



Circle Protocol

“Wholeness - All things are interrelated. Everything in the universe is a part of a single whole. Everything is connected in some way to everything else. It is therefore possible to understand something only if we can understand how it is connected to everything else.”

- The Sacred Tree



The Circle is like a basket. “What is said in the circle, stays in the circle”

The Circle is like a basket. You can put what you need in to it and then leave it there. What is said in the circle stays in the circle. It is a safe place. Quite often the doors are locked and a sign put up on the door saying “circle in progress”, and or “do not disturb unless emergency”. This is to respect the spirit of the people participating. It can be very disruptive for someone to walk in during the circle. An example of this would be when an elder is speaking about an emotional topic like their experience at a residential school, and someone comes in during their sharing time.



We are inviting our Ancestors into the circle

When we gather in the circle, we are inviting our Ancestors to be present. Being mindful of this, we must open respectfully. Begin the circle with an acknowledgement of the local territory on which the circle is being held, and the protocol for the circle should be given or explained prior to starting.



Basic Expectations/Protocol

- All electronic devices are to be turned completely off. No headphones.
- No hats/hoods worn during circle.
- Nothing should be crossed and feet should be flat on the ground. This allows us to be open and grounded - ready to receive and participate in what is being said and shared in the circle.
- Show respect through our body language by sitting up, not slouching and being present.
- Arrive early as the door may be locked afterwards, being on time demonstrates respect for others.
- Only “I” statements are to be used in the circle. No one in the circle or outside of the circle should be singled out.
- Make sure there are no empty chairs in the circle.
- If at all possible, remain in the circle until it is completed



The Use of the Eagle Feather

The Eagle Feather is used in the Circle for many reasons. Whoever has the Eagle feather is the only person speaking at that time. It is their time to speak their truth. All others are listening with intention. We must speak and listen with honesty, integrity, authenticity and love. Without the listeners, the speaker is alone. Both play a vital role. The Eagle feather is sacred and must be treated as such. It should be held upright, and the speaker can use it to give them the strength and courage to tell their story wholeheartedly. If an Eagle feather is not available, a special or sacred object of your choosing can be used, and should be treated in the same way.



The Four Rounds of the Circle

The number four is an important number in Indigenous worldview

- At the beginning of the circle introductions are made by all participants. **Respected** Lkwungen elder Skip Dick gave the following teaching- when you are in circle stand up, and take a small step forward because who you are and what you say matters. You have been given a voice and you need to use that voice.
- In the west, circles flow counter clockwise to follow the path of the moon. In the East circles flow clockwise following the path of the sun. Therefore, on Coast Salish territory, you pass the feather to the person on your right when you finish speaking.

Round 1- Traditional Introduction

- Stand up, take a step forward and **state your name**, your **heritage/where your ancestors are from**, and or where you are from. If you are Aboriginal, you give your **name(s), and the nation(s) you belong to**. When we introduce ourselves in this way, we give context to who we are and where our worldviews come from. If your ancestors are not from the territory you are on, you can state how long you have been a visitor. This acknowledges the land that we share as well as the ancestral and generational connection the people of the territory have with the land.
 - Ex. - My name is John Smith. I am from the Mohawk Nation through my mother and I have settler ancestry from France through my father. I have been a visitor on Coast Salish Territory for 10 years.
- Next, state **how you are feeling that day using a scale from 1-10**. This allows all in the circle to be mindful of those who may not be feeling so great, and draw on those who are feeling stronger that day.
- If there is a guest present in the circle, go and shake their hands and welcome them.

Guests

- If a guest is present each person will introduce themselves as shown above, say how they feel using on a scale of 1-10, and then get up and shake the guests hand to welcome them to the circle.

Round 2/3

These rounds are used to facilitate discussion. You can tailor them to suit your needs. If you have a guest present, round two can be used to give the guest the space to share their stories/teachings. The guest must be given a time frame prior to the circle so that they know how long they have, and can prepare for it. The third round can be utilized for students to give feedback and thank the elder. Each round is started by the person facilitating the circle.

Note* If a participant is feeling as though they are truly not able to speak, they may pass by saying “all my relations”, thereby acknowledging those in the circle, the ancestors, and our connection to all that is.

Round 4

This is the gratitude round. Each person shares something they are grateful for. This brings the circle to a close in a good way.

- If you have a guest in the circle, it is protocol to give a gift. The ANED staff at your school can assist you figure out what is an appropriate gift. This is to pay respect and acknowledge the teachings that have been shared.
- ANED provides honorariums to elders and cultural guests. A request must be done prior to the Elder’s participation in the circle. You may find request forms on the Aboriginal Nations Education website, or you can call the ANED office at the SD61 board office
- Provide the elder/cultural guest with some water, coffee or tea upon their arrival at the school.

Summary

Here is an example of how circle can be done:

- opening round with acknowledgement of the territory and members of the circle introducing themselves
- second round for guest to speak or for teacher to give lesson
- Third round for students to ask questions or comment on the presentation
- Fourth round for each member of the circle to say something they are grateful for and therefore close the circle in a good way

Teachings shared by Sarah Rhude and Diane Sam. Please contact us for further information, or use of this handout.

Sarah Rhude – Aboriginal Art and Culture Teacher/facilitator, SD61 srhude@sd61.bc.ca

