

The Center for Dispute Resolution at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law (C-DRUM) advances conflict resolution processes to transform relationships, systems, and the world.

Restorative Approaches Lesson 1: Using a Talking Piece in Circle

Key Takeaways:

Circles are a key tool in restorative practices and interventions. One important element of their effectiveness is the use of a talking piece. This lesson is a very simple exercise to help students acclimate to speaking with a talking piece and to help you experience and gain confidence in using a talking piece to help everyone fully participate.

Participants' Learning Objectives:

Students will learn to use a talking piece to communicate effectively in circles.

Materials:

1. Choose an object to serve as a talking piece. The object should fit in students' hands and can be easily passed from person to person. The object should have some meaning to you that you can imbue it with by telling a story or describing its value to you and why it has that value.

Examples:

- a. "This coffee mug was given to me by my daughter when . . ."
 - b. "This globe-shaped stress ball represents our world. I chose it because to me it's a reminder of how we are all united."
2. Pull up Lesson 1 PowerPoint on your computer and project it on your classroom screen so everyone can see it.

Procedure:

1. Have your students move their chairs or desks into one large circle so that everyone can see and hear each other when they are seated facing toward the center.
2. Bring your chosen object into circle so you can use it as the talking piece.
3. Share your story about why the talking piece is meaningful to you.

4. Follow the instructions on the PowerPoint slides as you take your students through the exercise.
5. Once you have completed the lesson, have students return their chairs or desks to the regular configuration for your lesson.

Approximate Time: about 20 minutes

Timing will vary depending on how quickly students get into a circle, the number of students, and how long they take to answer the various prompts. You should have plenty of time for this exercise, however, so have fun and get to know your students in a different way than you can in a regular classroom setting.

Pro Tips:

If you have limited time, introduce the questions and ask everyone to answer with one word or one short phrase. DO NOT change the length requirement midway through the circle or end the circle before everyone has had a chance to answer. Circles honor every participant's voice equally.

Passing without comment is the right of every circle participant. However, if you find that everyone chooses to pass rather than answer the question, make up a fun and easy question your students can answer without risk.

Extend the Learning:

The circles process is central to many American Indian and First Nations cultures of North America. Books such as [The Little Book of Circles Process](#) by Kay Pranis, and [Circle Forward](#) by Kay Pranis and Carolyn Boyes Watson can provide deeper insights into how circles work and the role of the talking piece.

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