. We tried to avoid making assumptions, asking for help when needed and inviting others to work with us.

A PLACE FOR HEALING

Jay and Essie are two best friends and cousins who routinely came to the office when they felt they needed to talk. One afternoon I overheard Essie yelling in the hallway. I went out to see our gym teacher/dean standing between Essie and another student. Essie had dropped her bag, and Jay was standing with her. I asked Essie and Jay to walk back to my room with me. While Jay was calm, Essie started to cry, worked up over the other student repeatedly bothering her. The two of them explained the situation, with Jay and I both reassuring Essie that we understood her perspective, that the other student should not have treated her that way. Throughout our conversation I asked the girls where they were on the feelings chart, and acted out each feeling listed, which made all of us laugh and relax. We had an honest conversation about avoiding contact with the other student and the cost for everyone involved if things escalated. Jay and Essie agreed to go to a movie screening afterschool, which they loved.

Community-Building Activities

CREATING CLUBS

Intentional community-building is the foundation of RJ practice. In each school we improved school culture and climate by investing resources and time in creating opportunities for community building. Students and staff need opportunities to build relationships with one another through fun and engaging events. **Making school a place where students want to be is far more effective at preventing harm and promoting pro-social behavior than taking traditional punitive approaches.**

To develop responsive community-building activities, we asked for student input. Many asked for space and opportunities to get together with one another outside of the classroom. To meet this need, we started hosting lunchtime and afterschool clubs for students. The most requested clubs were affinity groups for students to vent and talk about experiences that uniquely affected them. This included Girls Group, Men in Color (MIC), and Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA). As facilitators, our job was to create optimal conditions for the students to be themselves, set goals, and work through issues.

GIRLS GROUP

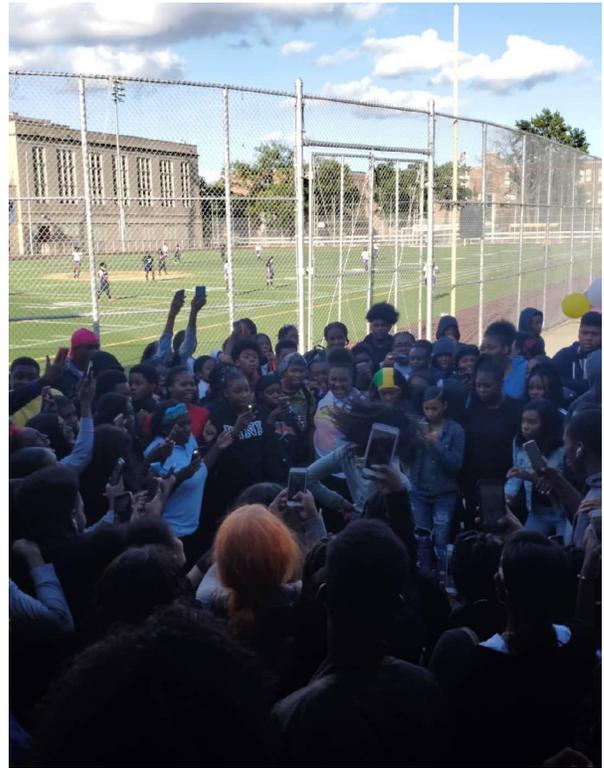
Because we are in a majority male school, many of the initiatives in our school were focused on the boys. Our girls often felt insignificant. I wanted to create a space that was girl-centric. Partnering with another community-based organization in the school, we hosted Girls Group once a week during lunch. We encouraged students to take the lead. We emphasized student leadership by empowering the girls to set the agenda and decide how we would spend our time together. Some days they asked us to facilitate discussions on topics related to high school, dating, self-esteem, and college. Other days we played games or planned self-care activities. Together we managed to create a safe, welcoming space for young women.



COMMUNITY EVENTS

In addition to spaces and opportunities for small group activities and conversations, there was a desire from students to have community-building activities for the whole school to help spread love and a sense of belonging beyond classrooms and individual clubs. With some creativity and input from students and staff, we hosted school dances, pep rallies, sports days, and carnivals. **These helped students see the importance of investing in their social and emotional selves and the vital role it plays in their ability to perform successfully.**

Stronger relationships allowed us to hold our students accountable for upholding community norms. For example, we hosted “An Evening to Remember” Fall Formal, which incentivized students to attend school and contribute positively to the community. In order to be a nominee for the Royal Court, students had to have a minimum attendance of 85%, minimum GPA of 80%, and no student infractions within the year. A few girls who were really excited were excluded from the Royal Court because they had participated in a fight earlier in the year. Despite initial protest, the girls ultimately vowed to commit to positive behavior because they wanted to be included in the next event. This is how restorative practices encourage pro-social behavior. **Students are more often inclined to be their best selves when they are excited to be a part of something. Moving forward, our girls avoided fights not to avoid suspension, but to be part of the school formal.**



OPEN MIC

Large-scale events like a school dance or carnivals are wonderful but take a lot of time and money to plan. To conserve limited resources while being attentive to students' wants and needs, we developed smaller events like The Cypher, a student-led open mic event showcasing student poets and writers. The Cypher brought together over a dozen students from different social groups to share their writing. The budget was small (a couple boxes of cookies and donuts), the space was free (the library), and the promotion was simple (a few flyers and word of mouth). Many of the students and staff who participated in The Cypher reported feeling more connected to the larger school community. Not only did it give students who are typically disconnected from each other an opportunity to connect, it also gave staff the opportunity to share parts of themselves that were obscured by their position of authority. Any school can have a cypher, all it takes is some relationships and an eagerness to clap (or snap) for what you like.



Community-Building Circles

Circle practice is vital to culture change. Circle practice builds relationships through storytelling. It is inspired by the indigenous tradition of peacemaking that focuses on healing and reparation. We used the circle process to build community and repair harm done to that community.

We found that circle practice in our communities provided participants with the opportunity to create spaces together. **In these spaces, participants process life events in a way that allows them to better understand one another and take responsibility for each other's well-being.** Circles are a tangible tool for school communities to improve relationships and ultimately improve school climate and culture.

When we arrived in our schools, we immediately engaged in community-building circles during advisory classes. Meeting weekly, they served as a space for us to get to know the student body. Anchored in popular culture, music, movement, meditation, and fun, students' participation in community-building circles was intended

to foster pro-social communication and develop listening and focusing skills as well as empathy for fellow students. These daily circles provided a space for students to reflect on ongoing issues before they erupted into crises. In the beginning we did the facilitation with the assigned teacher sitting in the circle. Eventually teachers (and some students) began to co-facilitate and some went on to facilitate independently.

We started with low-intensity circles that did not require divulging a lot of personal information i.e., our opening question asked for names, favorite foods, or favorite subjects in school. We gradually shifted to circles that asked participants to share familial stories and past school experiences. Finally, when students were ready, we held circles during which we asked about dreams, aspirations, and definitions of respect, love and loyalty. **We found that when teachers were willing to be vulnerable in circle, students often feel more comfortable and may be inclined to do the same.**

MEETING STUDENTS WHERE THEY ARE

Some of our classes were not as eager to participate in circle as others but we were determined to change that. Different groups of students need different interventions in different environments. When I asked questions around community and self-reflection to a particular class, no one would engage – though when I popped in during their lunch period, it was clear they have a lot to say on the subject. But when I changed the topic to relationships – friends, family, or dating – those same students in that same disengaged class had endless things to say about respect and communication styles.

Another advisory class I had was an all-boy freshmen group that could always be found discussing the online video game, Fortnite, but in circle it was radio silence, with the exception of one student who spoke possibly out of sympathy for me. I needed to meet them where they were. I found a documentary on gaming and learned that e-sports is rapidly becoming one of the most watched sports and may even become an Olympic competition. I shared my newfound knowledge and was better equipped to frame conversations with my students. We discussed important topics with gaming as the entry point: (1) gender and racial disparities in gaming; (2) the dedication real gamers bring to their craft and how to build discipline; (3) the ability to reinvent yourself online and how it can be both liberating and encouraging of bad behavior; and (4) the way games rewire our brain and gaming habits affect us. Soon we were able to move away from e-gaming as the framework for our conversation, but it had given us an important foundation and many inside jokes.

Still, not everyone feels comfortable being vulnerable or sharing personal experiences with students. Some teachers may never embrace or excel in the role of circle keeper. **We found it important to identify our highest leverage change agents early on and support them instead of dividing our time equally to train all staff.** In our second and third years, we worked with administration and teachers to ensure that those best equipped and most willing were assigned to courses requiring community-building circles.

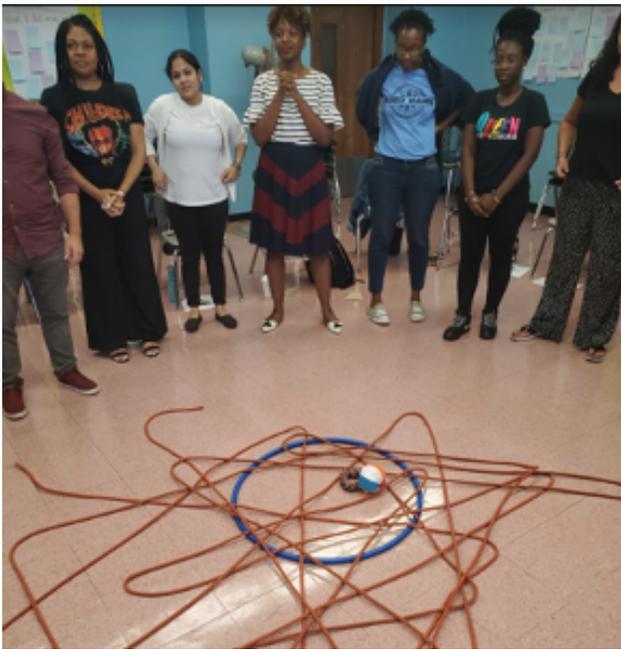
COACHING STAFF

Mr. D. was an exceptional teacher with great classroom management skills and sharp boundaries that were useful for his teaching. However, these same strategies do not always make for a positive experience for circle participants. I was worried that he would run advisory circle exactly like he did his classroom. So I spent an afternoon explaining to him the values of circle, which he easily adopted. Soon Mr. D took total initiative in facilitating circles. He developed check-ins and together we developed circle topics of interest to particular classes, like gender and sports for one cohort and the ethics of science for another. Equally important, Mr. D. courageously shared stories of growing up in the Caribbean and Brooklyn and losing loved ones to gun violence and incarceration. In the end, Mr. D was stellar at running circles in his first year at the school because of the attention he put into designing questions and the extent to which he shared of himself with his students.

For more information on how to implement community-building circles, see our appendix on circle practice.

Training and Support for School Staff

Training and support for school staff played a central role in establishing buy-in for restorative practices. In assessing our schools, we quickly realized that the teachers and staff were often asked by their superiors to implement restorative practices with scant training, people power, or experience. For many, RJ was another mandate added to their already overwhelming workload. In addition, we found that the staff of the schools were not well connected to one another and needed opportunities for mutual support and to build community. To address these issues, we provided training and assistance, and worked side by side with the school staff to help alleviate some of their stress.



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CIRCLE TRAINING

While most of our teachers were familiar with restorative justice, many of them had little or no circle exposure. In addition, as they made clear, professional development (PD) sessions were often their least favorite part of the day. Therefore, we intentionally designed PD to honor their social and emotional needs. Instead of traditional lectures or PowerPoint presentations, our team used parallel practice and facilitated circles with staff, so they could learn through experience. We found that the

best way to train staff and teachers is by having them participate in a circle, followed by discussions of its key elements and theoretical underpinnings.

In our circles with school staff, we explored a variety of topics, often starting with very lighthearted subject matter and then easing into more difficult topics as we established trust. For instance, we held circles on childhood memories, asking questions such as “What was your favorite childhood game growing up?” Or, “When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?” These questions allowed staff to reflect on what life was like for them as children; and to draw parallels between themselves and the students they teach. As faculty grew more comfortable sharing, we shifted to more personal reflections. One of the most engaging questions we asked—and regularly returned to—was, “When you were in high school, who was an adult you trusted and what did s/he do to make you feel that way?” Our goal was to get faculty to think about the type of adults they needed as a teen, and to use these adults as a model when engaging young people. By sharing and listening to each other’s stories, the staff was able to see themselves in one another, as well as in their students. Moreover, because they experienced the benefits of circle through their own participation in it, the staff began to embrace restorative justice and adopt it in their classroom lessons. Having circles as PD became something the staff looked forward to as they felt heard and supported, and more connected to one another.

STAFF-LEAD COMMUNITY BUILDING

After sufficient exposure to circles, we tapped the teachers to lead different aspects of the staff circles. For example, one teacher led the check-in, and another started the storytelling round. Our goals were two-fold: to create a safe and welcoming environment where teachers and school staff could understand the steps and process of a circle; and to give teachers an experience that they could take with them into their classrooms. Over time, we were able to delegate PD circle planning and facilitation to the teachers. At their suggestion, our PD sessions became celebratory with teachers using the time to host Teacher Appreciation Luncheons, Holiday Gift Exchanges, and Pre-Summer Reflections on Progress.

TEACHERS NEED CIRCLE TOO

Given our students' experiences with poverty, immigration, and violence, we felt it was important to host a PD circles centered on adverse childhood experiences (ACES). We watched Dr. Nadine Burke Harris' TED Talk on How childhood trauma affects health across a lifetime. Then in small groups we asked staff to reflect on the parallels between what they saw in their students and what Dr. Harris had described. We also asked questions about staff's own childhood experiences of trauma and how those informed the people they were today. This exercise allowed the staff to see the diversity in thought and experiences among their colleagues and how those experiences relate or differ from their students.

GENERAL SUPPORT

In addition to PD circles, we provided individualized support to staff with a special focus on building one-on-one relationships with, and supporting, those who had limited opportunities to host PD circles. We helped set-up at the start of semesters, checked in frequently with teachers to gauge their comfort level, supplied food for sustenance, and remembered days and events that were important to them. We made sure to inform teachers when students shared positive things about them or their class, particularly from those students with whom they were struggling. We worked with teachers to strategize and make plans for working with specific students on particular topics of interest, like healthy relationships and LGBTQIA+ issues. Additionally, when appropriate, we co-facilitated circles during class time with teachers on topics that benefited from circle format. This tailored approach was particularly beneficial for schools with limited PD time because it provided teachers with other opportunities to participate in circles, connect with our team, and build trust.

I'll share my opinions and thoughts just like them so [students] can see that we're not just robots. We have ideas and thoughts and we've thought about things in certain ways, too.

MEETING TEACHERS WHERE THEY ARE

Mrs. C., who taught the Peer Group Connection class, came to me frustrated because her elective had become a scheduling filler for students with nowhere else to go. The class had been designed as a leadership program that students applied to, interviewed for, and were selected to participate in but, because of circumstances, she struggled to run the course as it was intended. Because she trusted me to provide honest feedback, Mrs. C. asked me to sit in and observe. We then brainstormed strategies for engaging students who objected to every class activity that she proposed. We developed small groups based on who would work best together and crafted more interactive activities. We also had an honest conversation about the tension between her and particular students. She acknowledged how her desire to have a tightly controlled classroom environment led to tension which certain students rebelled against. I explained that students are intuitive and can sense that she may not want them there. We discussed strategies to be more supportive and inclusive of those students. Finally, I validated her frustration at how the class had devolved from its original design.

In some of our schools we facilitated circles for administrators to support their efforts to work together as a cohesive team. **These circles provided administrators with a space for open and honest dialogue about what kind of support they needed from each other.** We encouraged them to discuss their leadership style, their communication patterns, and how they complemented or clashed with other members of the administrative team. Though rare, these kinds of difficult conversations allowed the administration to experience the vulnerability of circles just as their students did, and it provided an opportunity for them to connect with and be supported by the RJ team.

THE LITTLE THINGS

Little things can increase buy-in for even the most skeptical people. Good relationships can go a long way at weakening resistance and opening staff to trying something new to see how it might benefit them. For example, I once asked a teacher about her recent family gathering and she told me her oldest daughter was about to give birth. After some time passed, I asked about the baby and how it felt to be a grandmother. She eagerly shared pictures and we had conversations about family transitions and dynamics. Over time, these interactions built trust between us. Now she relies on me to help with students she has trouble reaching. I was able to build a lasting relationship while helping students in need by simply listening and caring.

- **Smile and Greet:** When teachers are having a tough week or administrators are challenged by an increase in rowdy behavior, a simple smile and “how are you doing?” can go a long way. The trick is to mean it. Slow down when you ask how someone is and wait for the response. It transforms a casual greeting into something more genuine. People can sense the difference.
- **Check-ins:** When you have more time, you can use it to deepen your connection. Questions like *How was your weekend?*, *What did you do for Mother’s/Father’s day?*, *Did you watch that episode of (insert show) last night?*. These kinds of questions can help you learn more about your colleagues and build trust.
- **Coffee runs:** Bringing someone food or drink is an act of care. During a hectic school schedule, staff often have little time to do small things for themselves. Stopping by their room to ask if they want anything is a simple but powerful gesture. Whether or not they take you up on the offer, they will likely remember the attention.
- **A Helping Hand:** Everyone appreciates assistance during a hectic school day. Offer to do small tasks like putting up a poster or stapling something to the board.
- **Validation:** Research shows that people bond over shared challenges more than shared preferences. If you find a shared pet peeve, lean into it, and bond over the shared frustration.

Collaboration with School Safety Agents

School Safety Agents (SSAs) can play a crucial role in influencing school culture and climate. At the time of our initiative, the SSAs were a division of the New York City Police Department and viewed as outsiders tasked with keeping order. The presence of large groups of uniformed SSAs performing roll call was intimidating, and the routine scanning of students through metal detectors sent negative messages to the students on a daily basis. (See section on scanning on page 34). However, over time we came to understand that some SSAs were much more than rule enforcers and, in fact, had some of the strongest relationships with students. Most of the agents were from the same neighborhoods as the students. Many had attended the same schools, and some had even attended high school with our students' parents. **As trusted adults in the school community, we learned to view many of the SSAs as allies and over time we developed collaborative relationships.**

SSAs are the first responders to any physical altercations that occur within and around the outside perimeters of the schools. They respond to classroom disruptions and conflicts among students. In our role as RJ facilitators, we often worked alongside the SSAs to quell conflicts and support students in crisis. While working together we realized that many of our methods of handling conflict and building relationships were often the same. Many of the agents knew to de-escalate confrontations by actively listening to students, asking what they needed in the moment, and resolving problems without harsh punishments. These SSAs tapped into their lived experiences which allowed them to be empathetic and responsive. As a result, we were able to work with our safety agents running mediations and harm circles with their assistance. Because of the quality of our relationships with SSAs, they would bring distressed students to our offices so we could assess their needs and connect them to the appropriate resources.

We also provided restorative justice training to the SSAs in our schools. Using the same parallel process we used in PD sessions with teachers, we sat in a circle with agents and explored our respective needs in the midst of conflict and how we met those needs when they came up. The conversation deepened as the SSAs opened up about the challenges of balancing their roles as both NYPD officers and school safety agents. We learned how they went beyond their job descriptions to serve the students in multiple capacities. Contrary to the training they were given by NYPD, they knew that building rapport with students made it easier for them to prevent crises and de-escalate them when they arose. Some ran after-school programs such as cheerleading, basketball, and track, while others facilitated lunchtime circles with freshmen. In many ways, many of these SSAs had already been using restorative practices. **We just gave them language and theory to validate the importance of their relationship-building with students and encouraged them to continue to use restorative approaches when students acted out.**

SSAS PROVIDE MORE THAN SAFETY

Prior to school desegregation, black teachers comprised up to half of the faculty in many public schools.¹ Half of all college-educated Blacks became teachers and played an integral role in their communities, serving as role models, mentors, and second parents to black children during and outside school hours.

The landmark Brown v. Board of Education case required schools to integrate their student bodies but not their faculties. Not wanting black teachers educating white children, many school boards summarily fired black educators. Today 7% of public-school teachers are black.²

This scarcity of black teachers affects the success of black students. According to research, Black teachers have higher standards and expectations for black students than their white counterparts. And teacher confidence in their students' ability influences student performance.³ It is not surprising, therefore, that studies show having a black teacher in elementary school reduces the likelihood that black students will drop out and increases their likelihood of attending college.⁴

Arguably, School Safety Agents – many of whom are Black women – are filling the void left by Black teachers. These SSAs are deeply invested in student success, both academic and personal. They have high standards and expectations for students, many of whom are their neighbors and kin.

1. According to an analysis of schools in 17 states prior to *Brown vs. Board of Education*, 35-50% of teachers were black. Will, 2019.
2. Pew Research, 2018.
3. Johns Hopkins, 2016.
4. Gershenson, et al., 2017.

Restorative Responses to Harm

Restorative justice is an alternative approach to addressing and healing from harm. But what is harm? It is hard to conceptualize. We can harm ourselves; others can harm us; and systems can inflict harm on communities. Regardless of its source, harm can be traced back to an unmet need for food, shelter, safety, belonging, respect, and feelings of self-worth. In response to interpersonal and systemic harms in our community, we turn to circles and other restorative responses to offer healing.

Circles

In striving to establish a restorative approach to discipline within our schools, our team worked diligently to handle issues that arose, without creating greater harm and while mitigating damage. We worked with school safety agents and staff, including teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals, as well as students and their families, to plan, prepare and execute responsive circles. **In these circles, we created a space for all parties involved to address the harm that occurred and acknowledge their feelings surrounding the harm.** Finally, we assisted staff and students in finding a path and/or solution for moving forward.

An effective circle requires significant preparation and planning. We want to know who each participant is, as a person, not just what they did in the context of the conflict at issue. This involves meeting with each participant to gain an understanding of how s/he views the situation. We ask probing questions to learn not only what happened, but what led to the problem, as well as its underlying causes. Ideally, our pre-existing relationships with participants facilitate this learning process. When we don't know a participant, we begin by getting to know them and their values before we move

to questions about the incident. We understand that conflict and the harm it causes occur because of unmet needs, and that meeting those needs helps individuals take responsibility for their feelings and actions. So, we make sure participants have eaten enough and are sufficiently hydrated. Fundamentally, the goal of prep activities is to listen to participants, ensure they feel heard, and validate their feelings.

HARM CIRCLES

Interpersonal conflicts are a natural part of life.

However, it is the way in which conflicts are handled that illuminates where a school community is along its journey towards a restorative approach.

Harm circles are an integral part of creating a restorative school culture that promotes community, mutual respect, self-awareness and healthy dialogue. They are especially helpful at addressing persistent problems because they can help identify underlying causes, heal friendships and improve teacher-student relations.

Harm circles require an extraordinary amount of time and need to be voluntary for all involved. Therefore, as part of our preparation with participants, we confirm their willingness to engage in a harm circle to address the conflict. If we have a consensus, we begin the process of planning the circle. This may involve additional prep sessions to understand what each person intends to share in the circle. Because we are working with young people, we spend time coaching them around how to share their thoughts and feelings so that their message will be well received. In addition, we work with participants to ensure that their tone and body language, like their words, reflect their willingness to apologize and move on from the conflict.

To further our goal of building a school community steeped in the principles of RJ, we enlist the help of trusted members of the school staff. In many of our harm circles, school staff acted as supports for those in conflict, at times even acknowledging the harm that they caused. Many of the most powerful moments in harm circles were when adults owned their role in the actions taken by students. This is especially meaningful since students constantly watch and take cues from adults.

LEVERAGING RELATIONSHIPS

Sandy and Thomas had a playful relationship having become fast friends since they started together later in the school year. So we were alarmed when Sandy came to us with concerns that Thomas spread a rumor that they had been intimate. She was worried this rumor would ruin her reputation and current relationship. Thomas insisted he did not start the rumor and told only one person about their interaction. He was on edge because Sandy's boyfriend had threatened him by text message. The situation hit a peak when Sandy and Thomas had a physical altercation during gym. In response to this incident, we convinced the students and their mothers to resolve the matter with a harm circle. We invited Ms. Gold, the students' teacher, to attend because of her strong relationships with them. In the circle, everyone was given the opportunity to share their input. The students and their parents discussed the impact of the rumor. Ms. Gold shared how it has affected the school community. In the end, Thomas apologized to Sandy and her mother, and his mother apologized for her son's behavior. Sandy and her mother felt heard and were satisfied with the end result. We later followed up with both students to make sure that they were doing well and that no other issues occurred.

ADDRESSING CONFLICT WITH STAFF

Mr. Knowles, a veteran history teacher, sought help in dealing with a conflict involving his department chair, Ms. Kane, who was routinely making decisions without consulting with staff. He shared that he had been outspoken about it because many of his peers would not speak up. As a result, his relationship with Ms. Kane had deteriorated. Mr. Knowles felt powerless to improve the situation and was concerned that there were underlying racial tensions. Mr. Knowles was a white man and Ms. Kane was an Indian Woman.

*We spoke with Mr. Knowles and Ms. Kane and both agreed to discuss the issue in a harm circle. Through prep we learned that Mr. Knowles believed his advocacy for peers was interpreted as an attempt to usurp her power. Ms. Kane believed her co-teachers did not support her as department chair, perhaps due to her race. To resolve the issues we held three harm circles with the two teachers through which we learned that Ms. Kane had been bullied in high school and was triggered by Mr. Knowles' confrontation style that felt similarly bullying. Mr. Knowles acknowledged the impact of his delivery and agreed to privately share his concerns, outside of departmental meetings. **Taking ownership for the environment she had created, Ms. Kane, asked us to host a circle with her department to help her establish trust and build community.** Over the course of the year, we received positive feedback that there was more transparency in the department.*

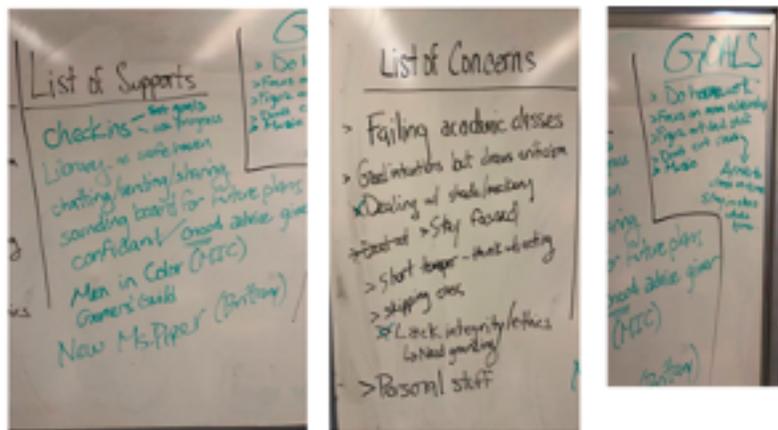
SUPPORT CIRCLES

Support circles bring people together to support an individual or group. Prep work involves first identifying allies—family, friends, classmates, and school staff—who can speak to what they want/hope for the person, and what kind of support they can provide to help him/her achieve goals. As with Harm Circles, we meet with all potential participants to discuss their contribution and then confirm that they affirmatively consent to the circle process. Note: Prep with adults and peers can encourage a reluctant participant to engage in a support circle for their benefit.

GETTING STUDENTS BACK ON TRACK

Dwyane came to our school mid-semester of our first year. After our first circle together, he became somewhat of a co-facilitator with me leading dynamic conversations about racial disparities in the US. Then I learned from other teachers that he started skipping classes and was consistently coming to first period late. His grades slipped and he started smoking more, coming to school high and smoking in stairwells. We held a support circle for him with his favorite teacher, the dean, and a teacher whose class he struggled in.

Together, we brought out the passionate Dwyane we first met and developed a list of ways we would support him. For weeks, Dwyane showed improvement. His attendance improved. He got a new girlfriend and things were beginning to look up. Despite his initial success, circumstances in Dwayne's life prevented our ability to continue to support his growth. Tensions with his mother flared and he witnessed the death of a close friend. Ultimately, he moved to Virginia with his brother. RJ doesn't fix people and doesn't necessarily fix the situations they are in but it does plant seeds through valuable conversations and unconditional love.



For some students, the focused attention in support circles may seem overwhelming, especially if they believe participants will view their problems as self-inflicted. In these instances, we can adjust the support circle format.

MEETING STUDENTS' NEEDS WITHOUT CASTING BLAME

Alanna and her two best friends were inseparable. They did everything together including dating boys in the same friend group. But Alanna's boyfriend was abusive with her and, despite many cycles of breaking up and making up, she admitted that it was hard to maintain distance from him. We offered her a support circle, but she was not keen because she did not want that kind of attention focused on her and this relationship. So we adjusted and offered to host a regular lunch circle with only her and her two best friends. Three or four adult facilitators, all women, shared relationship stories including how they had worked their way out of toxic relationships and fostered healthier relationships. Without directly addressing the abuse that Alanna experienced, we were able to support Alanna in a way that met her needs for privacy.

Students understand when they make a mistake or there is a problem, that it's not the end all be all, that you can work through it... [RJ] has given them the tools to kind of resolve conflict going forward and understand other people's perspectives and empathy and things like that.

REENTRY CIRCLES

Students may be absent from the school community for an extended period of time under a myriad of circumstances, including suspension, loss of a family member, or a prolonged sickness. Reentry circles are a more specific type of support circle where the community develops a plan to welcome a student back. The goal of a reentry circle is to help a student transition back into the school community and provide the support necessary for him/her to excel. To prepare, we reach out to a student prior to his/her return to describe the process, obtain consent, and identify support persons from within and outside the school. In school assistance can include: help with class notes, access to resources, or a friend to sit with at lunch. Family and friends outside school can provide motivation to keep up attendance and complete assignments. Then the student is asked to make commitments to the community and share what type of community member s/he will strive to be. Reentry circles offer students a pathway forward and clear support systems. **In instances of suspension, re-entry circles shift the focus from the harm they caused the community to the support the community is willing to offer them.**

A WARM WELCOME

Asia was a loyal friend and strong student who had no interpersonal issues of her own, but she constantly involved herself in arguments and physical fights on her friends' behalf. Asia's mom had grown accustomed to receiving calls from the school about suspensions but had never been offered a restorative process to welcome her daughter back to school. This time we invited Asia's mother to take part in a reentry circle where the focus would be on supporting Asia. We used the circle process to design a system for Asia to check in with trusted adults and found positive outlets for her to engage in the school community. We also brainstormed other ways to be a good friend that did not involve fighting. This reentry circle was the beginning of ongoing communication with Asia's mother and positive behavioral changes from Asia, who knew she had a united support system.

Alternative Responses to Harm

To integrate restorative practices with established community responses to conflict, we utilized restorative chats, harm circle/mediations, crisis interventions.

Not every conflict requires an extended harm response process such as a harm or support circle. When there are extreme time constraints, small disruptions, or an unwillingness of student(s) to sit in a more formal process, a restorative chat is a useful strategy. Similar to prep conversations for harm circles, restorative chats are one-on-one conversations during which we work to understand what happened and gain a greater sense of what is going on for them. Restorative conversations can reveal all kinds of complex reasons why students do that they do: difficult home lives and family obligations; the need to show strength because of feelings of inadequacy; fears of violence and recrimination if they did not act a certain way. These kinds of chats serve to validate students' experiences; affirm their creativity and resourcefulness in addressing obstacles; and acknowledge the complicated challenges they face while also discussing how they can stay out of harm's way when necessary.

A harm circle/mediation hybrid approach is effective when attempting to solve a conflict within the confines of a 40-minute period. Using a mix of techniques, we facilitate a discussion with the goal of agreeing to end the conflict, even if it means agreeing to disagree. It is most useful for one-off conflicts between two parties, and when there is no desire to have a continued relationship. The mediation allowed us to prevent an impending fight. Once tensions are de-escalated, we use restorative approaches to work with the parties to address underlying issues and build a longer-term strategy.

ADDRESSING HARM BEFORE IT ESCALATES

Bria came to our school as a 10th grader with a history of conflict in her previous schools. She had trouble maintaining good relationships with students. Within the first few months of school she became part of, and was subsequently abandoned by, three separate friend groups. When the potential for a fight with ex-friends arose, we quickly mediated it to avoid a physical altercation. Later, we prepped and sat in a circle with her and another friend. The peer shared that the friendship did not feel genuine. Bria was able to recognize that she had trouble relating to others and being vulnerable, but she wanted to work on it. Although Bria would shut down during our initial conversations, she later began to stop by the RJ room multiple times a day to check in with us. We engaged in conversations about her behavior without her feeling attacked or shutting down. She made an active effort to be more reflective about how she engages with, and relates to, others.

Ultimately, addressing harm should be as creative and unique as the people involved. Cooling off looks different for everybody. We may address conflicts head on or indirectly, while some situations call only for distraction. For example, ripping up paper, coloring, providing snacks, or looking at images online may do the trick. Involving trusting adults is always helpful. With patience, wisdom, humor and undivided attention, we use everything at our disposal—space, toys, imagery, questions, silence, laughter and tears, and discretion—to help students and staff in distress.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

With cases of teen dating violence on the rise in our schools and the Chancellor's regulations that did little to support the young people involved, we developed a restorative approach to IPV with administrators. In one school, we led a Healthy Relationship discussion series during advisory classes. In another school, we led the same series but after school, and launched a club around relationship dynamics. In addition, we developed a campaign to educate students on IPV warning signs and provide information on the resources available to students experiencing dating violence. Our aim was to shift attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that enforce harmful gender norms and contribute to unhealthy relationships and violence.

Our approach was twofold. We worked on an individual level to support students with specific needs, and on a community level to encourage healthy relationship habits and to shift the cultural norms that contribute to intimate partner violence.

SAFETY PLANNING

In the middle of a harm circle between two friends, it became apparent that one friend, Antonette, was in an abusive relationship. She detailed a pattern of control where her ex-boyfriend showed up at her home to walk her to school, walked her to and from each class, and opened classroom doors in the middle of a period to check that she was still there. Though she had tried to break up with him and distance herself repeatedly, he threatened to commit suicide if they broke up. Antonette feared if she said no to his advances he would harm her or himself.

From that point, the circle focus shifted to developing a safety plan for Antonette. Together we discussed how we could ensure Antonette felt safe inside and outside of school. In school (1) Antonette's friends committed to walking her to class (2) teachers were asked to monitor interactions between the two in the hallway and (3) Antonette agreed to visit the RJ room during lunch to check in with us. Following the circle, we called Antonette's mother to develop a safety plan for outside of school; she agreed to drive Antonette to and from school.

As we established systems to support Antonette, our guidance counselor also worked with the young man. They arranged for him to be transferred to a school that could provide him with more robust mental health services. This restorative approach was able to provide individualized support for both Antonette and the young man.

EXPLORING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

We created a relationship spectrum activity to explore dynamics between intimate partners. In advisory, groups of 3-4 students were assigned a few scenarios and asked to discuss where on the spectrum of unhealthy to abusive behaviors certain behaviors landed, and then reported their reasoning to the whole class.

For example, in one class we presented this scenario: After an argument, your partner blocks the doorway and takes your keys to prevent you from leaving.

Priya was quick to respond, "That's bad! No one should stop you from leaving. If a girl wants to leave, she can." Talia followed up, "Yea! At that point it's kidnapping because she can't leave if she wants to." I nodded and reminded students to not assume gender. That's when Niko perked up. "It's wrong when guys do it, but when females do the same thing, it's ok!" I asked him to elaborate; why would an action be okay for one gender but not for another? He responded, "That happened to my brother. He was at his girl's house and he wanted to leave but she took his car keys and hid them. She told him he couldn't leave until they talked." Then the conversation took off:

"Well that's good, you're supposed to have conversations."

"But if he wants to go, he can go."

"Man, he should've just shoved her out the way and called a cab."

"Nah, because then she can call the police and tell the cops he hit her."

"He should've found a window to leave out of."

"Couldn't be me."

After a free form discussion, I recounted the overarching ideas I heard and structured our follow-up conversation around several main points. We discussed that any person, regardless of gender, can be the victim of dating violence and any person can have unhealthy or abusive behaviors; we all need to reflect on our actions within relationships. We learned that while conversations are always encouraged in relationships, you cannot force someone to talk to you, even if you think it would be beneficial for your relationship. And finally we decided that there were complicated situations that did not always have clear answers.

The beauty of this activity was that we had these conversations with students before they encountered these situations. This enabled them to think about their own behaviors, make changes and advocate for themselves if their partners' behaviors were problematic.

What Was Challenging

We encountered various obstacles in our work to implement RJ in institutional settings with their own rules, regulations and incentive structures. Some of these barriers were insurmountable due to time, lack of authority, limited resources or the historical context we live in. Others were a function of the amount of work that needs to be done.

Restorative Justice Is Voluntary, School Is Not

RJ works best when participants volunteer into the process but students have no choice whether to attend school and classes. Mandating participation in RJ processes can be problematic because it compromises authenticity and risks becoming perfunctory for students and staff alike.

To address this challenge, we developed several strategies:

1. Building voluntary spaces like clubs that students could opt into.
2. Working with already established peer groups where trust can make sharing easier and safer.
3. Leaning on our strong personal relationships to encourage participation in the RJ process.
4. Working with administrators to ensure teachers who wanted to do this work had the opportunity.

IDENTIFYING THE MOST WILLING & ABLE CIRCLE FACILITATORS

Ms. Ram is a teacher who really struggled to adopt circle practice. To assist, I led her circles to model facilitation for her. She struggled with students speaking out of turn and would chastise them. While this approach worked well in her classroom and led to strong academic performance, it was not ideal for circle. We spoke after the circle to address the concerns. Sometimes students spoke without the talking piece, I explained, but we needed to give them an opportunity to learn by doing. Circle is a new experience and it takes adjusting. As the year went on, Ms. Ram still resisted. Most days she would sit out to grade or do other work. On the few days she did sit in, she shared minimally. She said she did not feel comfortable in the circle. She did not want to share about her personal life and worried it would send mixed signals to the kids about appropriate behavior in the classroom.

While I respected her desire to not share, I explained that students can learn to relate to adults differently depending on the context, just like teachers can alternate between the roles as educators, disciplinarians, mentors and coaches.

Ultimately, we concluded that because Ms. Ram was not comfortable modeling how to share in a circle, she would not be effective facilitator even though she was a phenomenal teacher. Working with Ms. Ram and administrators, we ensured that only teachers who wanted to be circle facilitators were chosen the following year.

Restorative Justice Within A School System

Some aspects of our public-school system are inconsistent with the values of restorative justice. Our strong relationships with staff enabled us to mitigate tensions caused by scanning and restrictive bathroom policies, however without policy changes we could not eliminate them entirely. Other factors, such as traditional instructional methods and policies requiring parental involvement for some processes added complexity to our work that we could not overcome.

SCANNING (METAL DETECTORS)

Going to school in full-time scanning schools is difficult. Students must wait for a staff member to watch them get scanned and collect their cell phones. Most kids are not happy to wait so the scanning process can frequently erupt into conflict and they often miss instructional time, which sends the message that their education is not important. **More broadly, metal detectors have been shown to make students feel less safe, not more.** While we held circles to help students process their feelings, we could not change the fact of scanning and their quiet resignation in the face of it.

FOOD

Over 90% of our students qualify for a Free & Reduced Priced Lunch, yet a sizable portion of the student body refuses to eat the meals provided by their school. Much of the food served is unhealthy, undercooked, bland or simply unappealing to students. Though we raised private funding to provide snacks to everyone we worked with, our resources didn't match the scope and depth of the need.

WATER

Drinkable water was a major concern in all of our schools. Administrators would warn kids not to drink from the fountains because of its lead content and would procure bottled water for thirsty students. We also had a supply of potable water, but it did not meet the need and we were often forced to ration.

BATHROOM/FACILITIES

In all of our schools, bathroom use was highly regulated, and the facilities did not meet basic standards. Most had mold/mildew problems and lacked hot water, paper towels and adequate supplies of soap and feminine hygiene products. Despite a student-led campaign in one of our schools for open and well-stocked bathrooms, we did not see change.

INSTRUCTION

Teacher turnover, burnout and inexperience undermined the quality of instruction in our schools and our RJ implementation efforts. An over-reliance on substitute teachers who were strangers to our students contributed to conflict, chaos and less instructional time. Burnout was a significant obstacle to successfully implementing RJ. In one school, over 60% of the teachers trained in RJ left by the end of year one. New and substitute teachers had not received RJ training. Inevitably a small core of teachers in each school ended up shouldering a disproportionate amount of the emotional labor and care-work for kids. **Teacher retention is critical to instituting RJ.**

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Engaging parents is difficult, and at our schools the challenge was compounded by small to non-existent PTAs. Calling home doesn't always manifest in a change in student behavior, and there is the obvious challenge of reaching out to a stranger for the first time with bad news. We actively tried to counter that in our work by proactively reaching out to parents early in the year. We viewed our work in school as a partnership to the work already occurring at home. We avoided deficit framing of our students' families and looked for ways to bring parents into the building for positive experiences. Yet, some parents had their own negative school experiences in the same building, others were coming from a middle or elementary school where they were on the receiving end of educational neglect. Many parents were busy, tired, and had competing obligations—sometimes those obligations were younger kids in different schools who needed more attention. Other times, it was dealing with the structural violence and racism that was present in their communities. Regardless, building a steady pattern of communication with parents was a challenge that we didn't conquer.

RJ Does Not Solve Structural Violence

Restorative justice alone cannot undo structural violence and racism. Yet many of the dynamics RJ is called upon to address are corollaries of those systemic forces—poverty, discrimination, housing instability, job insecurity, instability and trauma.

Our students with the highest needs often had the most severely challenging home environments. For our team members who were trained counselors and social workers, we could provide counseling. Yet, the demand for professional counseling outweighed the supply. Our schools are under resourced and unable to support the needs of all their students.

While we cannot redress historical wrongs and injustice, we can help students cope with life challenges, process their pain and connect to resources with the goal of achieving the best possible outcomes.

AFFIRMING STUDENTS

Tianna often came to our office to say hi and talk about her home life. She spent nights and weekends caring for her younger brother. Her father and his girlfriend would have loud disputes that made her feel unsafe and made it impossible for her to do homework. She also alluded to her father's struggle with addiction. All this gave insight into why she felt she needed to be heavily guarded among her classmates. We helped her process her pain, but we couldn't address her caregivers' unmet needs, provide family counseling or put food in her fridge. We listened, affirmed her worth, and offered practical advice for managing her emotions during stressful moments in school. For Tianna, providing a space to talk was all we could give her, but she deserved so much more.

Accountability

Restorative justice requires accountability. At the heart of restorative justice are strong, trusting relationships and open communication. Our team was able to build these kinds of relationships with students because they knew they could call us out on our mistakes and we would own them. Teachers and staff were willing to trust us because we were honest about our shortcomings and would take responsibility when we erred. **These strong relationships in the school community enabled us to hold ourselves and others accountable.**

However, our school communities do not have such clear, consistent or transparent systems of accountability. As a result, staff actions—and students' responses to those actions—can appear haphazard and unfair to young people and adults.

Second, adults in our school building were often not willing to hold themselves accountable. Rarely do those with power have to be held accountable to those without power. In the case of our schools, adults did not have to acknowledge, or apologize when they made mistakes that affected the students. We all make mistakes, and likely have no intention of causing harm. However, when we do, it is important to acknowledge that although not intentional, the impact can be harm. Too often students come to us to complain that an adult has been dismissive to them, and they are facing consequences for responding in kind. While we can have endless conversations with student about holding oneself accountable for one's own actions, it does little to quell the general feeling of unfairness when adults are not asked to do same. When adults apologize, students too can take responsibility for their actions.

HOLDING YOURSELF ACCOUNTABLE

Lou was a new football coach. His laid-back demeanor and sense of calm enabled him to easily connect with the students. He would help me supervise students in the cafeteria at lunch time. One day, a tit-for-tat situation got out of hand in the first 10 minutes of lunch. A playful food fight between two students escalated and ruined a new sweater. We did quick prep sessions with each student who halfheartedly admitted that they should have told an adult. But their tone and body language betrayed them – they clearly did not think this was the best or even a real recourse.

During our harm circle, Lou sat in and led the round, “What could you have done differently to make the situation better?” When it was his turn, Lou shared that he should have been in the lunchroom to stop the fight or at least de-escalate it before it exploded. He explained he misplaced his walkie-talkie and was late in getting down to the cafeteria. He acknowledged that if he had been more mindful, things may have turned out differently.

Lou’s accountability shifted the tone of the conversation. The students followed up with apologies for what they threw and said they should not have thrown food. They did not focus on blaming someone else for their wrongdoing. Lou modeled what it looked like to hold yourself accountable and sent the message that everyone can hold themselves accountable for their own part. Adults must model the type of accountability we expect of young people.

HOLDING YOUR COLLEAGUES ACCOUNTABLE

When required, we hold ourselves accountable as a team. For example, I witnessed the end of an exchange between a fellow coordinator, Franco, and Denny, a junior who had gotten into arguments with several young women. As I approached the office, I heard Franco say, “I can’t deal with you right now, Denny. You have to self-soothe.” Denny stormed past me. I followed him into the hallway and asked him what was wrong. He relayed to me what he shared with Franco, his frustration and anger that he might be held back. He also shared how he was scared to tell his mom. Once he was calm, I told him to come back to the office that afternoon so we could figure out his graduation requirements and how to meet them on time. Then I turned my attention to Franco.

We had a frank conversation about his response. I told him that being dismissive of students’ needs was not consistent with the values of restorative justice and, more importantly, not reflective of his own values. He agreed. He had a long week balancing his own familial needs and work. After mediating several issues between Denny and others, he admitted to having little empathy for him. Regardless of the cause of his frustration, Franco asserted that it was our duty to support the needs of all students. He acknowledged that he was not the best person to talk to Denny, and that next time, he would ask a colleague for help.

When Denny came by that afternoon, Franco apologized. He explained his personal stresses and shared that he, like Denny, had lost a loved one. Franco offered himself as a resource if Denny ever wanted to talk about their losses. Together the three of us drafted a summer school plan so that Denny could graduate on time. As RJ facilitators, it is important to have a team who will hold you accountable for your actions. At some point we all fall short; it is crucial that we acknowledge the harm we’ve caused and make an effort to be better moving forward.

Third, restorative justice implementation must figure out how to navigate accountability while working within a system. It is easier to take responsibility when there is no risk of punishment. A restorative environment is one that holds harm doers accountable through a shared plan for healing with consensus from the community affected. This requires a safe and supportive environment and a willingness to have hard conversations that address underlying feelings, experiences and tensions. This cannot happen if people are punished for sharing.

CONFIDENTIALITY IS KEY

In one school we held a teachers' circle during which we facilitated a conversation about the stereotypes about our black students and implicit biases. One brave teacher, who was beloved by his students, shared his personal evolution explaining that he had had biases which he was unlearning through his work with students.

*After the circle, one of the administrators came to us concerned about what the teacher had said. She was considering whether to give him a bad review and letting him go at the end of the year. This was not a restorative response. **The circle space is sacred; healing and accountability cannot happen if people's honest contributions are weaponized against them.***

The administration must be on board with not only asking adults to hold themselves accountable, but also investing in developing ways for adults to then heal the harm that they have contributed to. Our current punitive system encourages a culture of silence and passing blame. Instead restorative justice requires us to confront ugly truths and figure out how to move forward, together.

Our Lessons Learned

- **It takes time:** Change doesn't happen overnight. This is a long game with changing players. It may take years just to get buy-in even before a new system can be put in place. Have patience. Remember that it took years to establish the existing school culture, and therefore it will take time to shift it.
- **Pay your dues (show your commitment to the community):** Before you call on others to make changes, it is important that you demonstrate your commitment to the school community. The easiest way to do this is by being of service to the community. Assess where you can offer a helping hand. Taking the time to do small things like volunteering for school functions or clearing trash in the lunchroom signals to the school community that you are invested in the broader needs of school.
- **Modeling is key to culture change:** For many, restorative practices represent a paradigm shift and are best understood when modeled by a trusted colleague or educator. This includes demonstrating how to handle power and conflict responsibly—by asking questions, apologizing when you're wrong, and leading by example.
- **Know the strengths and skill sets of the community (everything is not for everyone):** Educators should engage with RJ using their strengths and connecting with young people in a way that feels natural to them. Some educators will excel in facilitating circles while others may be better suited for one-on-one restorative chats.
- **RJ is not a magic bullet:** The challenges facing many students are complex and numerous. RJ does not have the power to dismantle all systemic problems. However, RJ can provide a space and a process to acknowledge and troubleshoot the challenges of daily life.
- **Prioritize relationship building:** Without focusing on community- and relationship-building, you will always have conflict.

Appendix

Circle Curriculum

Appendix

Circle Curriculum

Circle Practice

"In circle, no one is more important or has more rights or power than anyone else; even if they choose not to speak, no one is invisible." – Kay Pranis

Circle practice is a peacemaking tool used by restorative justice practitioners to build relationships through the sharing of thoughts, ideas, opinions, and stories. Peacemaking, or some form of it, is found among many different tribes and reflects each tribe's unique culture, religion, and collective experiences. While it may vary in format and name, there is a common focus on creating unity, restoring harmony to a community, and an emphasis on repairing relations for future success. We believe circles are a tangible tool for school communities to build empathy, relieve tension, and take collective responsibility for improving school climate and culture.

In these spaces, participants process life events and concepts in a way that allows the community to better understand one another and to take responsibility for each member's well-being. Anchored in relatable concepts and popular culture, every part of a community building circle is intentional and intended to engage pro-social communication by promoting active listening and empathy.

Circle Elements

- **Circle Set-Up:** All participants are seated in a circle without desks or obstacles between them (aside from the centerpiece).
- **Talking Piece:** A talking piece is used to regulate the discussion by ensuring everyone has an opportunity to be heard. Participants can choose to speak or pass the talking piece if they don't want to share. The talking piece should be an object that has special meaning to the facilitator or group. Avoid sharp or heavy objects for safety reasons.

- **Centerpiece:** A centerpiece may be used to help establish the 'new' space they are in. It is an opportunity for participants to dictate what their shared space looks like by creating it collaboratively.
- **Opening Ceremony:** An opening ceremony is used to mark the beginning of the circle space and set the tone for the circle. This can be a question, song, mindfulness moment, or any activity that reminds them of their interconnectedness.
- **Community Guidelines:** It is good practice to establish a set of guidelines and a set of values, agreed upon by the whole circle. Guidelines—which can be written on a board as a visual reminder—typically address ways that participants communally agree to conduct themselves during the circle. Groups will also have a conversation about values, which are aspirations for how circle participants can bring their best selves to the group. These can be reviewed at the beginning of every circle and referred to throughout.
- **Rounds:** Rounds are the bulk of the circle experience. A distinct round is counted as each time the talking piece makes its way fully around the circle. Rounds can start with a prepared prompt or question for the group, can emerge organically in response to issues that the facilitator observes. Rounds vary in time based on the participants and should be adapted to meet the unique needs of your group and the time constraints of your school day. While each circle is designed to be completed in approximately 45 minutes, facilitators should feel empowered to exercise their best judgment on whether to continue the same circle at the session.

Practice tip: Typically, a facilitator poses a question for the group and then models behavior by answering first. The more a facilitator shares when opening up a round, the more students will follow their lead.

- **Closing Ceremonies:** Closing ceremonies mark the end of the circle space and help participants transition from circle back to regular life.

Having consistent circles provided a space for students to explore topics and reflect on common issues that affect them as individuals, as a school community, or the community at large. We intentionally started with low-level circles that did not require a lot of personal information from students because a circle can be an incredibly vulnerable place. We gradually shifted to circles that asked participants to share personal stories and experiences that wouldn't usually come up in casual conversation. As classes were ready, conversations moved on to dreams, goals, family, love, loyalty and other intimate topics.

In the beginning, we facilitated all circles with the assigned teacher sitting in the circle. Eventually, our best-case scenario happened where teachers, and sometimes students, began to co-facilitate and facilitate these spaces themselves.

Things To Consider When Choosing Circles

- **Choosing circle topics should be very intentional to ensure the process is meeting the needs of the group.** There is no one right way to integrate circles into a school because every community is unique. Each school community should tailor the circles in this curriculum to their particular needs.
- The introductory circles ensure everyone understands the characteristics and purpose of the circle process. Doing this together, as a group, allows everyone to receive and process this information as a whole to **determine what they expect from the circle space and how they are entering into the process as individuals and as a group.**
- **The curriculum is organized in an intentional sequence** from low barrier circles, to higher stakes circles that can involve sensitive, personal, and potentially triggering topics. If you are unsure of what conversations might be best for your group, **you can use the following guide.**

**It's important to note that following the progression of the curriculum does not necessarily indicate readiness of the group to converse on more sensitive topics and the facilitator should constantly be assessing the strengths, limitations, and needs of the group.

- **Ensure the group has a solid foundation.** It can be very tempting to dive right into topics that require high levels of vulnerability. Without positive group dynamics this can be harmful for the individual, the group, and the willingness of either to participate in future circles. Taking time to **establish familiarity with one another, patience for one another, and sensitivity of one another is the key** to promoting positive circle dynamics and creating a welcoming space.
- **It is very important to understand the dynamics of your group when choosing circle topics.** Every group will progress at a different rate due to a variety of factors such as maturity and familiarity. It takes very intentional observations of group dynamics throughout the group's time together to determine what nature of conversation is best.
- **Make sure to choose conversation topics that you as the keeper are comfortable discussing.** As an active participant in the circle sharing process, the circle keeper must also understand their own strengths, limitations, and triggers when choosing a circle topic as well as the participants.
- **It's okay to take breaks.** Circle can be overwhelming. It's okay to take a break from traditional circle format mid-circle, or in place of scheduled circles, if you feel your group needs a break or a reset.

The following guidelines can help you decide what level of conversation might be best for your group:

All circles work best when participants:

- volunteer for the process
- respect the talking piece
- adhere to community guidelines

UNIT 1: BUILDING COMMUNITY CIRCLES work best when participants:

- need to get to know one another
- need more opportunities to experience and become comfortable with the circle process
- need a break from more intense circle conversations

UNIT 2: DIVING IN CIRCLES work best when participants:

- have contributed to the creation of and have demonstrated a respect for community guidelines
- are familiar and seem comfortable sharing personal information, thoughts, and opinions
- are receptive of other participants thoughts, opinions, or experiences without judgement or ridicule

UNIT 3: RESPONDING TO HARM CIRCLES work best when participants:

- consist only of the affected parties and appropriate support persons
- have processed their role in the situation and planned their approach to the conversation
- feel ready to participate and hold themselves accountable, where applicable
- have demonstrated a respect for community guidelines

A NOTE ABOUT CONSENSUS

In this guide, we reference seeking consensus around guidelines. When conflict arises, the search for consensus becomes even more salient. It is helpful to remember that consensus does not mean that everyone gets their desired outcome or agrees with the exact wording. Rather, consensus asks, “can I live with that?” When seeking consensus around a circle about an issue that has been discussed, a facilitator may reference the issue and ask, “when the talking piece comes to you, please state whether you can live with that result.”

PRACTICE TIPS

Each circle in this curriculum contains tips, explanations, and instructions based on our staff and trainers’ experiences. These notes are intended to be flexible and help new facilitators be mindful about how they prepare for and facilitate circles. All practice tips will be listed in the footnotes.

Unit 1: Building Community

A. Introduction To Circle Practice

Introducing Circle Practice Students

PURPOSE Introduce the practice of circle and begin building community

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, 5-6 miniature stuffed animals or miniature beach balls

WELCOME Greet and welcome students to the space.

Facilitator note: Always welcome circle participants to the circle space. If circle participants enter late, welcome them briefly as they enter or wait until the talking piece is being passed if someone is sharing.

INTRODUCE CIRCLES Introduce the circle process and have a round where everyone says their name.

Today, we are going to spend time in circle. The practice of circle is inspired by Indigenous teachings as a way to build community through authentic conversations. Circle offers each of us an opportunity to speak and be heard. I'm going to pass the talking piece and ask that everyone say their name and pass it to the next person.

ICEBREAKER Group Juggle activity: 5–10 minutes. 5–6 small stuffed animals/soft objects needed.

- Ask each person to stand and put one hand in the air.
- Call out the name of a circle participant and then throw a stuffed animal to them.
- The person who caught the stuffed animal should now call out the name of another participant and then throw the stuffed animal to them.
- Once a person's name has been called, they put their hand down. This continues until everyone's name has been called and everyone has received the ball. This will be considered 1 round.
- Begin a second round going slightly faster. Without telling anyone, add another stuffed animal to the mix, until there are 3 or more in the circle.
- Let this continue for a bit then say "Reverse the pattern" meaning they will reverse the order, throwing the stuffed animal back to the person who threw it to them.
- Reemphasize that people need to say the name. As all the pieces come back to you, put them away.

OPENING CEREMONY *An opening ceremony is used to mark the beginning of circle and the transition from our everyday lives into the circle space. Today we will open circle with a quote. “Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow.” – Albert Einstein. Allow a moment for reflection.*

INTRODUCE ROUNDS

- A “round” occurs when the group passes the talking piece around the circle and gives each participant the opportunity to speak or to pass.
- Typically, the facilitator poses a question or prompt and then models a response by answering first.
- A round can start with either a pass to the left or to the right.
- It should be made explicit that it is okay for students to pass. A facilitator can encourage participants to hold the talking piece for a moment before choosing to pass.

INTRODUCE CENTERPIECE Explain in detail the components of your centerpiece and the significance of each item. Invite members of the circle to contribute to the centerpiece and allow each person the opportunity to explain the significance of their item.

INTRODUCE TALKING PIECE Explain in detail how it works and the meaning of the particular talking piece you are using. Explain that when holding the talking piece, a person can speak without being interrupted by anyone in the group and that it’s always okay to pass.

Facilitator note: If participants in your group tend to over talk when they have the talking piece, it helps to remind the group that everyone in the circle needs time to speak.

INTRODUCE CIRCLE GUIDELINES Read the community guidelines aloud and explain to the group that they will have an opportunity to create their own guidelines later on and that these are being used for the sake of time in today’s circle. Here are sample guidelines:

- One mic—respect the talking piece
- Speak from the heart—share your experiences
- Listen from the heart
- Say just enough without feeling rushed, and remember it is always okay to pass
- Names stay and lessons travel—his is a quick way to explain that personal details divulged in the circle should remain confidential, but that lessons learned from a personal story can be discussed outside of the circle.

ROUND ONE *Do group members agree with the guidelines on the chart paper? Does anyone have anything to add or change? If students do not agree with the guidelines, continue to pass the talking piece in rounds until there is group consensus.*

ROUND TWO *What is your favorite dish or homemade meal and who makes it the best? Share a story about your dish or the person who prepares it.*

Facilitator note: Be prepared to share a story about your favorite dish to model the response for students.

ROUND THREE *If you were a high school teacher, what subject would you teach and why? What would you enjoy most about it?*

ROUND FOUR *What is one strength you possess that will be helpful this school year?*

CHECK-OUT Invite the group to share one word to describe how they’re feeling about the circle.

CLOSING CEREMONY *Closing ceremonies are used to mark the end of the circle and transition is back into our day to day activities. Today we will also close our circle with a quote. “For me, I am driven by two main philosophies: know more today about the world than I knew yesterday and lessen the suffering of others. You’d be surprised by how far that gets you.” – Neil deGrasse Tyson, an African-American astrophysicist, author and science communicator.*

Celebration: Starting 9th Grade

PURPOSE Welcome 9th grade students, reflect on their transition, and celebrate this major milestone

MATERIALS Centerpiece, tassel as talking piece (or anything else that symbolizes this transition), circle guidelines, index cards, markers

WELCOME Greet and welcome students to the space.

OPENING CEREMONY *Today we will open circle with a quote. "Don't be afraid of new beginnings. Don't shy away from new people, new energy, new surroundings. Embrace new chances at happiness."— Billy Chapata, a writer & poet. Let's take 30 seconds to reflect on the quote.*

INTRODUCE CENTERPIECE Explain in detail the components of your centerpiece and the significance of each item. Invite members of the circle to contribute to the centerpiece and allow each person the opportunity to explain the significance of their item.

INTRODUCE TALKING PIECE Explain in detail how it works and the meaning of the particular talking piece you are using. Explain that when holding the talking piece, a person can speak without being interrupted by anyone in the group and that it's always okay to pass.

Facilitator note: If participants in your group tend to over talk when they have the talking piece, it helps to remind the group that everyone in the circle needs time to speak.

CHECK-IN *Remind us of your name and tell us a few words about how you are doing today.*

INTRODUCE CIRCLE GUIDELINES Read the community guidelines aloud. Use the sample guidelines listed below or the guidelines the group has created.

- One mic—actively listen to the person holding the talking piece.
- Speak from the heart—share your experiences
- Listen from the heart
- Say just enough without feeling rushed (remember it is always okay to pass)
- Names stay and lessons travel

ROUND ONE *Do group members agree with the guidelines? Does anyone have anything to add or change?* If anyone disagrees, continue to pass the talking piece in rounds until there is group consensus.

Facilitator note: If consensus cannot be reached and time is running out, ask the group to postpone the conversation until next time.

ROUND TWO Pass out index cards. *List three things you bring with you to high school. It can be a friend, your sense of humor, cool backpack, or basketball skills. Share what you wrote then place in the center.*

ROUND THREE *What is something that you are proud of right now?*

Facilitator note: Model for students by sharing something you are proud of before passing the talking piece.

ROUND FOUR *What are you excited about/ looking forward to about high school?*

CHECK-OUT Invite participants to share their reactions to this experience.

CLOSING CEREMONY Play Celebration by Kool & the Gang or another celebratory song of your choosing. *We will close out circle today with a celebration song. Once again, congratulations on entering high school!*

Why We Listen

PURPOSE Explore what it means to have voice and to be heard

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

WELCOME Greet and welcome students to the space.

OPENING CEREMONY *“There’s a lot of difference between listening and hearing.” – J.K. Chesterton.* Pass the talking piece and ask the participants to reflect on the meaning behind this quote.

INTRODUCE CENTERPIECE Explain in detail the components of your centerpiece.

INTRODUCE TALKING PIECE Explain the meaning of the particular talking piece you are using and reiterate the importance of using the talking piece.

REVIEW GUIDELINES *How do you think we have been doing with the guidelines? On a scale of 1–10, what grade you would give us?*

ROUND ONE *Tell us about a time when you were in a situation and you felt like your side of the story was not being listened to or you felt like you didn’t get a chance to explain. What was going on? How did you feel?*

ROUND TWO *How did that situation affect you? What did you need in that moment to not feel silenced?*

ROUND THREE *How does people’s willingness to hear what we have to say affect the way that we feel about them and interact with them?*

ROUND FOUR *Who is someone that you feel really listens to you and cares about your opinion? How has that affected your relationship with them?*

Facilitator note: Facilitator should model this answer by going first.

ROUND FIVE *How could listening to other people in circle affect our relationship with them?*

Facilitator note: If not already mentioned, facilitator should relate conversation back to core concepts of circle. To build community and relationships we must truly listen to each other.

CLOSING CEREMONY *“Raise your words, not voice. It is rain that grows flowers, not thunder.” – Rumi, a 13th century Muslim poet, jurist, Islamic scholar, and theologian.*

Facilitator note: Again, the facilitator should explore the concept of giving others space to speak so that they can thrive, which is what we ourselves need.

Establishing Circle Values

PURPOSE Develop a shared set of values

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, chart paper with guidelines

WELCOME Greet and welcome participants to the space.

OPENING CEREMONY *Today we will open with a quote. "In recognizing the humanity of our fellow beings, we pay ourselves the highest tribute" – Thurgood Marshall, first African-American on the U.S. Supreme Court.* Pass the talking piece and ask participants to share their reaction to the quote.

INTRODUCE CENTERPIECE Explain in detail the components of your centerpiece and the significance of each item. Invite members of the circle to contribute to the centerpiece and allow each person the opportunity to explain the significance of their item.

INTRODUCE TALKING PIECE Explain in detail how it works and the meaning of the particular talking piece you are using. Explain that when holding the talking piece, a person can speak without being interrupted by anyone in the group and that it's always okay to pass.

Facilitator note: If participants in your group tend to over talk when they have the talking piece, it helps to remind the group that everyone in the circle needs time to speak.

GUIDELINES Read the community guidelines aloud. Tell participants that there will be an opportunity for a more in-depth conversation and for now we will hold the existing guidelines.

CHECK-IN *What is one good thing that has happened this week?*

ACTIVITY

- *Raise your hand if you have a younger brother, sister, cousin or friend that looks up to you. Take moment and think of that person and identify three things that you would want people to say about them. Each thing should be something you value in a person.*

Facilitator note: Give examples of values such as respect, kindness, understanding, patience.

- *Pass out index cards: On one side of the index card list the three things and on the opposite side, in bold letters, write the one you value the most.*

ROUND ONE *What value did you choose as most important and why? After they are done sharing, ask them to 'offer' the one they value the most to the centerpiece and place it in the middle.*

ROUND TWO *Everyone has to agree that we feel these are important values to have in our space. Are these values you would want in our circle community? Are there any that you can't live with?*

Facilitator note: If participants mention there is a value(s) that they cannot agree with, write them down on chart paper and have a round to reflect on whether they should or should not be included. If there is no consensus by the end of the period, leave the undecided values out and revisit the conversation next time.

ROUND THREE *What value do you want people to see in you?*

CLOSING CEREMONY *Today we'll close with a quote. "Your beliefs become your thoughts, Your thoughts become your words, Your words become your actions, Your actions become your habits, Your habits become your values, Your values become your destiny." – Mahatma Gandhi.*

Building Circle Guidelines

PURPOSE Develop a shared set of guidelines by checking that the existing guidelines reflect our values and expanding on the existing list

Facilitator note: Establishing guidelines may require multiple circles.

MATERIALS Values index card from previous circle, marker, additional chart paper, centerpiece, talking piece, chart paper with guidelines

WELCOME Greet and welcome students to the space.

OPENING CEREMONY 4 by 4 breathing exercise—*You can either close your eyes or just softly focus on a spot on the floor. Do whatever feels comfortable so you aren't distracted by anything or anyone in the room. You are going to breathe in slowly through your nose to the count of 4; hold your breath for 4 seconds; then you will breathe out of your mouth for 4 seconds. You can exhale loudly if you want.*

INTRODUCE CENTERPIECE Explain in detail the components of your centerpiece.

INTRODUCE TALKING PIECE Explain in detail how it works and the meaning of the particular talking piece you are using.

Facilitator note: If participants in your group tend to over talk when they have the talking piece, it helps to remind the group that everyone in the circle needs time to speak.

GUIDELINES *Today we are going to dedicate our time to discussing our community guidelines to make sure that they meet the needs of the group. Let's start by reviewing the guidelines we've been using so far. Read existing guidelines aloud.*

ROUND ONE *Tell us about a guideline at home, school or anywhere else in your life that you have appreciated. Why do you appreciate it? What is the benefit?*

ROUND TWO *What are some benefits of having circle guidelines? Why do you think we create them as a group?*

ROUND THREE Invite each participant to grab a value from the previous circle and develop a guideline related to that value. Participants are also welcome to use values that were not named last time. Pass the talking piece and invite participants to share the guidelines they created and why they feel it is important. Record these on chart paper.

ROUND FOUR Give the group a moment to assess the guideline suggestions. Pass the talking piece and invite participants to state which guidelines they definitely want to keep, which guidelines they do not think should stay, and why. Continue to pass the talking piece until the group reaches consensus on the new list of guidelines.

CLOSING CEREMONY Pass the Pulse activity. Ask the group to stand in a circle facing one another and join hands. Share that this activity is a reminder of our interconnectivity. Have the facilitator start by squeezing the hand of the person to the right or left of them. That person then "passes the pulse" by squeezing the hand of the next person. Do this until you have made it all the way around the circle.

Facilitator note: If participants are uncomfortable holding hands, they can touch elbows or link arms.

Unit 1: Building Community

B. Getting to Know You

Introducing Circle Practice Students

PURPOSE Explore how much we know about each other and what we want to know more about

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

PREPARATION Write questions on individual strips of paper (one question per strip). The questions should be low-barrier, 'get to know you' questions and there should be enough for every participant to receive a question (including facilitators). Fold and put all of the strips in a container.

OPENING CEREMONY 'Pass a greeting' the person on your left in any way that you would like. Example—'Good morning, Ms. Wright' or 'Hola, Ms. Hugh'. The greeting can also be nonverbal.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community guidelines and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

ACTIVITY

- Pass the container around the circle, letting each student pick one strip of paper from the bag
- Ask the students to answer the question on their piece of paper.
- This can be done as the container is being passed around or you can wait until everyone has one then start the round.

GUIDELINES Does everyone agree with the guidelines on the chart paper? Does anyone have anything to add or change?

ROUND ONE What is one thing you learned about a fellow classmate in our opening ceremony that you didn't know before?

ROUND TWO Tell a story of a time when you thought you knew someone, but learned something that changed your view of that person.

Facilitator note: Model with a story when you jumped to negative conclusions about someone but learned you had something in common.

ROUND THREE Do you feel like you know your classmates outside of this class? Did you learn anything about one of your classmates that changed your perception of them?

ROUND FOUR If you could pick a topic to talk about next circle to get to know one another better, what topic would you pick?

CLOSING CEREMONY Pass a farewell to the person to your left. Example—'Goodbye, Ms. Wright' or 'See ya later, Ms. Hugh'. The greeting can also be nonverbal.

Childhood Stories

PURPOSE Learn more about each other and connect over shared experiences

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

OPENING CEREMONY 4 by 4 breathing exercise—*You can either close your eyes or just softly focus on a spot on the floor. Do whatever feels comfortable so you aren't distracted by anything or anyone in the room. You are going to breathe in slowly through your nose to the count of 4; hold your breath for 4 seconds; then you will breathe out of your mouth for 4 seconds. You can exhale loudly if you want.*

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community guidelines and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

CHECK-IN *What is one thing that made you laugh this week?*

ACTIVITY

- Have participants stand in a circle in front of their chairs
- Let them know that you will be reading a series of prompts. If what you say applies to them, they should take a step into the circle
- Pass the talking piece to those in the inner circle and invite them to share about that experience
- Once the story telling is over, ask them to step back into the larger circle and move on to the next prompt.
- Step into the circle if:
 - Your parents forgot/were late to get you from school
 - You ever wet the bed
 - You ever fell off of a bike, scooter, or skateboard
 - You ever got in trouble for coming home too late
 - You ever got lost in a store
 - You grew up in New York City (what neighborhood?)
 - You grew up outside of New York City (where?)

ROUND ONE *What's one of your favorite memories from childhood?*

ROUND TWO *What's one thing you would change about your childhood?*

ROUND THREE *What's one thing you are grateful for from your childhood?*

CLOSING CEREMONY Give participants 5 minutes to work in pairs to create a hand game (i.e. rock, paper, scissors; numbers; miss mary mack). It does not have to be long or make sense, just a fun rhyme with hand movements. Alternatively, students can pair up and create a handshake.

Food

PURPOSE Build community through a low-stakes conversation that gives circle participants some insight into each other's culture, likes, and dislikes through food

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

OPENING CEREMONY *'Pass a greeting' to the person on your left in any way that you would like. Example—'Good morning, Ms. Wright' or 'Hola, Ms. Hugh'. The greeting can also be nonverbal.*

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community guidelines and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

CHECK-IN *What's the best thing that you ate this week?*

ROUND ONE *What's your favorite food, dish, or type of food? Who or where makes it the best?*

ROUND TWO *Share a crazy kitchen story—what is the worst thing you've ever cooked? Have you burned a meal? Set something on fire? etc.*

Facilitator note: Model with embarrassing story.

ROUND THREE *What is one food tradition your family has?*

Facilitator note: Model first—holiday dishes are a good place to start.

ROUND FOUR *What is the craziest/most exotic thing you've tried?*

ROUND FIVE *What is the worst food you ever ate?*

ROUND SIX *What food could you not live without?*

CHECK OUT *What is something that you've always wanted to try?*

CLOSING CEREMONY *"Your diet is a bank account. Good food choices are good investments."— Bethenny Frankel.*

Obstacle Course and Teamwork

PURPOSE Evaluate the role they play on a team and the importance and challenges of teamwork

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, items for an obstacle course (chairs, desks, tables, backpacks, hula hoops, anything big and bulky)

OPENING CEREMONY *“The way to achieve your own success is to be willing to help somebody else get it first.”*
– Iyanla Vanzant, a motivational speaker.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community guidelines and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

CHECK-IN Check-in on a scale of 1-10. 1 being ‘Bleh.’ 10 being ‘Superb.’

ROUND ONE *What makes a team work?*

ACTIVITY

- Arrange the furniture and other objects in the room into an obstacle course and break the class into two or three teams
- Explain to the group that one student will try to complete the obstacle course blindfolded (or eyes-closed) while another person (or the whole team) directs them
- Variations can include having the other team trying to distract, or having pairs instead of teams.
- The guide can never touch the person navigating the obstacle course, all directions must be verbal
- When the pairs, or teams, have finished, have them re-arrange the furniture enough to set up chairs in a circle

ROUND TWO *What role did you play in that game?*

ROUND THREE *What does it mean to be part of a team?*

ROUND FOUR *What is a strength of this team/class/group? What is a weakness?*

ROUND FIVE *What do you contribute to this team/class/group?*

ROUND SIX *What do you need from this team/class/group?*

ROUND SEVEN *What can you work on?*

CLOSING CEREMONY Invite participants to share one positive thing about the person next to them.

My Culture

PURPOSE To learn about each other's cultures.

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

OPENING CEREMONY *What is your favorite food in your culture?*

ACTIVITY

- Invite first participant to turn to their neighbor and say either 'ask me something' or 'tell me something'
- The participant will then respond with a question or a story/fact about themselves.
- The questions that are being asked and facts/stories being told should be culture related.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community guidelines and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

ROUND ONE *What does "culture" mean to you?*

ROUND TWO *What cultures do you identify with?*

ROUND THREE *What do you appreciate about those cultures and what frustrates you?*

ROUND FOUR *What do outsiders misunderstand about your culture and what do they need to know?*

CHECK OUT *Please choose one word to describe this circle.*

CLOSING CEREMONY *What is your favorite tradition in your family?*

Nonverbal Communication

PURPOSE Help students think about how they communicate with one another and the power of nonverbal communication

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

OPENING CEREMONY *"Few realize how loud their expressions really are. Be kind with what you wordlessly say."*— Richelle E. Goodrich.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community guidelines and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

ROUND ONE Repeat the quote from the opening ceremony and ask students to reflect on what it means to them.

ACTIVITY

- Today we are going to explore the topic of nonverbal communication by trying it out.
- Tell participants that they will have two minutes to line up in a certain order without speaking or making any noise.
- Designate one side of the room to be the beginning and one side to be the end.
- Once they are done lining up, have them check their accuracy starting from one end. This can be done verbally.
 - Line up according to height
 - Line up according to birthday
 - Line up according to shoe size
 - Line up according to age
 - Line up according to number of siblings in your house
 - Line up according to the numbers in your address
- Have participants return to the circle.

ROUND TWO *How did it feel to participate in the activity? What was it like communicating without speaking?*

ROUND THREE *Was there ever a time in your life in which you had to communicate with someone, and you did not understand one another? What was the situation and how did it work out?*

ROUND FOUR *Do you think it is important to try and understand one another? Why or why not? What are some benefits?*

CLOSING CEREMONY *"Body language is a very powerful tool. We had body language before we had speech, and apparently, 80 percent of what you understand in a conversation is read through the body, not the words."*
— Deborah Bull.

Holidays And Traditions

PURPOSE Learn more about each others' culture and traditions

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, item(s) that represent your culture to be used in your centerpiece or as a talking piece

OPENING CEREMONY *"I see you, I am here"* activity. Start by turning to the person next to your right and say, *"I see you,"* to which they respond, *"I am here,"*. They then turn to the person on their right and say, *"I see you,"* and that person responds *"I am here,"*. This continues around the room until it returns to you.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community guidelines and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

ROUND ONE *What is your favorite holiday and why?*
Explain to the group that it can be a holiday from their culture or a family/friend tradition only they celebrate.

ROUND TWO *What is your favorite tradition and why?*
Explain to the group that it can be a holiday from their culture or a family/friend tradition only they celebrate.

ROUND THREE *What is your favorite food that is traditionally made with your family or friends?*

ROUND FOUR *What is the craziest/most exotic thing you've tried?*

ROUND FIVE *What is something that people do not understand about your culture/ religion/ ethnicity that they should understand?*

ACTIVITY

■ *In small groups of 3-4 people, design a new holiday that can be for your culture, religion or a made-up one.*

- Why is it celebrated?
- What are the traditions?
- What food do you eat?
- When do you celebrate?
- Who celebrates it?

ROUND FIVE Ask students to return to circle and have a member from each group share the holiday their group came up with.

CLOSING CEREMONY Unity blink. This activity runs exactly like the unity clap but with blinking instead—start by blinking in unison with the person on your right, that person then tries to blink simultaneously with the person on their right, and that continues until it returns to you.

Unit 1: Building Community

C. My School Experience

Exploring Values In The School Community

PURPOSE Explore values we think are important for our larger school community

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, index cards with values from values circle, chart paper, marker

OPENING CEREMONY *Today we will open with a quote. "The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing."— Albert Einstein.*

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

CHECK-IN *What ice-cream flavor would you say represents your current mood?*

ROUND ONE *What are some ways that the school represents the values we've talked about? Have you seen or experienced any of these values during the school day? Instruct the students to review the values written on index cards that you have placed in the centerpiece.*

ROUND TWO *What is one value you would like to see more in your school community and why? Record these on chart paper.*

ROUND THREE *What is one thing you can do to support the value you shared in the school? How do we community members take initiative to encourage the value we want to see more of? Record these on chart paper.*

Facilitator note: Emphasize our need to take responsibility for our own community. If we want change, we need to take initiative, make a plan, and hold ourselves and each other accountable to it.

ROUND FOUR *Reflect on values shared and the approaches discussed—are these doable? Pass the talking piece around once more to see if there are other ideas for how we can improve our community.*

CHECK OUT *How do you feel about the values we've set? What approach on the list seems the most doable for you personally?*

Facilitator note: If there is not enough time, invite participants to share one word on how they are.

CLOSING CEREMONY

*"Your beliefs become your thoughts
Your thoughts become your words,
Your words become your actions,
Your actions become your habits,
Your habits become your values,
Your values become your destiny."
— Mahatma Gandhi*

Expectations Between Students & Teachers

PURPOSE Explore expectations in the relationship between teachers and students

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

OPENING CEREMONY *“Never judge others. You both know good and well how unexpected events can change who a person is. Always keep that in mind. You never know what someone else is experiencing within their own life.”*
– Colleen Hoover.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

ROUND ONE *Think of a time when your expectations of someone else were not met. What happened? How did that feel?*

Facilitator note: Facilitator should model first.

ROUND TWO *What do you think your school and teachers expect from you?*

ROUND THREE *Compared to the teachers expectations, what do you expect from yourself?*

ROUND FOUR *Briefly share your expectations of your teachers.*

CLOSING CEREMONY *Today we’re going to check-out with an activity called ‘Circle, square, triangle’. If you choose circle, please share something that is circling on your mind. If you choose square, please share something that was shared today that ‘squares’ or agrees with your values. If you choose triangle, please share three ‘takeaways’ or thoughts/ideas/lessons that you are leaving this circle with.*

Knowledge Quest

PURPOSE Reflect on what we have learned and what we have the capacity to share.

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, chart paper, marker

OPENING CEREMONY Invite the group to stand in a circle and one person at a time, silently act out their morning. As an optional add-on, the rest of the group can repeat their movement after each person, or each person has to do all of the movements that came before them.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

CHECK-IN Name one high point and one low point from your week so far.

ROUND ONE *What is something you have learned so far this school year? It can be something that you learned about yourself, or a new skill, or something academic, etc.*

ROUND TWO *What is something that you would like to learn about or learn how to do? It could be anything from riding a bike to learning about the Civil War. While students share their answers, write them on a piece of chart paper, or invite students to write it down.*

ROUND THREE *What is one thing you think you could teach someone? Is there anything on the board that someone wants to learn that you could help them with?*

ROUND FOUR *Who is someone in your life who likes to learn new things?*

CHECK-OUT *What is one step you'll take towards learning your new thing?*

CLOSING CEREMONY Unity Clap activity. Facilitator turns to the person to the right and claps in unison with them. That person then turns to their right and does the same with the next person until the clap returns to the facilitator. Lastly, the entire group claps together in unison after the clap returns to the facilitator.

End of Term

PURPOSE Reflect on our academic performance, how we can improve, and how we can support one another to improve

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, speaker and cellphone/computer to play a song

ACTIVITY: HUMAN KNOT

- Everyone stands in a circle and takes the hands of two different people.
- Those people cannot be next to them, and no one's hands should be crossed.
- Your arms can cross other peoples' hands, but not your own.
- The group has to detangle into a circle with no overlaps, and no one can let go to get there.
- Once successfully unraveled, release hands, shake it out, and repeat without speaking.

OPENING CEREMONY *"I see you, I am here"* activity. Start by turning to the person next to your right and say, *"I see you,"* to which they respond, *"I am here,"*. They then turn to the person on their right and say, *"I see you,"* and that person responds *"I am here,"*. This continues around the room until it returns to you.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

CHECK-IN *It's the last circle of the semester—What is one thing that you are stressed about and what are you feeling proud of?*

ROUND ONE *What is one thing you learned from someone else this year?*

Facilitator note: Facilitator should model first.

ROUND TWO *Which subject do you feel you did your best work in?*

ROUND THREE *What subject do you need to improve in next semester?*

ROUND FOUR *What's your plan for improvement? Think about your classmates' strengths, is there anything they can support you with?*

ROUND FIVE *Think about a time you got your best grade on a test or project—how did you get it? What are some good study strategies that have worked for you?*

CHECK-OUT *What are you going to do over break?*

CLOSING CEREMONY Play a celebratory song for the class. This can be of their choosing or of your own.

Circle Reflection

PURPOSE Reflect on the circle experience within this setting and how it transcends into other aspects of life

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

OPENING CEREMONY *What is one lesson that you learned this week? What exactly did you learn and how did that come about?*

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

CHECK-IN *In one word, how do you feel about sitting in circle right now?*

ROUND ONE *Now that we have been doing circle for a while, where do you see elements of circles outside of here? Examples can be a family dinner or when you hang out with friends, in class.*

Facilitator note: Facilitator should go first and model the answer to this question.

ROUND TWO *What makes a “good” circle? When do you feel like circles went well this year?*

ROUND THREE *What makes a “bad” circle? When do you feel like circles did not go well this year?*

ROUND FOUR *Outside of this circle, where do you feel like circle can be useful and when would you definitely not use circle?*

ROUND FIVE *Is there any situation in your life where you would use circle? How would you do that?*

ROUND SIX *Do you have any feedback or suggestions for circles in the future?*

CHECK-OUT *What is one step you’ll take towards learning your new thing?*

CLOSING CEREMONY 4 by 4 breathing exercise—You can either close your eyes or just softly focus on a spot on the floor. Do whatever feels comfortable so you aren’t distracted by anything or anyone in the room. You are going to breathe in slowly through your nose to the count of 4; hold your breath for 4 seconds; then you will breathe out of your mouth for 4 seconds. You can exhale loudly if you want.

Unit 1: Building Community

D. Goals and Motivation

What Is 'Success?'

PURPOSE Analyze and define success

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, speaker, sticky notes, pens

OPENING CEREMONY Pass around sticky notes and pens. Have participants take 1 minute to reflect on the concepts of 'success' and 'being successful'. *Who comes to mind? What does it mean? How do you know when you see success? How does it feel?*

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

ACTIVITY

- On individual sticky notes have participants write words, names and phrases that came to mind.
- When participants have finished writing, invite them to start putting their sticky notes on the chart paper that has 'success' written in the middle.
- As they add their sticky notes, ask them to group them together with other similar sticky notes.

ROUND ONE *What did you write on your post-it notes? Tell us a little about what you wrote and why those specific things or people came to mind.*

ROUND TWO *After hearing what everyone wrote, and seeing the different categories, what does this say about how we, as a group, define success? What's important to us? Do we all have similar expectations for success?*

Facilitator note: Model with a story when you jumped to negative conclusions about someone but learned you had something in common.

ROUND THREE *Does your ideas about success match up with what other people tell us it means? How or how not?*

ROUND FOUR *What motivates you to be successful?*

ROUND FIVE *Is making it from your neighborhood a sign of success? Why or why not?*

Facilitator note: This round is optional, depending on the comfort level of facilitator and group.

ROUND SIX *Who's someone that you consider successful? What about them means 'success'?*

Facilitator note: Consider passing the talking piece around twice. Students may struggle to identify someone easily.

CHECK-OUT *Thinking about how we've defined success individually, and as a group, what is one success that you've had this week?*

CLOSING CEREMONY *Finish the phrase "I'll consider this year a success if I..."*

Strategy For Success

PURPOSE Explore the steps required to get to where students want to go in life

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, projector, speakers, laptop

MINDFULNESS MOMENT Guided Visualization—we're going to close our eyes for one minute and visualize a future you. What does your life look like in 4 years? Where would you like to live? Will you be in college? Already have a job? How will you earn a living?

OPENING CEREMONY "Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today."— Malcolm X.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

When talking about the future, it is common for people to say, "I just want to be successful/famous/rich." Today our circle will focus on the small steps that will allow us to achieve these big goals. We can have all the goals/passion in the world, but we need a plan of action, a strategy.

ROUND ONE *Where do you envision your future self? What type of job or career do you want to have? Where do you want to live?*

ROUND TWO *What are some of the steps you must take to achieve that goal?*

ROUND THREE *Who are some of the people in your life who help you achieve your goals?*

ROUND FOUR *What is true about yourself and your life goals right now that would make 8 year old you proud?*

CHECK-OUT *What can you take away from this circle today? Did this circle help you come up with a plan?*

CLOSING CEREMONY Make one promise to yourself about a goal of yours, that you will never stop working on. The goal does not have to be something that we have discussed today and it can be big or small.

Motivation / Setting Goals

PURPOSE Assist students in naming tangible goals and identifying steps to achieve them

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, index cards, markers

OPENING CEREMONY Play the song by DJ Khaled “All I Do is Win” or motivational quote of your choosing.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

ACTIVITY

- Handout index cards and markers to each student.
- In this circle we are going to discuss the goals we have for this year. On the index cards handed out please write one measurable goal that you hope to achieve this year (example: earning an 80 in global).
- Give the students 2 minutes to do this.

ROUND ONE Please share what you wrote on your index card and why this goal is important for you to achieve.

- Please flip your index card over and draw a line down the middle.
 - On one side right a positive sign (+) and on the other side write a negative sign (-).
 - List on the positive side some things that you have done or can do to achieve your goal.
 - On the negative side write things that have made it harder or can make it hard to achieve your goal.

ROUND TWO Please share what you have written on your index cards.

ROUND THREE Share one thing you will do in the coming week that will help you achieve this goal.

CLOSING CEREMONY Each person says “This year I will... (each should state the goal they intend to achieve this year).” Example: “This year I will earn an 80 in global studies class.”

Unit 2: Diving In

A. Values and Emotions

Exploring Feelings

PURPOSE Reflect on our feelings, how we experience them and how we identify them

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, feelings or expressions chart

OPENING CEREMONY *“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the hear” – Hellen Keller*

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

CHECK-IN *How are you feeling this morning? Take thirty seconds to think about how you are feeling at this moment. Feel free to close your eyes if you need to. Try to answer as specifically as possible and avoid using general terms such as ‘good’ or ‘great’.*

Facilitator note: It would be helpful to have a feelings or mood chart available that has a variety of emotions and expressions available for reference.

ROUND ONE *Do you consider yourself a person who responds quickly in situations or do you take more time to express your feelings?*

ROUND TWO *Do you find it easy to recognize your feelings or is it harder for you to understand what you are going through emotionally?*

ROUND THREE *What is a time when you have been surprised by how you have reacted to something?*

Facilitator note: Facilitator should model this with a story—an example of a time you responded more angrily, calmly, etc.

ROUND FOUR *What is a time when you had mixed feelings about something? How do you sort out those feelings?*

CHECK-OUT *What was it like to talk about your feelings in this circle?*

CLOSING CEREMONY *“I see you, I am here” activity. Start by turning to the person next to your right and say, “I see you,” to which they respond, “I am here,”. They then turn to the person on their right and say, “I see you,” and that person responds “I am here,”. This continues around the room until it returns to you.*

What Is ‘Disrespect’?

PURPOSE Explore the concept of disrespect.

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, chart paper

OPENING CEREMONY *Today’s circle will focus on respect and how we each define it. While the song plays reflect on the artist’s interpretation. Play the song RESPECT by Aretha Franklin.*

Sample language: Respect means a lot to us as a community and that is apparent because very often students and teachers are offended when there is a lack of it. Referring to others’ actions and words as ‘disrespectful’ is very common and it’s used to refer to a variety of different situations that happen here at our school. Because the culture of disrespect is harmful to our community, today I want to talk about how we define “disrespect” and how we respond when we experience it.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

ROUND ONE *What does it mean to be disrespectful? How do you know if someone has said or done something disrespectful? Is it specific? Is it a general feeling?*

ROUND TWO *Share a time when you felt disrespected. Who was there? What did they do or say?*

ROUND THREE *Share a time in your life where you were the person who was disrespectful. Why were you disrespectful in that moment? Record the reasons why they were disrespectful on chart paper.*

ROUND FOUR *Listening to the stories shared about disrespect, what do you think prompts us to be disrespectful to others? Record any reasons that were not mentioned before on the chart paper.*

ROUND FIVE *What could have changed the outcome of these situations? Think about the situations you shared and what you considered to be disrespectful—what did you need in that moment for you to have felt respected? Record these answers on chart paper—phrase them as you would community guidelines.*

Sample language: We care very much about being respected and so we should try handling situations in ways that we consider respectful. In order to avoid being disrespected or being disrespectful, we need to understand what we all consider to be disrespectful and have come up with ways to handle situations respectfully. We can expand on this list and use this to guide us on how we interact within circle and outside of it.

CHECK-OUT *What can you take away from this circle today?*

CLOSING CEREMONY *“I see you, I am here” activity. Start by turning to the person next to your right and say, “I see you,” to which they respond, “I am here,”. They then turn to the person on their right and say, “I see you,” and that person responds “I am here,”. This continues around the room until it returns to you.*

What is Respect? Part 1

PURPOSE Continue exploring the concept of respect

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, pieces of paper, pens

OPENING CEREMONY *“Respect for ourselves guides our morals; respect for others guides our manners.” – Laurence Sterne.*

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

ROUND ONE Pass out index cards and writing utensils. *Now that you have heard stories about disrespect, please write on your index cards 3 ways that you show respect to family and friends.* Pass the talking piece and ask them to share these with the group.

ROUND TWO *When you hear people talking about respect, what do you hear in common with your definition of respect? What does it mean to give or show respect?*

ROUND THREE *Do we show respect differently to adults than we do to peers? If so, in what ways?*

ROUND FOUR *In what ways can adults show respect to young people?*

ROUND FIVE *In what ways can young people show respect to adults?*

CHECK-OUT *Share one word about how you feel about the circle today.*

CLOSING CEREMONY Unity Clap. Facilitator turns to the person to the right and try to clap at the same time as them. That person then turns to their right and does the same with the next person until the clap returns to the facilitator. Lastly, the entire group tries to clap at the same time.

What is Respect? Part 2

PURPOSE Expand on the concept of respect and how the participants relate to it by critically thinking about our relationship with respect

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

OPENING CEREMONY *'Pass a greeting' the person on your left any way that you would like. Example—'Good morning, Ms. Brown' or 'Hola, Ms. Hugh'. The greeting can also be nonverbal.*

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

CHECK-IN Rose, Bud, Thorn activity. Ask participants to reflect on how they feel the group has been doing by choosing from the following: *Rose—something that has been going well, Thorn—something that has not been going well or has not been happening, or Bud—something that is getting better or that we need to work on.*

ROUND ONE *Can you remember a time you felt respected? What made you feel respected?*

Facilitator note: Facilitator models first.

ROUND TWO *Who is someone you respect? What do you respect about them?*

ROUND THREE *Does your respect have to be earned? If so, what does it take?*

ROUND FOUR *What are some things that would make you lose respect for someone?*

CHECK-OUT *What can you take away from this circle today?*

CLOSING CEREMONY *Pass a farewell to the person to your left. Example—'Goodbye, Ms. Wright' or 'See ya later, Ms. Hugh'. The greeting can also be nonverbal.*

Trust

PURPOSE Explore the meaning and value of trust.

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

OPENING CEREMONY Invite everyone to sit in their chair, put their feet on the ground, rest their hands comfortably and close their eyes or rest their gaze on the floor. As you sit let your attention rest on your breath. Breathe in for a count of four and out for a count of four for a minute. Your mind will wander and whenever you notice it, gently guide your attention back to your breath.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

ACTIVITY: LEAD THE BLIND

- Instruct people to pair up with someone and ask them to decide who will be A and who will be B.
- Explain that A's will close their eyes and will rely on the verbal directions/guidance of B's who will lead them to their seat in the circle.
- Partners are not allowed to touch each other.
- Have the students line up in the hallway with their partners and stand at the door to signal the pairs starting in 15/30-second intervals.
- Once the pair reaches the student's seat, they can celebrate. Given time, you can either switch roles or return to circle to debrief the activity and transition to circle.

ROUND ONE Reflect on the activity. *What feelings came up for you during the activity? What did it feel like to have to trust somebody and/or what did it feel like to have somebody trust you?*

ROUND TWO *How do you know if someone is trustworthy? Tell us a story about a time you realized this was a friend that you can truly trust.*

ROUND THREE *Is trust important to you? Why or why not?*

ROUND FOUR *How do you build trust? What does it take to lose your trust?*

ROUND FIVE *Can trust be rebuilt after it is lost? What*

would make you want to rebuild trust with someone?

CHECK-OUT *Share one word about how you feel about the circle today.*

CLOSING CEREMONY *"Nothing builds trust more than saying what you mean, and doing what you said you would do. Trust and accountability go hand in hand."— Art Murray.*

Stressful Times / Check-In

PURPOSE Check on stress levels and discuss coping skills

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, thermometer drawn on chart paper, sticky notes, markers

OPENING CEREMONY Pass the Pulse Activity. Ask the group to stand in a circle facing one another and join hands. Share that this activity is a reminder of our interconnectivity. Have the facilitator start by squeezing the hand of the person to the right or left of them. That person then “passes the pulse” by squeezing the hand of the next person. Do this until you have made it all the way around the circle.

Facilitator note: If participants are uncomfortable holding hands, they can touch elbows or link arms.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

CHECK-IN: THERMOMETER GAUGE

Pass out sticky notes and markers. Have them write their names on two sticky notes and as a round, invite them to walk up to the thermometer and place the sticky notes with their names according to how they are feeling in each category. *How stressed have you been feeling recently? Gauge how you are feeling in the two categories—inside and outside of school by placing a sticky note with your name.*

ROUND ONE *If you feel comfortable sharing, let us know why you gauged your feelings where you did inside and outside of school?*

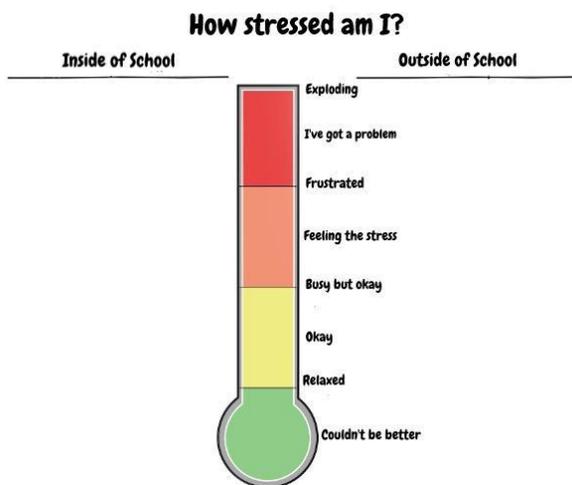
ROUND TWO *How can you tell when someone else is feeling stressed or worried about something?*

ROUND THREE *How can you tell when you’re feeling stressed or worried about something? What are some things that stress you?*

ROUND FOUR *How do you deal with your stress and your worries? Has that been working?*

CHECK-OUT *Please share one word about how you’re feeling after this circle.*

CLOSING CEREMONY *Pass the pulse in reverse.*



Reacting To Fear

PURPOSE Exploring experiences with fear and how we react to it

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

OPENING CEREMONY *"I'll tell you what my idea of freedom is. No fear." – Nina Simone*

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

CHECK-IN *Where is a place you feel free? What does freedom feel like?*

ROUND ONE *Where is a place you feel fear? What does fear feel like?*

ROUND TWO Invite participants to share something/ things they are afraid of.

Facilitator note: Model by sharing something deep (death, loneliness) and something light (bugs, etc.)

ROUND THREE *How have you seen the adults in your life respond to fear?*

ROUND FOUR *How do you react to feeling afraid?*

ROUND FIVE *Tell a story about a time when you felt fear.*

ROUND SIX *What is a way that you have helped yourself feel safe when you are feeling fear?*

ROUND SEVEN *Tell a story about a time when you felt safe.*

CHECK-OUT *Share one word about how you feel about the circle today.*

CLOSING CEREMONY *"I see you, I am here"* activity. Start by turning to the person next to your right and say, *"I see you,"* to which they respond, *"I am here,"*. They then turn to the person on their right and say, *"I see you,"* and that person responds *"I am here,"*. This continues around the room until it returns to you.

Risk and Vulnerability

PURPOSE Explore with students why we do and do not take certain risks, and what circumstances make us more likely to be vulnerable or brave

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

OPENING CEREMONY *Who do you want to dedicate the energy of today's circle to?*

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

CHECK-IN Ask students to share a 'high' and 'low' moment from their weekend/week so far.

ROUND ONE Invite students to share the last time they did something brave.

ROUND TWO *What makes it hard to be honest with the people we care about?*

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL) Invite students to write a letter to someone about something that they are having trouble saying to them.

ROUND THREE *Are you a risk taker? In what situations are you brave and in what situations are you more cautious?*

ROUND FOUR *When do you feel comfortable being vulnerable and when do you not?*

CLOSING CEREMONY Invite students to finish this sentence: "If you really knew me, you would know..." And model by sharing something about yourself.

Exploring Anger

PURPOSE Explore ideas about where anger comes from, how we express it and how we manage it

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

OPENING CEREMONY *“Anger is just anger. It isn’t good. It isn’t bad. It just is. What you do with it is what matters. It’s like anything else. You can use it to build or to destroy. You just have to make the choice.” – from White Night by Jim Butcher.*

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

CHECK-IN *Where are you at on an anger scale of 1-10? 10 being furious and 1 being super relaxed.*

ROUND ONE *Where does anger come from? What are some reasons that we feel anger?*

ROUND TWO *What are some ways you’ve seen people handle their anger?*

ROUND THREE *What do you do when you get super mad?*

ROUND FOUR *What are some ways that you express anger that you are not proud of?*

ROUND FIVE *What are some ways that you express anger that you are proud of?*

ROUND SIX *How has anger been used to create positive change in our society and communities? What did that anger look like? How was that anger expressed?*

ROUND SEVEN *What are some productive ways to express anger?*

CLOSING CEREMONY Pass the pulse activity. Ask the group to stand in a circle facing one another and join hands. Share that this activity is a reminder of our interconnectivity. Have the facilitator start by squeezing the hand of the person to the right or left of them. That person then “passes the pulse” by squeezing the hand of the next person. Do this until you have made it all the way around the circle.

What Does Happiness Look Like?

PURPOSE Discuss the concept of happiness and how we relate to it

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

OPENING CEREMONY *“Happiness always looks small while you hold it in your hands, but let it go, and you learn at once how big and precious it is.”— Maxim Gorky.*

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

ROUND ONE *What is happiness? What does it mean to you?*

ROUND TWO *Do you think happiness is a choice or a product of good circumstances? Why?*

ROUND THREE *What makes you happy?*

ROUND FOUR *Do you think that people who do not appreciate what they have and are always looking for more can ever be happy?*

ROUND FIVE *Think about someone in your life who is always negative, why do you think some people are constantly negative?*

ROUND SIX *Do you believe that you show your appreciation of the things you have and the people in your life? If so, how? If not, why not?*

CLOSING CEREMONY Unity Clap activity. Facilitator turns to the person to the right and claps in unison with them. That person then turns to their right and does the same with the next person until the clap returns to the facilitator. Lastly, the entire group claps together in unison after a round of clapping has finished.

Anxiety

PURPOSE Developing self-awareness about our anxieties and an ability to identify stressors

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

OPENING CEREMONY *“Living with anxiety is like being followed by a voice. It knows all your insecurities and uses them against you. It gets to the point when it’s the loudest voice in the room. The only one you can hear,” – unknown author. What do you think of this quote?*

CHECK-IN *How are you feeling on a scale of 1-10? Why?*

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

ROUND ONE *Anxiety is a feeling of worry, nervousness or unease about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome. Have you ever had a moment where you were worried, nervous or uneasy? What did that experience look like for you?*

ROUND TWO *How do you know when you are feeling anxious? How does it show up physically?*

ROUND THREE *What situations make you the most anxious?*

ROUND FOUR *What helps you when you are feeling anxious?*

CLOSING CEREMONY Breathing activity. Invite the group to place their feet on the ground, sit up straight and hands in laps. Eyes can be closed or resting gently on the ground. Invite the group to breathe in for a count of three, hold, and release for a count of six. Repeat three-four more times. Explain that when you take longer breaths in and shorter breaths out, your body thinks you are panicking and your heart races, but when you take shorter breaths in and longer breaths out, your body thinks you are calm.

Unit 2: Diving In

B. Self-Reflection

Comfort Zones

PURPOSE Investigate our comfort zones and the challenges and benefits of stepping out of them

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, two sheets of paper labeled 'very comfortable' and 'very uncomfortable' (optional)

OPENING CEREMONY *Invite the group to stand in a circle and silently act out something from their morning, then the rest of the group can repeat their movements and guess what they were doing.*

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

ACTIVITY: SOCIAL BAROMETER

- Have participants stand. Designate one side of the room as 'very comfortable' and the other side of the room as 'very uncomfortable'. This can be done verbally or by writing those categories on pieces of paper and taping them to opposite sides of the room.
- Explain to the participants that you will read a prompt and they should choose a space on the spectrum to stand that symbolizes comfortable they feel with the action item in the prompt.
- Be sure to explain that they can choose any space in between both extremes if they have mixed feelings about how they would react in each situation.

■ Prompts

- Talking about your relationship with your family
- Sharing your feelings
- Going places by yourself
- Talking to your teacher
- Getting on stage for a performance
- List on the positive side some things that you have done or can do to achieve your goal.
- On the negative side write things that have made it harder or can make it hard to achieve your goal.
- Doing this activity

CHECK-IN *Ask students to share a 'high' and a 'low' point from their week so far.*

ROUND ONE *Why do we have comfort zones?*

ROUND TWO *What is a time that you left your comfort zone?*

ROUND THREE *What are the benefits and downsides of leaving our comfort zones?*

ROUND FOUR *What is something that helps you leave your comfort zone?*

CLOSING CEREMONY *What's your favorite thing about this season?*

Self-Awareness

PURPOSE Reflect on how other people perceive us and how those perceptions impact the way we think about ourselves

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, sticky notes, pens

OPENING CEREMONY *Today we will be thinking about who we are as individuals. Let's the open circle today by taking 2 minutes to reflect on who we are as a person—our personality, our likes, our dislikes, our past, and our present. You can think of questions such as 'Who am I?' and 'How did I get to be the person I am?', 'What are my habits?', 'What do I value?'*

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

ACTIVITY: WHO AM I?

- Pass out sticky notes and pens and invite participants to write down three facts about themselves that they are okay with other people knowing.
- The facts should not immediately give away who they belong to. For example, if everyone knows someone just moved to the state, they should not write that on their sticky note.
- Once everyone is done writing, collect the post-it notes and put them all up on a board or wall.
- Cover them with a large piece of chart paper or ask students to close their eyes when picking so it is random.
- Invite one participant to choose one sticky note from the board and read it aloud as if they wrote it,
- Once a person has been found out, they get their sticky note back and they choose the next sticky note.

ROUND ONE *How would teachers describe you? Why?*

ROUND TWO *How would your family describe you? Why?*

ROUND THREE *How would your friends describe you? Why?*

ROUND FOUR *Do you agree with the way people describe you? Why or why not?*

ROUND FIVE *What is one thing about you that you feel like people don't know, don't pay attention to, or don't understand?*

ROUND SIX *Who do you think knows you best?*

ROUND SEVEN *Do you think that anybody can know you as well as, or better than, you know yourself?*

CLOSING CEREMONY *"I see you, I am here" activity. Start by turning to the person next to your right and say, "I see you," to which they respond, "I am here,". They then turn to the person on their right and say, "I see you," and that person responds "I am here,". This continues around the room until it returns to you.*

Personality and Growth

PURPOSE Encourage students to reflect on what personality traits they have and what traits they want to continue to develop

MATERIALS Centerpeice, talking piece, circle guidelines

OPENING CEREMONY *"Personality has power to uplift, power to depress, power to curse, and power to bless."* – Paul Harris

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

**ACTIVITY: WHERE THE WIND BLOWS—
PERSONALITY TRAIT RELATED PROMPTS**

- Have one student stand in the middle and remove their chair.
- The student standing in the middle has to say a prompt and any students to whom the statement applies must stand and find a new chair.
- Students must not sit in the same chair or sit in a chair next to their own.
- The person left standing begins a new round with a new statement. Ex: The wind blows if you are patient, caring, trustworthy, respectful.

ROUND ONE *What do you think is your best personality trait and why?*

ROUND TWO *What do you think your friends/family/peers would say your best personality trait is and why?*

ROUND THREE *What is a personality trait/value that you want to work on? Pass out index cards and have students write down one character trait. When they are done sharing, put them in the center as a visual reminder of their personal goal.*

ROUND FOUR *What do you need to do to become more (insert some of the traits they named)? How can we support you?*

CHECK-OUT *What is one word that describes how you feel the circle went?*

CLOSING CEREMONY Unity Clap activity. Facilitator turns to the person to the right and claps in unison with them. That person then turns to their right and does the same with the next person until the clap returns to the facilitator. Lastly, the entire group claps together in unison after one round of clapping has finished.

Human Knot and Leadership

PURPOSE Consider one's leadership style and the varied ways leadership looks

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, large spacious room

OPENING CEREMONY *Who is someone you are a role model to and how do you honor that responsibility?*

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

CHECK-IN What is something you are proud of and something you are working on?

ACTIVITY: HUMAN KNOT

- Everyone stands in a circle and takes the hands of two different people.
- Those people cannot be next to them, and no one's hands should be crossed.
- Your arms can cross other peoples' hands, but not your own.
- The group has to detangle into a circle with no overlaps, and no one can let go to get there.
- Try again without speaking.

ROUND ONE *How was that experience for you?*

ROUND TWO *What role did you play in the game?*

ROUND THREE *How did the role you played in the game reflect your general approach to problem-solving?*

ROUND FOUR *What is your leadership style? What would you like it to be?*

CLOSING CEREMONY Invite everyone to share how this went for them.

How Do I Communicate?

PURPOSE Encourage participants to name patterns and themes in their communication style and how it impacts their relationships

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

OPENING CEREMONY Take 1 minute to reflect on the conversations you've had over your life. Who in your life is a good communicator? What about them makes you consider them a good communicator?

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

CHECK-IN What is one good conversation you had this week?

ROUND ONE Who do you feel like you have the best communication with and why?

ROUND TWO How would you describe your communication style?

Facilitator note: Facilitator models first.

ROUND THREE What is the benefit of learning about each other's communication styles?

CHECK-OUT What is one thing you learned about your communication style? What is one thing you want to work on?

CLOSING CEREMONY Pass a farewell to the person to your left. Example—'Goodbye, Ms. Wright' or 'See ya later, Ms. Hugh'. The greeting can also be nonverbal.

Remembering Who You Are

PURPOSE Recall positive qualities about one's self

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, roll of toilet paper

OPENING CEREMONY *Relaxation Exercise—We're going to open today's circle with a brief cool down exercise. The same way you stretch before exercising in gym, meditation helps us get in the zone to be better listeners. If you're not into it, no pressure. Just sit back and relax quietly.*

- Every time we practice mindfulness and meditation, we will start by getting in a mindful posture. A mindful posture has 6 guidelines:
 - Facing forward
 - Back is upright
 - Stillness
 - Quiet
 - Mind and body are relaxed yet alert. Hands on lap up or down.
 - Letting your eyes close, or if that's not comfortable, focus on a spot on the floor.
- Once participants are in their position, begin the meditation:
 - *Meditation is not about not having any thoughts, but rather watching the thought. Not having any thoughts is not possible, because we are human. Judging ourselves is just another thought, so if you find yourself saying "I'm terrible at this", that's just a thought to observe and let go of. Count to 10. If you lose count just start again at zero.*
- Let participants sit in silence for 1 minute, then ask them to slowly open their eyes.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

CHECK-IN What is something you are proud of and something you are working on?

ROUND ONE *Tell us about a time in your life when you felt proud of yourself.*

ROUND TWO *What is it about that experience that made you feel proud of yourself?*

ACTIVITY

- Pass a roll of toilet paper around the circle, inviting participants to take as many sheets as they wish from the roll before passing it to the next person.
- Ask them to separate and stack the sheets they tore off of the roll.

ROUND THREE Once the roll returns back to you, model making a positive statement about yourself for each piece of toilet paper you have. Encourage them to vary the statements to encompass their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual being.

Facilitator note: Observe the number of toilet paper sheets taken by each student. If it appears that you will not have enough time for the number of sheets taken, think about limiting sharing to 4 sheets.

CHECK-OUT *Share one word on how it felt to participate in this circle.*

CLOSING CEREMONY *We're about to transition back to the regular bustle of the school day. I invite you to take 60 silent seconds to reflect back on the toilet paper and remember the enormous strengths you already possess.*

Identity Conversations

Part 1

PURPOSE Acknowledge and discuss the various identities in the circle community

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, sticky notes, chart paper with “Identity” written in the center, paper plates, markers, pens

OPENING CEREMONY Pass the Pulse Activity. Ask the group to stand in a circle facing one another and join hands. Share that this activity is a reminder of our interconnectivity. Have the facilitator start by squeezing the hand of the person to the right or left of them. That person then “passes the pulse” by squeezing the hand of the next person. Do this until you have made it all the way around the circle.

Facilitator note: If students are uncomfortable holding hands, they can touch elbows or link arms.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

ROUND ONE Provide students with sticky notes and ask each student to write what comes to mind when they hear the word “identity” and then place their sticky note on the chart paper. In a round ask participants to respond/reflect on what was written on their post-it note and/or shared on the chart paper.

ACTIVITY

- Give each person a plate and a marker and instruct them to write three parts of their identity that they identify with most strongly.
- Participants should write the 3 identities in concentric circles based on which ones they identify with the most (the one in the center is the one that they identify with most strongly and then the ones that impact them less).
- Explain to students that identities can include ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, sexuality, age, national origin, language, ability, religion and spirituality.
- Break up into small groups and have smaller circles where they share:

ROUND TWO *Which identity did you place in the center? Why do you think that is?*

ROUND THREE *Which identity have others identified you with the most? Why do you think that is?*

ROUND FOUR *Which identity have others identified you with the most? Why do you think that is?*

Facilitator note: Name that choosing an identity that we associate with the most can be difficult because we experience each identity differently depending on the situation.

ROUND FIVE *Think about a time when you started to understand your identity more clearly.*

CLOSING CEREMONY Pass the Pulse Activity in reverse. Ask the group to stand in a circle facing one another and join hands. Share that this activity is a reminder of our interconnectivity. Have the facilitator start by squeezing the hand of the opposite person they started with during the opening ceremony. That person then “passes the pulse” by squeezing the hand of the next person. Do this until you have made it all the way around the circle.

Facilitator note: If students are uncomfortable holding hands, they can touch elbows or link arms.

Identity Conversations

Part 2

PURPOSE Reflect and share how parts of one’s identity impact daily life; think critically about markers of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, sexuality, age, national origin, language, ability, religion and spirituality.

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

OPENING CEREMONY *“Never forget what you are, for surely the world will not. Make it your strength. Then it can never be your weakness. Armour yourself in it, and it will never be used to hurt you.” – George R.R. Martin.*

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

CHECK-IN *How are we feeling about our last conversation on identity? Have you thought about it since or did anything come up for you about your identity since we last met?*

ROUND ONE *Has anyone ever limited you to one of your identities, positively or negatively? What was that like?*

Facilitator note: Facilitator should come prepared with a story to share first to assist others in thinking of relevant stories.

ROUND TWO *Do you think the way people view you has impacted what you included in your identity circles or the order that you put them in?*

ROUND THREE *Do you think of any of your identities as being a strength or a weakness?*

CHECK-OUT *Today we’re going to check-out with an activity called ‘circle, square, triangle’. If you choose circle, please share something that is circling on your mind. If you choose square, please share something that was shared today that ‘squares’ or agrees with your values. If you choose triangle, please share three ‘takeaways’ or thoughts/ideas/lessons that you are leaving this circle with.*

CLOSING CEREMONY *“Never be bullied into silence. Never allow yourself to be made a victim. Accept no one’s definition of your life, but define yourself.” – Harvey Fierstein.*

Unit 2: Diving In

C. Activism

Social Justice Activism

PURPOSE Define activism and discuss what it means to effectively advocate for something

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

OPENING CEREMONY *"I cannot say whether things will get better if we change; what I can say is that they must change if they are to get better."* – said by Georg Christoph Lichtenberg

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

ROUND ONE *What do you think of when you hear 'social justice'?*

Facilitator note: While circle participants are sharing their responses, ask a volunteer to write up keywords on a large piece of chart paper.

ROUND TWO *Think of a time when you fought for or against something? What did you do? What did that feel like?*

ROUND THREE *Think of a time when you noticed an injustice and did not do anything about it. What stopped you from getting involved?*

Facilitator note: Model an answer to this question before sending the talking piece around the circle, and send it around a second time if the conversation seems like it could keep going.

ROUND FOUR *What does activism mean to you? What does justice mean to you?*

Facilitator note: continue capturing keywords on chart paper.

CHECK-OUT *How did it feel to sit in circle today? Ask students to respond with one word or a brief phrase.*

CLOSING CEREMONY Breathing activity. Invite participants to sit forward in their chairs, place their feet on the ground and rest their hands in their laps. Students can close their eyes or rest them gently on the floor. We will breathe in for a count of three and out for a count of six together.

Current Events

PURPOSE Discuss a current event and explore the way it impacts us as individuals and our communities

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, paper, pens, blank index cards, index cards with current event facts written out

MINDFULNESS ACTIVITY 4 by 4 breathing exercise—*You can either close your eyes or just softly focus on a spot on the floor. Do whatever feels comfortable so you aren't distracted by anything or anyone in the room. You are going to breathe in slowly through your nose to the count of 4; hold your breath for 4 seconds; then you will breathe out of your mouth for 4 seconds. You can exhale loudly if you want.*

OPENING CEREMONY Pass out index cards and writing/drawing utensils for students to write a letter or draw a picture about how they're feeling.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

CHECK-IN Have students share what they wrote or drew on their index cards.

ROUND ONE Distribute index cards that contain facts about the current event that will be discussed. Ask students to take one card and pass the rest. State the topic that will be discussed and the source from which you collected the information. Ask each participant to read aloud the fact that is on their index card.

ROUND TWO *Is this the first time you are hearing about this? If so, what are your initial reactions? If not, is there any new information that you learned during the last round?*

ROUND THREE *Have you heard any other information about this that wasn't shared today? Where did you hear it and what did you hear?*

Facilitator note: The facilitator should go last during this round and speak to checking for reliable sources when reading news or any information.

ROUND FOUR *What do you think caused this to happen? What factors contributed to this?*

ROUND FIVE *What are some of the effects of this event? Who or what does it impact and how?*

CLOSING CEREMONY *"I see you, I am here"* activity. Start by turning to the person next to your right and say, *"I see you,"* to which they respond, *"I am here,"*. They then turn to the person on their right and say, *"I see you,"* and that person responds *"I am here,"*. This continues around the room until it returns to you.

Unit 2: Diving In

D. Relationships

Family

PURPOSE Discuss the meaning, benefits, and challenges of our families

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, index cards, pens

OPENING CEREMONY Breathing activity. Invite the group to place feet on the floor, sit up in their chair, rest hands on lap. Suggest closing eyes or resting eyes gently on the floor. Guide the group in breathing in for a count of 4, hold briefly, and out for a count of four for a few rounds.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

CHECK-IN *What is one thing you would like to erase from this week?*

ROUND ONE *Pass out the index cards and pens. Write down what family means to you—the good and the bad. Please share with the circle what you wrote on your index cards.*

ROUND TWO *Does family only mean people who you are biologically related to? What else can family mean?*

ACTIVITY

- *In groups of 3 share with your group members something that you need to know to understand your family.*
- *To provide students with a model, tell a story about your own family.*

ROUND THREE *What did your group members share that reminds you of your family?*

ROUND FOUR *Is there one thing you would change about your family or the way you were raised? If so, what would it be?*

ROUND FIVE *What is the greatest lesson you have learned from your family?*

CHECK-OUT *How did it feel to sit in circle today? Ask students to respond with one word or a brief phrase.*

CLOSING CEREMONY *“I see you, I am here” activity. Start by turning to the person next to your right and say, “I see you,” to which they respond, “I am here,”. They then turn to the person on their right and say, “I see you,” and that person responds “I am here,”. This continues around the room until it returns to you.*

Family Dynamics

PURPOSE Reflect on the dynamics of our relationships with our families

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

OPENING CEREMONY *Who would you want as your celebrity parents?*

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community guidelines and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time. Inform them of what today's circle conversation will be about and pass the talking piece to see if anyone has anything they would like to add to the community guidelines for this specific discussion.

CHECK-IN *Invite students to stand and take turns acting out their stress level. After each person goes, the whole group can repeat their action. No talking.*

ACTIVITY

ROUND ONE *If we were going to spend the day with your family, what is one thing we would need/would be helpful to know about them?*

Facilitator note: Model by telling a story about a family member or family dynamics in your own family.

- After the facilitator shares, invite participants to pair up and share a similar story with their partner.
- As a whole group, share the stories.
- Each participant will share their partner's story instead of their own, beginning with the prompt *'When you go to ___'s house, you should know that...'*

ROUND TWO *What is something that your family does that annoys you?*

ROUND THREE *What is something that you do that annoys your family?*

ROUND FOUR *What is something that you appreciate about your family?*

CHECK-OUT *Do you want to be a parent? Why or why not?*

CLOSING CEREMONY Who is someone in your family (chosen or blood) who teaches you important life lessons?

Family and Power

PURPOSE Discuss how we view our family and learn more about each others families

MATERIALS Centerpeice, talking piece, circle guidelines

ICEBREAKER: WHERE THE WIND BLOWS WITH FAMILY RELATED PROMPTS

- Have one student stand in the middle and remove their chair.
- The student standing in the middle has to say a prompt and any students to whom the statement applies must stand and find a new chair.
- Students must not sit in the same chair or sit in a chair next to their own.
- The person left stand begins a new round with a new statement. Ex: The wind blows if you have more than 1 sibling.

OPENING CEREMONY 4 by 4 breathing exercise—*You can either close your eyes or just softly focus on a spot on the floor. Do whatever feels comfortable so you aren't distracted by anything or anyone in the room. You are going to breathe in slowly through your nose to the count of 4; hold your breath for 4 seconds; then you will breathe out of your mouth for 4 seconds. You can exhale loudly if you want.*

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community guidelines and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time. Inform them of what today's circle conversation will be about and pass the talking piece to see if anyone has anything they would like to add to the community guidelines for this specific discussion.

CHECK-IN *How is your family doing?*

ROUND ONE *What does family mean to you—positive and negative?*

Facilitator note: Model a response to them that thinks of family with an expansive definition—blood, chosen, very close friends, etc. Also model talking about positive and negative aspects of family.

ROUND TWO *Who has the most power in your family? What power do they have/what do they do that shows they have power?*

ROUND THREE *How does that power affect the rest of your family?*

ROUND FOUR *Do you have any of those same tendencies/ do you do any of those same things?*

ROUND FIVE *If there is one thing you could change about your family/ the way you were raised, what would it be?*

ROUND SIX *What is one thing you would never want to change about your family/ the way you were raised?*

CLOSING CEREMONY Unity clap activity. Facilitator turns to the person to the right and claps in unison with them. That person then turns to their right and does the same with the next person until the clap returns to the facilitator. Lastly, the entire group claps together in unison after one round of clapping has finished.

Familial Conflict

Part 1

PURPOSE Reflect on how our families handle conflict and how it has shaped our conflict resolution skills

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

WELCOME Greet and welcome students to the space.

OPENING CEREMONY Invite participants to spend 20 seconds with their eyes closed. During this time they should try their best to relax and clear their mind. Invite them to focus on the centerpiece for the duration if they do not wish to close their eyes completely.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community guidelines and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time. Inform them of what today's circle conversation will be about and pass the talking piece to see if anyone has anything they would like to add to the community guidelines for this specific discussion.

ROUND ONE Divide up into groups of three. In your group describe the ways that your family deals with conflict. *Provide 3 minutes to discuss.* What were some of the ways that your group members' families deal with conflict?

ROUND TWO *Do you feel like the way your family handles conflict has played a role in the way you handle conflict? If so how?*

ROUND THREE *If you could, what would you want to change about the way that your family handles conflict? Why?*

ROUND FOUR *If you had a child, how would you handle conflict with them?*

CHECK-OUT *What can you take away from this circle today?*

CLOSING CEREMONY *"Peace is not the absence of conflict but the ability to cope with it" – Gandhi.*

Familial Conflict

Part 2

PURPOSE Share experiences of family conflict and explore how participants want their families to approach conflict

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, chart paper, markers

OPENING CEREMONY Invite participants to spend 20 seconds with their eyes closed. During this time they should try their best to relax and clear their mind. Invite them to focus on the centerpiece for the duration if they do not wish to close their eyes completely.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community guidelines and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time. Inform them of what today's circle conversation will be about and pass the talking piece to see if anyone has anything they would like to add to the community guidelines for this specific discussion.

CHECK-IN *How was your commute to school this morning?*

ROUND ONE Invite students to share about an ongoing or resolved disagreement they have with their family.

ROUND TWO *How does your family deal with conflict?*

ROUND THREE *How do you tell your family something challenging?*

ROUND FOUR Invite students to share what they feel their parents do not understand about them/ teenagers in general, and what they would like their parents to understand about them/ teenagers in general.

Facilitator note: Ask a volunteer to write down responses on a piece of chart paper.

ROUND FIVE In small groups, invite participants to share with each other how they would try to explain those things to their parents. Suggestions can include text, letter, in-person conversation, etc.

ROUND SIX *How would you like your family to handle conflict?*

ROUND SEVEN *What helps you relax when you are very mad at your family?*

CLOSING CEREMONY Shake a limb: Going around the circle, each person does a dance move and everyone has to repeat it.

Friendship

PURPOSE Reflect on the friendships that we have and what friendships can look like

MATERIALS Centerpeice, talking piece, circle guidelines

OPENING CEREMONY *Share a story of a time when your friend was there for you at a point where you felt like there was no one else that you could turn to.*

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

ROUND ONE *Think about a close friend, what is one trait that they possess that you value most about them? Write the trait on a card and put it in the centerpiece—these will be our values for the circle today. After everyone has placed their index card in the centerpiece, pass the talking piece and invite students to share who they named and why.*

ROUND TWO *Why are friends important?*

ROUND THREE *How do you know if a friendship you have is one that you should keep?*

ROUND FOUR *How do you think your friends would describe you?*

ROUND FIVE *Do you think parents can be considered friends? Why or why not?*

ROUND SIX *Do you think your romantic partner can be considered a friend? Why or why not?*

CLOSING CEREMONY *“Close friends are truly life’s treasures. Sometimes they know us better than we know ourselves. With gentle honesty, they are there to guide and support us. To share our laughter and our tears. Their presence reminds us that we are never really alone.”*
– Van Gogh.

Rumors and Gossip

PURPOSE Explore how gossip and rumors begin, spread, and affect others

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, sticky notes, pens, music player

OPENING CEREMONY *"...What happens is of little significance compared with the stories we tell ourselves about what happens. Events matter little, only stories of events affect us."* – Rabih Alameddine, *The Hakawati*.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

ROUND ONE Ask the students to write words on sticky notes that they associate with the word "rumors." Put the sticky notes on a chart paper or board in front of the room. Invite students to share what they wrote on the sticky notes and give a brief explanation of their words.

ROUND TWO Invite students to pick a random partner—it should not be the person who is sitting next to them. With their partner, each student is invited to share a story about a time when someone said something about them that wasn't true or when someone misunderstood something that they said and it caused an issue or conflict. They have two minutes each to share.

ROUND THREE *Now that you have shared your story with a your partner. If you are comfortable please share your story with the circle. How did the situation make you feel?*

ROUND FOUR *Imagine a younger sibling or cousin is being bullied at their middle school. Write down what advice you would give them on the index card below your seat. Once we're done writing, we'll go around and share our words of wisdom.*

CHECK-OUT *Please share one word about your thoughts or feelings on the activity we just did.*

CLOSING CEREMONY *Let's take 30 secs to reflect on the following quote: "Everyone has a bullying story, whether as the victim, bully, or the witness. Your unique power lies in how you choose to respond."* – Congressman Mike Honda

Betrayals and Grudges

PURPOSE Explore how grudges can impact our relationships

MATERIALS Centerpeice, talking piece, circle guidelines

OPENING CEREMONY *Today we are going to open by checking in on how we feel in this moment. Take 30 seconds to reflect on how you are doing. On a scale of one-ten, how are you feeling right now?*

Facilitator note: The emotions thermometer can be used for reference.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

ROUND ONE *Do you hold grudges? If you do, why? If you don't, why not?*

ACTIVITY

- Invite students to break into groups of two and share about a time they felt betrayed.

Facilitator note: This activity should be timed, allowing each speaker 2 minutes to share.

ROUND TWO *Reconvene as a whole group for a debrief round. We've all shared stories and had time to reflect on that experience of betrayal. Is there something that you still expect or need from that person who you felt betrayed by?*

ROUND THREE *What would it take for you to let someone back into your life after betrayal?*

ROUND FOUR *What do you risk by letting someone back in after betrayal?*

ROUND FIVE *What affect can holding onto grudges have on a person?*

CLOSING CEREMONY *This circle might have brought up troubling memories for some of us and I'd like to acknowledge that and thank you for sharing those experiences with us. Although we have had troubling times, there are also things that we have really enjoyed and will continue to look forward to. What is one thing you are looking forward to for next weekend?*

Unit 3: Responding to Harm

A. Responding to Conflict

Making Mistakes

PURPOSE Share about mistakes we have made and explain how we worked to move forward

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, chart paper, construction paper, markers

WELCOME Greet and welcome students to the space.

INTRODUCE CENTERPIECE Explain in detail the components of your centerpiece and the significance of each item. Invite members of the circle to contribute to the centerpiece and allow each person the opportunity to explain the significance of their item.

INTRODUCE TALKING PIECE Explain the meaning of the particular talking piece you are using.

INTRODUCE GUIDELINES *Do group members agree with the guidelines on the chart paper? Does anyone have anything to add or change?*

OPENING CEREMONY *“Do not judge me by my successes, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again.” – Nelson Mandela.*

ROUND ONE *Tell us a story about a time when you felt that you made a mistake or failed. How did it feel? How did you react to that?*

Facilitator note: Facilitator should come prepared with a story to share first to assist others in thinking of relevant stories.

ROUND TWO *Think of an adult in your life who has made a mistake and then handled it well. What did that look like? What did they do that made you admire how they handled the situation?*

ROUND THREE *What do we learn from making mistakes?*

ROUND FOUR *What can you learn from the mistakes you have made recently? What would you do differently next time?*

CLOSING CEREMONY Provide participants with construction paper and markers. Invite participants to write down a word or phrase about something good that came out of making a mistake. Do a final round to share words and phrases, and then hang up the pieces of construction paper so that when students walk by they see all of the good things that can come from failure and making mistakes.

Boundaries in Relationships

PURPOSE Gather persons involved in a violation of consent of crossed boundary and discuss consent, shame, rejection; learn skills to respond positively to rejection

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, music speaker

WELCOME Greet and welcome students to the space.

INTRODUCE CENTERPIECE Explain in detail the components of your centerpiece and the significance of each item.

INTRODUCE TALKING PIECE Explain in detail how it works and the meaning of the particular talking piece you are using.

INTRODUCE CIRCLE GUIDELINES Read the community guidelines aloud. Use the sample guidelines listed below or the guidelines the group has created.

- One mic—actively listen to the person holding the talking piece.
- Speak from the heart—share your experiences
- Listen from the heart
- Say just enough without feeling rushed (remember it is always okay to pass)
- Names stay and lessons travel

OPENING CEREMONY Find a song or quote that connects with your students and explores friendship dynamics.

CHECK-IN What's the last thing that made you laugh out loud?

ROUND ONE Do group members agree with the guidelines on the chart paper? Does anyone have anything to add or change? If students do not agree with the guidelines, continue to pass the talking piece in rounds until there is group consensus.

ROUND TWO Have you ever had to set boundaries with someone before? What did that look like?

ROUND THREE What does "consent" mean to you? Why is it important to have consent in any type of relationship?

ROUND FOUR What role did you have in this situation?

LEARNING Explain at which points in the situation(s) being addressed boundaries were crossed and consent was not given.

ROUND FIVE How do you think ___ was impacted by this situation?

ROUND SIX What would you have done differently?

CHECK-OUT What advice would you give to a friend who was in a similar situation?

CLOSING CEREMONY "Young people are cynical about love. Ultimately, cynicism is the great mask of the disappointed and betrayed heart." – Bell Hooks.

Taking Responsibility

PURPOSE Provide an opportunity for people involved in conflict to gather for the harmed party to express their voice and for the responsible party to hold themselves accountable

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, index cards, markers

WELCOME Greet and welcome participants to the space.

INTRODUCE CENTERPIECE Explain in detail the components of your centerpiece and the significance of each item.

INTRODUCE TALKING PIECE Explain in detail how it works and the meaning of the particular talking piece you are using.

INTRODUCE CIRCLE GUIDELINES Read standard guidelines out loud. *Do group members agree with the guidelines on the chart paper? Does anyone have anything to add or change?*

- One mic—actively listen to the person holding the talking piece.
- Speak from the heart—share your experiences
- Listen from the heart
- Say just enough without feeling rushed (remember it is always okay to pass)
- Names stay and lessons travel

OPENING CEREMONY *“Making amends is not only saying the words but also being willing to listen to how your behavior caused another’s pain, and then the really hard part...changing behavior.”— David W. Earle.*

CHECK-IN *If your mood right now were the weather, what would it be? What color is the sky, is it raining, etc.?*

ROUND ONE *What do you see as your best quality? Please write this down on an index card. When it is your turn to share, please let us know what you think your best quality is, why, and then place it in the center. When the round is completed and everyone has shared, let the participants know that we all have great qualities and we want to remind each other of that. We also want them to bring their best self to the circle today and so invite them to physically put a representation of their best self in the center of our space.*

ROUND TWO *What do you think other people see as a quality that you need to work on?*

ROUND THREE *Name one thing about yourself that you would like to grow or improve in.*

ROUND FOUR *We’re all works in progress so sometimes we make mistakes. We’re here in this space to talk about those mistakes and how we can make them right. What was the most upsetting, frustrating, or concerning part of these situations? What feelings came up for you when that happened?*

ROUND FIVE *This round is an opportunity for you to respond to what they said frustrated or upset them and how your words or actions made them feel. Is there anything you want to say to them?*

ROUND SIX *What could you have done differently?*

CHECK-OUT *What is one thing you will take with you from today’s circle? It could be something you appreciated, something that surprised you, or something you thought was helpful.*

CLOSING CEREMONY *“We don’t grow when things are easy; we grow when we face challenges.”— Anonymous*

Processing Harm: Making Agreements

PURPOSE Provide an opportunity for people involved in conflict to gather for the harmed party to express their voice and for the responsible party to hold themselves accountable

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, index cards, markers

WELCOME Greet and welcome participants to the space.

INTRODUCE CENTERPIECE Explain in detail the components of your centerpiece and the significance of each item.

INTRODUCE TALKING PIECE Explain in detail how it works and the meaning of the particular talking piece you are using.

INTRODUCE CIRCLE GUIDELINES Read standard guidelines out loud. *Do group members agree with the guidelines on the chart paper? Does anyone have anything to add or change?*

- One mic—actively listen to the person holding the talking piece.
- Speak from the heart—share your experiences
- Listen from the heart
- Say just enough without feeling rushed (remember it is always okay to pass)
- Names stay and lessons travel

OPENING CEREMONY *“Making amends is not only saying the words but also being willing to listen to how your behavior caused another’s pain, and then the really hard part...changing behavior.”— David W. Earle.*

ROUND ONE *What value do you need in this space to make sure you can have this conversation and share as openly and authentically as you can? Please write that value down on an index card and place it in the center once you are done sharing.*

ROUND TWO *Introduce yourself and how you know ____.*

ROUND THREE *We are here today to process recent events and figure out how to move forward. What were your thoughts and feelings when the incident happened? How were you affected by this incident?*

ROUND FOUR *Who else was affected by what happened and in what way?*

ROUND FIVE *What were your thoughts and feelings about what happened? How were you affected by it?*

ROUND SIX *Who else was affected by what happened and in what way?*

ROUND SEVEN *What needs to be done to make this right and move on from this situation for everyone involved?*

ROUND EIGHT *What else needs to happen to make sure this doesn’t happen again? What should our plan look like? Write these down on an agreement form.*

ROUND NINE *Do you agree to this plan? Can you sign your name? Pass the form around so that everyone can sign the agreement. If there is a part that needs to be re-discussed, continue to pass the talking piece until you’ve come to a resolution.*

ROUND TEN *What can you do to make sure these agreements are followed?*

CHECK-OUT *Please share one word to describe how you’re feeling about the outcome of the circle.*

CLOSING CEREMONY Starting with the facilitator, shake the person’s hand sitting to your right and tell them thank you for being here.

Reentry / Support Circle

PURPOSE Support student(s) that have been suspended and/or have spent some time out of school

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, chart paper, markers

PREPARATION Explain the purpose, process, and intended outcome of the circle to each participant prior to the circle start. Ensure that all participants understand the process and are ready to engage in a productive and supportive manner. The student should also identify a person whom they consider to be supportive; that person should be invited to and prepped for the circle. Designate a scribe for the circle.

WELCOME Greet and welcome participants to the space.

INTRODUCE CENTERPIECE Explain in detail the components of your centerpiece and the significance of each item.

INTRODUCE TALKING PIECE Explain in detail how it works and the meaning of the particular talking piece you are using.

INTRODUCE CIRCLE GUIDELINES Read standard guidelines out loud. *Do group members agree with the guidelines on the chart paper? Does anyone have anything to add or change?*

- One mic—actively listen to the person holding the talking piece.
- Speak from the heart—share your experiences
- Listen from the heart
- Say just enough without feeling rushed (remember it is always okay to pass)
- Names stay and lessons travel

OPENING CEREMONY *Welcome back to school! Please think of a value that is important to the school community. Write that value on the paper plate with the marker. When the talking piece comes to you, please share the value you wrote and why that value is important, and then place the paper plate in the center.*

ROUND ONE *Why are you here? Introduce yourself and how you know the student(s).*

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	WHAT NEEDS SUPPORT?	WHO CAN HELP?	WHAT CAN THEY DO?	HOW OFTEN?	END GOAL
INSIDE OF SCHOOL					
OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL					

ROUND TWO Please name a value important to the school community and how it relates to the ___'s success at school.

ROUND THREE What is one thing you think ___ needs support with school. ___, what do you feel you need support in? Document these in the first column.

ROUND FOUR What is one thing you think ___ needs support with outside of school. ___, what do you feel you need support in? Document these in the first column.

ROUND FIVE Taking a look at the list of concerns, what are our goals for ___? Document these in the 'End Goal' Column. Once everyone has shared, pass the talking piece once more for any additional responses.

ROUND SIX What can you provide support in and how often can you provide that support?

ROUND SEVEN Do you have any suggestions for ___ to support them in their other needs? Record these answers in the 'what they can do' column.

CHECK-OUT What are your hopes and wishes for ___?

CLOSING CEREMONY What are your closing thoughts as we close the circle?

ALTERNATE CEREMONY "I see you, I am here" activity. Start by turning to the person next to your right and say, "I see you," to which they respond, "I am here,". They then turn to the person on their right and say, "I see you," and that person responds "I am here,". This continues around the room until it returns to you.

Unit 4: Professional Development

Introducing Circle Practice

PURPOSE Provide an overview on restorative justice practices for school staff

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, chart paper, markers, printed list of circle components

WELCOME Greet and welcome participants to the space.

INTRODUCE CIRCLES Introduce the circle process and have a round where everyone says their name. Today, we are going to spend time in circle. The practice of circle is inspired by Indigenous teachings as a way to build community through authentic conversations. Circle offers each of us an opportunity to speak and be heard. I'm going to pass the talking piece and ask that everyone say their name and pass it to the next person.

INTRODUCE ROUNDS *Read standard guidelines out loud. Do group members agree with the guidelines on the chart paper? Does anyone have anything to add or change?*

- A "round" is passing the talking piece around the circle—each person has the chance to speak or pass.
- The facilitator poses a question or prompt and typically models by answering first.
- A round can start with either a pass to the left or the right.
- Note to participants that it is okay to pass - invite participants to hold the talking piece for a moment first if they do choose to pass.

INTRODUCE CENTERPIECE Explain in detail the components of your centerpiece and the significance of each item.

INTRODUCE TALKING PIECE Explain in detail how it works and the meaning of the particular talking piece you are using.

INTRODUCE CIRCLE GUIDELINES *Read standard guidelines out loud. Do group members agree with the guidelines on the chart paper? Does anyone have anything to add or change?*

- One mic—actively listen to the person holding the talking piece.
- Speak from the heart—share your experiences
- Listen from the heart
- Say just enough without feeling rushed (remember it is always okay to pass)
- Names stay and lessons travel

CHECK-IN *What is something interesting that you have done or somewhere interesting that you have gone recently?*

REVIEW RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PRACTICES

- Some examples of Community Building Circles are:
 - Celebration Circles, celebrating an event
 - Support Circles, support around an issue
 - Discussion Circles, discussion of a topic
- Response Circle
 - Brief description of response circle purpose
- Re-Entry Circles
 - Brief description of re-entry circle purpose

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FACILITATOR SPEAKS Review Circle Process—print and hand out the circle components as listed in the introduction of this curriculum. This handout will serve a circle resource for them in the future as well as an ‘agenda’ for this session. Read the elements and description out loud and take any questions or specific circle components.

- The space and set up
- The talking piece: Centerpieces
- Opening ceremony
- Mindfulness moments
- Community guidelines and values
- Rounds
- Consensus
- Closing ceremony

ROUND ONE *What topics do you think students are interested in talking about? Have one person be the notetaker and record these answers on chart paper.*

ROUND TWO *What topics are you comfortable talking about with students? Share topics that have been discussed with students.*

ROUND THREE *Who is a student, past or present, who you are grateful for, or who motivates you to do this work?*

ROUND FOUR *Is there anything surprising on the list of topics that students discussed? Could you envision yourself having conversations with students about any of those topics? Why, or why not?*

ROUND FIVE *Think of a challenge that you face with your students and/or school community and how one or multiple of the circle components could be helpful in addressing that issue.*

CHECK-OUT *What is one hope that you have for the school community?*

CLOSING CEREMONY Unity Clap activity. Facilitator turns to the person to the right and claps in unison with them. That person then turns to their right and does the same with the next person until the clap returns to the facilitator. Lastly, the entire group claps together in unison after one round of clapping has finished.

Remembering Wins

PURPOSE Help staff reconnect with the reasons they chose this career and remind them of their ability to positively influence students

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

WELCOME Greet and welcome participants to the space.

OPENING CEREMONY Guided meditation of your choosing.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

CHECK-IN *If your feelings were the weather, what would the weather be like right now?*

ROUND ONE *Tell a story of a 'win' you've had with a student.*

ROUND TWO *Tell us about your favorite moment as an educator.*

ROUND THREE *'Shout out' someone on the staff who's helped you in a time of need.*

CHECK-OUT *Please share one word to describe how you're feeling.*

CLOSING CEREMONY Pass the Pulse activity. Ask the group to stand in a circle facing one another and join hands. Share that this activity is a reminder of our interconnectivity. Have the facilitator start by squeezing the hand of the person to the right or left of them. That person then "passes the pulse" by squeezing the hand of the next person. Do this until you have made it all the way around the circle.

Facilitator note: If participants are uncomfortable holding hands, they can touch elbows or link arms.

Accountability For Students

PURPOSE Create a space where staff can think critically about their understandings of accountability

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines

OPENING CEREMONY Ask participants to sit in silence for 2 minutes. Once the 2 minutes are up, ask them to share what they heard.

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

CHECK-IN *Who's one student that pleasantly surprised you today?*

ROUND ONE *As a teenager, how did the adults in your life hold you accountable? Was it effective?*

Facilitator note: Facilitator should have a prepared story to share first to model vulnerability.

ROUND TWO *Tell us a story of a time when you successfully held a student accountable.*

ROUND THREE *What are some of the challenges to consistently holding students accountable?*

ROUND FOUR *What is one thing you'd like all of the staff to hold students accountable on?*

CHECK-OUT *Please share one word to describe your mood after this conversation.*

CLOSING CEREMONY Unity Clap activity. Facilitator turns to the person to the right and claps in unison with them. That person then turns to their right and does the same with the next person until the clap returns to the facilitator. Lastly, the entire group claps together in unison after a round of clapping has finished.

End of the Year

PURPOSE Reflect on and celebrate the end of the year with school staff

MATERIALS Centerpiece, talking piece, circle guidelines, chart paper, markers

ICEBREAKER | WOULD YOU RATHER...?

- Live your entire life in a virtual reality where all your wishes are granted or in the real world?
- Be alone for the rest of your life or always be surrounded by annoying people?
- Never use social media sites / apps again or never watch another movie or TV show?
- Have an easy job working for someone else or work for yourself but work incredibly hard?
- Have a horrible job, but be able to retire comfortably in 10 years or have your dream job, but have to work until the day you die?
- Be able to teleport anywhere or be able to read minds?
- Die in 20 years with no regrets or die in 50 years with many regrets?
- Be feared by all or loved by all?
- Have hands that kept growing as you got older or feet that kept growing as you got older?
- Donate your body to science or donate your organs to people who need them?

OPENING CEREMONY Read this aloud to the group and invite them to listen, eyes closed or resting gently. You can also choose a few of these lines to read to the group, not the entire passage.

As you think back to September ... the end of your summer break ... the start of the new school year ... How were you feeling? Summer was coming to a close ... you had to start getting up early again ...

That first day of school as you started... you entered (name of school or campus) ... walking down the hallway on your way to your new classroom ...

Think back to meeting your new colleagues ... seeing your old friends ... or meeting the new kids in your class ... Maybe you were new yourself...

What was that like? ... What were you thinking? ... What were you feeling?

And as you got used to your new class and met your new colleagues ... think about the relationships this year ... with your colleagues ... with your friends ... your fellow students ... what were they like?

Were you able to work well together ... hang out after school perhaps?

Were you able to reach out to anyone who was struggling? ... Did anyone reach out to you? ... Think about that time ...

Think also about the things you gained .. the things you lost ... a time you celebrated ... a time you commiserated ... How have those times affected you?

Now, think back to a highlight of your year ... What happened? ... Who was involved? ... And how did it affect you?

Next, let's also think about a challenge you faced this year ... What happened? ... Who was involved? ... How did it affect you? ... What did you learn? ...

And as we've arrived here, now, today, as we wrap up the school year ... summer only just starting ... As you think back over the year, how are you feeling?

(this excerpt is from Morningside—A Circle to End the Year, June 13, 2013 by Marieke van Woerkom)

GUIDELINES Remind the group of their shared community values and that they can ask for them to be revisited and re-evaluated at any time.

ROUND ONE Choose one of the sentences from the meditation above to invite the group to talk about. A highlight of the year or a time they reached out to someone who was struggling/ someone reached out to them can be good talking points to be reflective and celebratory.

ROUND TWO *Think of a student that you have a positive relationship with and share the growth you have seen since the beginning of the school year. How did you develop a positive relationship with that student?*

ROUND THREE *Share a challenging experience and what you did to overcome it. If you didn't overcome it, what would you have needed?*

ROUND FOUR *Who makes you feel supported?*

ROUND FIVE *What kind of support would you need to have next year to feel validated? Record participants' answers on chart paper.*

CHECK-OUT *Share one or two words that describe how you are feeling.*

CLOSING CEREMONY *"If the structure does not permit dialogue the structure must be changed" – Paulo Freire.*

ALTERNATE CLOSING *"The teacher is of course an artist, but being an artist does not mean that he or she can make the profile, can shape the students. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves." – Paulo Freire*

The Center for Court Innovation

The Center for Court Innovation seeks to create a more effective and humane justice system by designing and implementing operating programs, performing original research, and providing reformers around the world with the tools they need to launch new strategies. The Center's projects include community-based violence prevention projects, alternatives to incarceration, reentry initiatives, and court and community-based programs that seek to promote positive individual and family change, and many others.

Since 2013, the Center's work has expanded into restorative practices, beginning with the Red Hook Peacemaking Program, an award-winning effort to bring the principles of Native peacemaking into the state court system in Brooklyn, NY. The Red Hook Peacemaking Program is rooted in the community, in which local volunteers are trained to lead peacemaking processes for people in conflict. Similarly, the Center established the Near Westside Peacemaking in Syracuse, which recruits and trains local volunteers to serve as peacemakers for criminal, civil, and family matters referred from the court system, police, probation, and other justice agencies, as well as from neighborhood organizations, local schools, and members of the community. The Center is committed to testing new restorative approaches to justice through its operating programs and research, and shares lessons learned with jurisdictions looking to increase their reliance on restorative and community-led initiatives.



The Restorative Justice In Schools Team

MISCHAEAL CETOUTE (Restorative Justice School Coordinator) is a Haitian-American educator with roots in Miami. He earned a Bachelor's degree in Africana Studies and Political Science from the University of Miami then taught high school history for two years in Crown Heights. Currently, in addition to working as an RJ Coordinator for the Restorative Justice in Schools Project, Mischael is pursuing a Masters in Education Policy at Teachers College with a focus on incarcerated youth/juvenile justice. He enjoys using popular culture to engage young people in critical discussions about the world we live in.

XAVIER CORNEJO (Restorative Justice Associate) is a recent graduate of Wesleyan University, where he earned his Bachelor's Degree in Psychology. He calls Brentwood, NY home, and through his lived experience there, he became inspired to work with young people facing challenges in mental health, the juvenile legal system, and intra-community violence. Approaching this work through a prison abolitionist lens, his intentions in joining the Restorative Justice in Schools Project centered around mentoring young people, providing mental health support, and pursuing alternatives to punishment based justice systems.

OMAR CYRILLE (Restorative Justice Associate) is a Brooklyn-born Haitian-American Restorative Justice Associate. For the past four years, he has been a mentor for high school and college students. In addition to working as an RJ Associate, Omar will be earning a Bachelor's degree in Public Administration from Medgar Evers College. Omar has also spent the last few years teaching film production for social justice awareness.

MIA FLOWERS (Restorative Justice School Coordinator) is Brooklyn-born and graduated from the State University of New York at Oswego with a Bachelor's degree in Anthropology, focusing on culture. Her entry into the Restorative Justice in Schools team came at the culmination of her fellowship with Repair the World, an organization that mobilizes around access to quality food and education in Central Brooklyn. As an Education Justice Fellow, she spent that year volunteering in an elementary school in Bed Stuy but her primary focus was her time spent at the Crown Heights Community

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Mediation Center in their Legal Hand office, providing legal information to community members about issues that affect their daily lives. She is passionate about the intersection of restorative justice, community engagement, education and race.

MAXINE GETZ (Restorative Justice School Coordinator) completed her MSW at the Silberman School of Social Work in Community Organizing and her undergraduate studies at Mount Holyoke College in Africana Studies. Maxine is from New York City, and has worked in schools and gardens in all five boroughs. She has a background in working with high school youth. She has also organized with LGBTQ migrants and worked on elder re-entry post-incarceration.

QUAILA HUGH (Senior Restorative Justice Associate) is New York-born and of Caribbean heritage. Prior to joining this project, she worked at the Office of Management and Budget reviewing the budgets of Department of Correction, Civilian Complaint Review Board, and the City's Commission on Human Rights. She has spent time working with adjudicated youth in Washington, D.C. and continues to serve as a mentor to children of incarcerated parents. Eager to work in her community, she is excited to explore the positive effects of circles on school culture. Quaila graduated from Georgetown University, where she double majored in Sociology and Justice & Peace Studies and minored in African-American Studies.

CARLETTE MARIE QUINTO (Restorative Justice School Coordinator) completed her undergraduate studies at Antioch University, Los Angeles with a concentration in psychology and a minor in urban community and the environment and received her Master's in Social Work from the NYU Silver School of Social Work. Prior to this position she was a life coach at Harlem Justice Corps, a project of the Harlem Community Justice Center. Her work has focused on providing systems-involved youth and young adults ages 13-24 trauma-informed services. Carlette works to engage young people using restorative justice and anti-oppressive social work practices. She also has experience working with adolescents with substance use, eating, and co-occurring disorders.

HILLARY PACKER (Senior Associate of Restorative Practices) was born and raised in New York City. In addition to supporting multiple RJ projects at the Center, Hillary is a licensed attorney, certified mediator and serves on New York City's Family Court Custody and Visitation Mediation Panel. She is a graduate of CUNY School of Law.

ERIKA SASSON (Director of Restorative Practices) oversees the Center's restorative practice initiatives across a broad range of demonstration projects. Ms. Sasson oversaw the planning and implementation of the Red Hook Peacemaking Program, the first program of its kind in a state court system. Originally from Montreal, Canada, Ms. Sasson received her bachelor's degree in peace and conflict studies from the University of Toronto and her civil and common law degrees from McGill University. Ms. Sasson moved to New York in 2009 to attend New York University School of Law, where she received an L.L.M. in criminal justice. She is indebted to her many mentors in this work, especially Raymond Deal and Gloria Benally, Navajo Nation, and Kay Pranis. She lives in Brooklyn with her family.

KELLSIE SAYERS (Associate Director of Restorative Practices) is an attorney and licensed social worker. She joined the Center in January 2017 and manages the daily operations of this project. Prior to joining the center, Kellsie worked as a litigator for the Legal Aid Society Criminal Defense Practice. Her social work experience includes individual therapy and adolescent group therapy.

ERICA WRIGHT (Restorative Justice School Coordinator) is a certified school counselor, writer and photographer from St. Louis, MO. She has over 12 years of experience working with young people in a variety of settings, from schools, juvenile facilities and community organizations. She has served as a school counselor, college and career counselor, retention coordinator, co-teacher and more. Erica has a dual undergraduate degree in English and Black studies as well as a Masters of Education in Counseling Psychology from the University of Missouri. She is a firm youth advocate and believes in empowering students to find their own voice.

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