

Circle Time – Relationship building, problem solving

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The following is a guide to staff who would like to run a 'circle' with students. Circles could be run at the beginning and end of each day or as a way to introduce a lesson.

Circles are a great way to build the relationship between staff and students. They can also be used as an informal and indirect way of bringing up any issues that students may be having; with each other, the College or course, or outside of College. They can also be used as a preventative tool by getting students used to talking to the group and staff about different issues and so developing a culture where they feel that they can speak about any issues that are having an affect on them and be listened to by staff.

Step 1)

Explain what the circle is for:

- The circle is to show everyone is equal and will have a chance to speak.
- Each person is to speak and also let others speak
- If someone has something to say, put it out in the open and discuss as a group.
- Everything that is said in the circle stays in the circle.

Step 2)

Ask some general questions first e.g. what people are watching on the TV, what they did at the weekend.

- If someone brings up a point that others react to or you feel is relevant then ask the rest of the group what they think.

Step 3)

Once the group are comfortable with the process ask them a question relating to the issue e.g. what is bothering people this week? How are people finding course work? What has been good about today? What would people like to change?

If a student brings up an issue:

- Repeat what has been said back to the group
- Ask them what everyone else thinks?
- What does this feel like?
- How can we move forward with this issue?
 - If students come up with a way forward, repeat back to the group and check for agreement.

If an issue is brought up that could have a negative effect on the group, i.e. is only affecting a small number of them:

- Ask them to speak to you separately about the issue and use restorative questions to discuss it and work together to move forward.

Restorative Questions 1

(Responding to challenging behaviour)

- What happened?
- What were you thinking about at the time?
- What have your thoughts been since?
- Who has been affected by what you did?
- In what way have they been affected?
- What do you think needs to happen next?

Restorative Questions 2

(Responding to those harmed)

- What happened?
- What were your thoughts at the time?
- What have your thoughts been since?
- How has this affected you and others?
- What has been the hardest thing for you?
- What do you think needs to happen next?

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