

Talking Circles

Circles are a traditional First Nations format for discussion and decision making. There are different types of discussion circles, such as Talking Circle, Sharing Circles, or Healing Circles, and the protocols for usage depend on the purpose. The term Talking Circle is sometimes used interchangeably with Sharing Circle. Definitions of these terms may differ depending on the context of the user.

It is important to understand that the type of discussion circles generally used in classrooms are not intended to be used for any therapeutic purpose. Classroom based Talking or Sharing Circles are not Healing Circles (the latter needing to be facilitated by skilled leaders in specific contexts, and in First Nations contexts, often include additional cultural protocols).

Talking Circles in classrooms are usually used to demonstrate that everyone is connected and that every person in the circle has an equal voice. They also ensure that everyone can see and hear the speaker.

In classrooms, they can be used for a variety of reasons and at different grade levels (i.e. be a part of consensus building for decision-making, as ways to help debrief students' experiences, or supporting learning from each other). It is appropriate to use Talking Circles to discuss some of the topics in these resources.

It is important to ensure that students understand and respect the Talking Circle process. This may require some teaching and modelling of expected behaviours in a Talking Circle. As well, students should understand the reasons for using a Talking Circle instead of other types of discussion.

In traditional settings, an object like a talking stick or feather may be used to denote who is the speaker of the moment. It is passed from person to person, and only the person holding it may speak. You can use any item that may be special or has meaning to the class. You could engage the class in choosing what that object is. For example, it could be a feather, shell, a unique stone, or a specially made stick. It should only be used during Talking Circles so it retains its significance.

Here are some basic guidelines for a Talking Circle:

- The group sits in a circle, so everyone can see each other.
- One person introduces the topic for discussion (often the leader of the group).
- Only the person holding the special object speaks; everyone else listens respectfully giving the speaker their full attention.
- Everyone is given a chance to speak, but someone may pass the object without speaking if they wish.
- Speakers use “I” statements, stating what they are thinking or feeling, rather than commenting on what other people have said.
 - Once everyone has had a chance to speak, the object can be passed around again giving people a chance to continue the discussion.

When using a Talking Circle to discuss topics introduced in these resources, it is important to give students time to reflect following the discussion. They can consider how the discussion affected their opinions or ideas, and they can assess how they felt during the activity, what they learned, and what they might do differently next time.

More suggestions for learning more about using Talking Circles may be found at First Nations Pedagogy Online, <https://firstnationspedagogy.ca/circletalks.html>

Excerpt from page 19-20 of the FNEC/FNSA: BC First Nation Land, Title, and Governance Teacher Resource Guide, 2019 <http://www.fnesc.ca/governance/>