



Story Circle Process for Community Transformation

There are 4 Parts to a Story Circle:

- 1. Introductions**
- 2. Listening and Telling**
- 3. Crosstalk**
- 4. Transformative Action**

Be aware of how much time you have for the whole process: Make sure you know to include time and instructions for how you will break up into small groups if you have more than 8 people, and what time your circle is to re-join the larger group (if there is one), or what time the whole session needs to end. The facilitator should re-cap these time factors to the circle. We recommend making groups of 6-7.

Part 1 – Introductions and explaining the guidelines

Always sit in a circle; make the circle a "good" circle", not oval or jagged. Being in a circle is important. In a circle everyone is an equal, and you can see everybody –so it's easier to listen.

Always introduce everybody. The facilitator of the circle should introduce themselves to the group, and then moving clockwise from that person, each person states their name and gives a VERY BRIEF introduction of themselves (where from, what organization they are with).

Be transparent about the purpose and theme for the circle. If there is to be a theme given for the stories, the facilitator explains the theme and answers any questions about that theme or about the process itself. This matters so that the participants can support the reason for the gathering. Don't get too worried about the theme though, because the only person who really needs to concern themselves with the theme is the person telling the first story.

Part 2 - Listening & telling

Only one person speaks at a time. As the circle proceeds, there will be no "cross circle" talk, questions or commenting on the story just told. After the circle is

complete and everyone that might have passed has had a chance to tell a story, then there will be a "cross circle questioning, commenting and dialogue" time.

The first story is the “seed” that grows what stories get told. The facilitator may have prompted some one to tell the first story, or the facilitator may call for the first story and anyone in the circle may begin with a story, it depends on the facilitator, the purpose of the circle or how well the people know each other.

The most important part of story telling is the listening. Listening is more important than talking. Don't spend time thinking of what your story will be; just actively listen to the stories. Trust that the circle will bring you a story. If several stories come to you as you are listening, go for the one that is the "deepest", that you feel comfortable telling.

Have a timekeeper and share time equally. Decide on the number of minutes for each story; **we suggest three minutes**. Choose the method of time keeping; will there be one timekeeper or will you pass the watch around the circle. Decide on what the signal will be when the time is up; the storyteller doesn't have to stop abruptly, just finish up the story.

The story circle will proceed clock-wise from the first storyteller.

You can pass, you don't have to speak. If it's your turn to share a story and you don't have a story to tell its ok – just say “pass”. Anyone who passes will have another chance to share at the end of the circle.

The stories you tell should be STORIES, not political theories, general histories, or your opinion on the theme, or your opportunity to lecture. A story can be your story or the story of a family member, friend or acquaintance.

Be Present. Turn off cell phones, don't text or tweet while participating. Do not take notes while in the circle. Do not hold books or papers in your lap. Concentrate on listening.

Silence is OK, in fact it is good. As the stories pass around the circle it is OK for there to be silence after one story is complete and before the next person begins; this gives that person, and the circle, time to reflect on the story they just heard, and it gives the next person time to land on his/her story, or decide to pass without pressure.

Respect. You don't have to like the story someone has to tell, but you have to respect their right to tell it.

If your circle has time for more than one circle of stories, then at the end of the circle, do it again - again ending with an opportunity for those who have passed if they now have a story. They may, or they may pass again.

Instructions:

- Divide the group into groups of six
- Give the Story Circle Prompt: “ ???”
- Allow 20 min for (1) round of stories approx: 3 min each

Part 3 – Crosstalk

Instructions:

- Ask each group to identify someone to scribe or be the “Griot” for the group for report back.
- Allow an additional 15 minutes for Cross Talk
- Allow the groupings to stay together but share (4) common themes from their group

***NOTE: Make sure to remind everyone to hold the same values: honor time, one person at a time, respect, and be fully present/active listening*

Part 4 – Transformative action