

# 8

“ We do not all  
have to agree,  
but it is  
important that  
we all listen. ”

## Circle Process



### video summary

(60:03 minutes)

This video discusses how to utilize Circle process in your organizations. The guests will be discussing and giving an overview of what Circle process is and how you can begin to utilize it within your organization. Each of the guests has had many years' experience using Circle process and have seen the value and outcomes that happen when Circle process is used.

Mary is from Treaty 8, she has a Masters of Education, a Bachelor of Social Work and brings more than 10 years of facilitation and child welfare expertise. She recently co-authored Guidelines for Indigenous Social Work Practice for Blue Quills. Mary is working with ACWS to develop a learning Workbook to accompany the Conversation with Lewis webinar series.

Sharon lives in Saddle Lake Cree Nation & is Team Lead for Social Work Programs at University Blue Quills. Blue Quills is committed to reclaiming Indigenous knowledge & practice & has established programs that students of all cultures describe as transformative by bringing both western science & Indigenous wisdom into the curriculum. Circle process has become a key feature of social work, education & many other programs.

A member of the Carrier First Nation, Dr. Maggie Hodgson is a leader in the fields of Aboriginal health, justice & reconciliation. She served as CEO of the Nechi Institute. Dr. Hodgson is a recipient of the Order of Canada, an Honourary Doctor of Laws from the U of A & many other national & international awards. She has co-authored four books, had a tree planted in her name in the Peace Park in Israel & has advised the UN on addiction prevention. She is a wife, a mother & an auntie who has helped raise other children. Maggie values building relationships in families & communities within the limits of our humanity & with the Creator's guiding hand.



## module summary

*This module serves as a support to help you understand Circle Process and become more comfortable using Circles within your shelter.*



## key concepts

- Ceremony
- Spirit and Intent
- Many Kinds of Circles
- Consensus Building in Action
- Relationships are Medicine
- Belonging
- Equality
- Safety
- Voice
- Ethical Space

Circle process is an old practice that many tribal people used as a means of communication. It is a way to hold space for those that feel voiceless and a way for those to be heard in a good way, without judgments or blame. Circle process is fast becoming the accepted way of creating Ethical Space: the space where meaningful dialogue can happen when two or more societies or peoples with disparate worldviews engage with each other (2007 Ermine, Willie). There are organizations who are training people to become Circle Facilitators, and Circles are being used in justice, education and the child welfare fields as a way to ensure all voices are being heard in any decisions being made.

When doing Circles with the women in the shelter it is important that you feel confident in what you are doing as others will be looking to you for direction and guidance. Circle process is grounded in intention, and once we are clear as to what the intention is, it becomes easier to plan for the Circle. As long as you are clear in your mind as to why you are bringing people together - to plan for safety, to show recognition for hard work, for conflict resolution - it becomes clear who needs to be invited. There are so many ways to utilize Circle process and Circles can be used at any point of entry into the shelter.

### A few ways you can use Circle process:

- When a woman enters the shelter to help her identify her supports, or her “village”.
- As a part of safety planning, inviting her supports in to help
- With the children to help them give voice to the events going on in their lives. When working with children it is a good practice to work with them before the Circle to tell their story. Often times children will not want to openly share or will not be able to verbalize their feelings, so it is a good idea to give them a project to do and ask them to speak on that until they become more comfortable with the process.
- When a woman is exiting the shelter with a closing or farewell Ceremony. It can be as simple as having a sharing Circle and asking participants to say something positive about the women leaving the shelter so that she leaves with those positive words.

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It is important to remember that when we sit in Circle, we are all equal, no voice is greater and no voice is less than, we are all there to listen and learn. We are asked to speak from the heart because that is how we touch other people's hearts. It is not so much about what we think as it is about how we feel. Therefore, using the "I" message and speaking only for yourself is so important in Circle process. You can ask as many questions as you feel your group has time for, whatever works best for your shelter and the Circle. It is good practice to start Circle discussions with an open question, such as asking the participants if they have any questions about the selected topic or material. The facilitator is the keeper of the Circle, but they do not control the Circle. You can plan discussion questions but try to use them as a guide. Remember there are no right or wrong answers, our only purpose is to create meaningful dialogue. We do not all have to agree, but it is important that we all listen.

Circle Process **8:3**

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## Individual Self-Reflection Questions for Circle Process

Think back upon the times you have sat in a Circle, whether formal or informal. What was the feeling and experience of being there? What contributed to either your positive or negative experience(s)?

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What are some of your fears, concerns or hesitations about Circle Process? How might you address them?

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What are some of your hopes for Circle Process? How might you work towards them?

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What does Ethical Space mean to you?

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Summarize your understanding of the purpose and responsibilities of the Circle Facilitator.

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What is the most important element or principle of Circle Process for you?

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Mary advises us to always “have a circle in your back pocket,” regarding being ready to take advantage or informal opportunities for Circle Process. How does this resonate with you? What are the opportunities that exist in your work to pull a Circle from your back pocket?

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What was your most important take-away from this video?

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How will you use this knowledge of Circle Process in your work going forward?

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## Staff Sharing Circle Discussion Questions for Circle Process

What is the most important element or principle of Circle Process for you?

Maggie talks about creating safety on larger organizational scale. How can we build on the interpersonal safety created for participants in Circle to a wider culture of ethical space in our shelter and programs?

How can we ensure equality in Circle Process when we may have more positional power?

What are some of hopes, aspirations or potential you see in Circle Process? How might we work towards them?

What are some fears, concerns or hesitations about Circle Process? How might we address them?

What are the specific we could like to incorporate Circle Process into daily life of the shelter? Our formal processes (e.g. staff meetings or conflict resolution)? Our programming with women, children, families or community?

What was your most important take-away from this video?

How can we use this knowledge of Circle Process in our work moving forward?



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## Women's Sharing Circle Discussion Questions for Circle Process

What is the most important element or principle of Circle Process for you?

Think back upon the times you have sat in a Circle, whether formal or informal. What was the feeling and experience of being there? What contributed to either your positive or negative experience(s)? What made you feel safe/respected/listened to?

All the panelists share their take on speaking as their 'authentic self' in Circle. What does that mean to you?

What are some of hopes, aspirations or potential you see in Circle Process? How might we work towards them?

What are some of your fears, concerns or hesitations about Circle Process? How might we address them?

Maggie talks about the impact of words and needing to choose them carefully (i.e. power vs strength). Does this resonate with you?

Sharon talks about how "humans are meant to be in relationships. We heal in relationships; we get sick in relationship." What does this mean to you?

What was your biggest take-away from this video?

Is there something you would like to have a Circle on? Who would you like in the Circle?



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## References

The Ethical Space of Engagement, (2007. Ermine, Willie)

<https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/17129/1/ILJ-6.1-Ermine.pdf>

Willie Ermine's 2007 paper describing the concept of ethical space and the framework for engaging in ethical space between Indigenous and Western worldviews.

Further Learning Material

What is Ethical Space? (2010. Ermine, Willie. Different Knowings Speaker Series) Run time 7:19

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85PPdUE8Mb0&t=5s>

Video of Willie Ermine describing the concept of Ethical Space.

Ethical Space in Action (2010. Ermine, Willie. Different Knowings Speaker Series) Run time 5:28

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUfXu3gfVJ8>

Video of Willie Ermine describing what Ethical Space looks like in practice.

Little Book of Circle Process: A New/Old Approach to Peacemaking (2005. Pranis, Kay)

Our ancestors gathered around a fire in a circle, families gather around their kitchen tables in circles, and now we are gathering in circles as communities to solve problems. This peacemaking practice draws on the ancient Native American tradition of a talking piece and combines that with concepts of democracy and inclusivity

The Circle Way (2019. Linnea, Ann; Baldwin, Christina)

<http://www.thecircleway.net/resources>

Website recommended by Sharon in the webinar. As the circle of practitioners grows, more products are being developed to support the work in different environments and parts of the world.