

20/20 A YEAR OF CLEAR VISION COMMUNITY SHARING CIRCLE GUIDEBOOK AND FAQs

OVERVIEW

Circle Sharing is a **meditation on listening** with the whole body (not just ears and brain) whether you are speaking yourself, or experiencing someone else's sharing. This "generous listening" supports deep communication on many levels arising from direct experience, in the present moment.

This process is one of discovery. There is no set agenda for spontaneously responding to each month's theme. The circle itself provides a disciplined and safe space in which those present can deeply experience themselves and others.

This is not a forum for dialogue, discussion, expectation of answers to questions, asking for clarification or argument. There are no expected outcomes or action points to follow-up on afterwards.

Everyone simply offers their authentic, spontaneous truth (which may be a silent bow) into the circle, one at a time. Each circle is a complete practice. The process itself is enough.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Ground

Focus all your attention on the physical sensation of our beautiful planet supporting your body. Consider the unconditional nurture and support provided to you for the whole of your life by the Earth. All our food, medicine, material for clothing and homes, even our toys, come from this generous source. The Earth will graciously receive our bodies and recycle them when the energy of this life completes itself.

From this direct sensation of support, gratitude and loving kindness naturally flow. The feeling of stability and spaciousness that this simple exercise in awareness of reality provides allows easy settling into the state of mind that supports the circle practice to unfold at its best.

2. Aspiration

We prepare the ground of our minds by contemplating profound, universal, altruistic motivation. Here is what we repeat together, but you are welcome to craft your own expression.

I take refuge in the vast intelligence of Universe.

I take refuge in the order and chaos of universal law.

I take refuge in the interconnectedness of all manifestation.

We do this work to expand awareness,
To deepen wisdom,
And to increase compassion,
For the benefit of all living beings.

3. Speaking from the Heart

When we speak spontaneously, from the heart, we may feel less attached to personal positions, less defensive and more able to connect to the truth of the circle as a whole. This enables us to be as authentic and honest as possible in the moment: to share something that really matters. Simplicity and passion tend to support heartfelt expression.

We sit in silence at the start. When someone is moved to speak, that person picks up the talking piece (stick, crystal, shell — your choice) and begins. When complete, the object is passed to the person on the left (clockwise). The last person to speak returns it to the centre.

When it is our turn, we can choose to speak into the circle or to express ourselves through silent acknowledgment of the circle before passing the talking object to the next person.

Only the person holding the talking piece is empowered to speak. They can expect undivided attention from the circle. In rare instances, if circle protocol is broken, or strong experience is overwhelming, it is the anchor's role to call a time-out, by ringing a bell or gong to indicate the need for silent reflection.

People can only speak in turn. There is no "passing" your turn in order to speak later or last.

4. Generous Listening

The success of circling is largely determined by the quality of generous, active listening. This involves training to listen with the whole body. Generous listening is energizing and helps the listener feel more connected to the speaker even when there is strong disagreement about what is being said.

5. Spontaneity

This is a training in spontaneous expression. Don't sit there planning your turn when others are speaking. When it is your turn to speak, learn to trust what wants to be expressed in the moment. This can provide room for the deeper, more intuitive, voice to speak. It is important not to feel hurried, and to be able to pause when you need to.

6. Being of Lean Expression

Try also to be mindful of the size of the group and the agreed-upon length of time for the circle. It is important to give everyone the opportunity to speak.

Being lean is a bit of an art - to express the essence that serves both the speaker and the circle without editing your response. Some people need longer than others to say what matters. Pauses are often necessary communication. When your circle is first forming, it is helpful to have flexibility in timing, while everyone learns.

7. Sharing

Allow time at the end of the circling process to compile the feedback you will send to the Year of Clear Vision team. Insights, emotions and difficulties can all be part of this, as well as any questions or comments you wish to offer. It is the anchor's responsibility to hear what the group wishes to provide, to compile and send your feedback each month.

All circles should close with a clear statement of offering the experience in a universal, altruistic way. We use this, but you may, of course, craft your own.

Through this powerful action
May all the distortions of body, speech and mind be healed,
And all beings
Firmly established on the path of liberation.

8. Confidentiality

What happens in the circle belongs only in the whole circle. It is not ok to discuss content with others, or even with friends who also participate in the circle.

Confidentiality helps to foster trust and keeps the container strong between sessions. Keeping what is shared in the circle maintains integrity and potency.

SETTING UP THE SPACE

Consider the environment. Is it a spacious-feeling, well-ventilated, pleasant room, well-lit so faces can be seen?

Arrange a circle of simple chairs or meditation cushions or both. The circle shape allows people to see and hear each other clearly. It is helpful for everyone to be on the same level, but it is more important that bodies be comfortable.

A central focus can be provided for inspiration and beauty — flowers, a candle, the “talking stick” (or other object) that will be passed from speaker to speaker.

A clock/timer and a bell or gong for the anchor. Tissues (since tears flow and noses need blowing.)

Allow for a brief period of greeting as people arrive and seat themselves, with their phones off.

THE CIRCLE BEGINS

It is the anchor's role to remind everyone:

- of the eight Guiding Principles of Circling Sharing
- of the agreed-upon timing for the circle

and to:

- check if there are any questions about the process
- to clearly state the question/theme for the session
- to formally acknowledging the support of the earth, and
- to lead the statement of aspiration.

A brief silent meditation may help people settle. When someone is moved to speak, that person silently picks up the talking piece and begins. When complete, the object is passed to the person on the left (clockwise). The last person to speak returns it to the centre.

It is helpful for the anchor to ring a bell 15 minutes before the agreed ending time.

FEEDBACK TO CLEAR VISION TEAM

In your 2019 preliminary circles, you will have decided how to collect your feedback, and this should be done now, before the circle is formally closed.

What you choose to share — insights, embarrassments, struggles, questions, delight or distress — is entirely up to you. Your report will be posted, with those from all the other Community Sharing Circles around the world, on our website, identified only by country of origin. There you will be able to read the feedback of all the other groups who are considering the same resource material as yours.

It is the anchor's task to send your compiled feedback to the Clear Vision team.
email: clearvision2020@icloud.com

SHARING

The anchor leads the circle in sharing the goodness of the process.

This is our standard, but feel free to create your own.

Through this powerful action

May all the distortions of body, speech and mind be healed

And all beings

Firmly established on the path of liberation.

FAQ'S: SOME ADVICE FOR ANCHORS (AND OTHERS) IF DIFFICULTIES ARISE

It is difficult to generalize what to do in situations that may arise in Circle Sharing. Each occasion will be different and the more experienced you become, the more confident you are likely to be about how to respond. The Guiding Principles are key supports. When these are maintained by all those in the circle they create a safe container.

What do I/we do if someone expresses strong emotions?

In the circle strong emotions are likely to be felt and expressed. Any authentic emotion is welcomed.

Simply holding the space with awareness and listening deeply with the whole body gives strong emotions room to be released; to arise and pass away. Freeing volatile or frozen emotion and energy allows us to maintain a wholesome state of mind. Unless a person asks directly for help there is no need for intervention.

It can be uncomfortable for circle members to be with their own strong emotions which may be triggered by hearing others speak. Being as aware as possible of what is happening internally while focussing on generous listening is the most helpful response.

What happens if someone starts crying?

Have tissues on hand. They can be silently passed around to whoever might need them. When the person is ready they will speak or indicate that they have finished by passing the talking piece on. Stay listening deeply with as much presence as you are able so you can be there for whatever arises.

What if there is conflict within the group?

Firstly it is helpful to look inward and ask if you have been practising the Guiding Principles strongly. If the answer is not a resounding "yes," then recommit to the intentions without wasting energy on self-judgement.

At times, depending on the circumstances, it may be helpful to name what you are observing and invite members of the circle to express their feelings and experiences about the apparent conflict.

Another possibility for a mature circle is to reconfigure as a fishbowl where the outer circle acts as silent witness to an inner circle sharing between the people involved.

Can I interrupt when someone is talking? What if someone speaks and it is not their turn?

Although anyone in the circle is free to comment on circle discipline or its absence **if it is their turn**, it is primarily the responsibility of the anchor to maintain the integrity of the process if a breach happens. Intervention out loud by the anchor is best used as a

last resort and the anchor should only interrupt if the agreed protocols of the circle are breaking down, eg. people start to dialogue with a person, or go over to comfort someone who is upset.

In this case, sometimes simply ringing the bell or gong to indicate a period of silence is enough to get things back on track. If necessary, remind people of the agreed process, and the importance of listening fully and generously to the person whose turn it is. Encourage people to trust the container of group support.

Remembering to listen deeply to the Guiding Principles at the start of each circle helps to prevent these difficulties from recurring. Conventional habits, such as speaking out of turn, can become difficult to pull in later if they remain unchecked.

What if someone is consistently late?

It would be a good idea to speak with this person in private and find out what might be going on for them, and also to restate the intended commitment to come on time out of respect for the circle itself and the individual members of the group. If a person's lateness is causing a disruption to the circle, you may need to consider asking the person not to enter the space if they arrive after the circle has started.

What to do if someone talks for a REALLY L O N G time!

Being clear with everyone as to the time parameters from the start is important to reduce the chance of this happening, so everyone is aware of how much time you have, and how many people need to speak. Different people will speak for varying lengths of time, some may speak at length while others may choose to stay silent, and usually the wisdom of the group will adjust accordingly. You will likely have decided to give a 15 minute gong before the end, which will indicate to everyone what time is left.

What if someone is going off topic?

Do not interrupt them. Allow them to speak about whatever they are sharing and listen generously and deeply.

Tips to help people stay on topic:

Before the circle starts the anchor states the topic/theme/question clearly as the last thing said before the circle opens, and to check with the group if people are clear about the topic/theme/question. Repeating it twice slowly can be helpful—with a silence following—this helps people “sink in” to the theme.

Are there any other circumstances where I need to intervene?

If anyone is becoming actively/physically aggressive towards anyone else, it would be important for the anchor to look after the safety of the group. Remind them to feel the ground of support under their body and to feel the support of the group.

If someone walks out in the middle of a circle and it interrupts the process, the anchor could allow them to go, and care for the group by re-grounding, sending supportive

thoughts to the person who has left, and re-establishing the theme/topic/the circle protocols and pick up from where you left off.

What if there are many people still left to speak and we are running out of time?

It is suggested the anchor does not interrupt to speed up the process. Let it conclude in whatever way it does.

If you have reached the agreed finish time, and some people are yet to speak, the anchor can ask the whole group if they are able/would like to stay for an extra agreed time, for example, 20 minutes. If they can, the anchor can extend the time. If not, the anchor will need to conclude the circle and simply acknowledge the people who didn't have time to speak.

Is confidentiality important?

Yes. Confidentiality helps to foster trust and keeps the container strong between sessions. Please make sure that the importance of confidentiality is highlighted at the outset. Keeping what is shared in the circle maintains integrity and potency.