Implementing Classroom Circles: Planning Decisions

1. Determine time of day and frequency and communicate this to students.
   - What time works best in the schedule?
   - When are students and teacher most in need of time to connect with others?
   - Readiness for additional as-needed circles in addition to circles explicitly planned

2. What is the purpose of the circle?
   - Think about what the circle is supposed to achieve
   - Is the circle to teach curriculum, build community, or problem-solving?
   - Is there a related talking piece that is relevant?

3. Additional supports in cases of deep emotional reactions
   - Anticipate whether the circle is likely to trigger emotions
   - What supports exist if a circle triggers an inability to cope with emotions?
   - How can the teacher be sensitive to these needs?

4. How much time is needed for the circle?
   - Is there a short amount of time, and how will that influence the circle? Should the circle be standing, in chairs, or seated on the floor?
   - Will additional time likely be needed for this circle? If so, is there a time limit to consider?
   - Share the responsibility for time management with the group by asking participants to say what is really important so others have a chance to speak
   - Consider limiting responses (for example, one or two sentences or one word)
   - Recognize that some circles cannot be fully completed in one session, so instead of rushing, be open and continue in a follow-up circle

5. Develop circle prompts
   - What question or questions should be asked to achieve the purpose of the circle and account for the time of day and time parameters?
   - What follow-up questions, if any, are necessary?
   - What are concerns exist about the reaction to the question?
   - What pre-planning do I need? This may involve developing explicit instructions for what to say in the circle (ex. no comments on appearance), selecting a student to start, giving the students the question ahead of time, approaching a particular student ahead of time
   - Spend time critically reflecting on each prompt before use to assure it is:
     - Clear
     - Not too long
     - Expressed as an open-ended question
Designed to encourage students to speak from their experiences (example: How has this affected you? Or what can you do to help this situation?)
Is sensitive to cultural diversity issues

6. What support is needed?
- Who will be available to assist staff members who are reluctant or struggle in the role of circles?
- How can teachers know whether they are using circle well?
- Who will provide additional resources, such as circle prompts, encouragement and related supportive ideas? How will these be shared with all involved?
- How can teachers invite school or C-DRUM staff to observe or co-facilitate a classroom circle?

7. Evaluation
- How will the use of circles be monitored and tracked?
- Who will assess discipline data, school climate surveys and possibly other evaluation methods such as focus groups or surveys specific to circle practices?

Introducing Circles for the First Time
- Take a moment to center yourself and prepare to set the tone
- How will you first introduce the concept of circles?
  - Include the purposes for using circles and what students can expect, including timing
  - Introduce the structure of being in a circle without desks in the way and consider practicing forming the circle “quickly, quietly, safely” (Jane Nelson, Positive Discipline in the Classroom) (If space is difficult in your classroom, identify another space to use)
  - Thoughtfully craft the words you will use to first introduce circles and how it works
  - Highlight your role as facilitator not instructor (It is their circle)
  - Introduce the use of a talking piece and how this works
  - Collaboratively with students develop guidelines on how “our circle” can be a safe space using guiding questions that will elicit concepts such as respect others, keep confidences of others, no put-downs but a place where we can disagree without hurting somebody
  - Plan an opening ceremony (examples: a poem, deep breathing, a song, a quote, a story)
  - Decide whether or not to use a centerpiece and, if so, explain why it is there
  - Plan a low-risk prompt for the first circle
  - Plan a closing ceremony (examples: a poem, deep breathing, a song, a quote, a story, a closing reflection prompt such as “Name in one to five words what you noticed about the circle”)
  - Keep this first circle short