

ACTIVITY 1.2 Restorative Circles Method

Learning Goals: Participants share their views on social change and identify possibilities for change

Format: Group discussion

Materials: Markers, color papers, “talking piece”, circular cloth to put at the circle, elements for the center of the circle representing water, fire, earth and air (nature elements)

Estimated Time: 1h 30 mins

Level: 3

Description: For deepening the discussion about systems and systems change, facilitators may use the “Restorative Circles” method. This method started to be applied by indigenous people in North America. However, it is more than a method. Restorative Circles is a philosophy, a way of living and a practice based on community values. It should be noted that for the activity only some elements of this method will be used for reaching the learning goals.

How does it work?

Participants sit in a circle in order to experience a stronger sense of community and feel more comfortable, close to each other. The shape of the Circle is very important. In this way, all participants are located at the same distance from the centre, showing that each member’s opinion has the same value and she or he should feel free to speak without any interference from others, when holding the “talking piece”. The “talking piece” is an object, usually something that has important sentimental value to the people participating in the circle. It is possible to include more than one “talking pieces” and choosing to switch it whenever you want. Each person takes the lead in turns, following the guidelines set by the Group Agreement, as well as the Circle guidelines which should be mentioned by the facilitator before starting the Restorative Circles process.

These include:

1. Respect the talking piece:
 - a. Give those who hold it your full attention
 - b. When you are holding it give full attention to your truth
 - c. Speak to the centre of the circle
 - d. Handle the talking piece respectfully
2. Speak from the heart: Speak for yourself, your perspectives, needs and experiences
3. Listen from the heart: Let go of stories that make it hard to hear others
4. Say just enough without feeling rushed
5. No need to rehearse: trust that you will know what to say when it is your turn to speak

Source: <http://www.centerforrestorativeprocess.com/>

Before starting the process, the facilitator will need to prepare the space by putting a circular cloth at the center. The facilitator may also put the nature elements at the circle of the cloth.

After the introduction of the basic concept of Restorative Circles, the facilitator asks all participants to write down three values that are important to them. If they wish, they can explain why each value is so special. This step is essential in order to build a system of values between the participants for their “learning community”. Then, the facilitator takes the “talking piece” posing the following questions one by one in every one or two rounds, depending on the content of the discussion:

“Do you see these values reflected in the current system you live in?” “Yes?”, “No?”, “Why not?”
“Would you like to share any ideas on how to alter the system?”
“What about personal responsibility?”
“What about social responsibility?”

In this activity, the facilitator intends to go from personal perspectives (Activity 1.1) to community level, with the aim to explore together with the participants how collective action could change things. For this reason, the suggested questions may be changed or posed in a different manner according to the facilitator and the development of the discussion.

This activity is expected to last quite long. It is suggested to have some small breaks without losing attention to the discussions and ideas expressed. The circle is suggested to close with a positive message of connectivity and deeper self-reflection. No other session should follow this day to allow the bonding atmosphere and self-reflection to work as emotions emerge from this process.