



Circle Processes for All Students

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Why Circles?

- Schools who have incorporated circle processes, up to and including restorative justice circles, see a decrease in student misbehavior. Talking circles promote school safety at all levels. To find resources and data to support these practices, go to:

<https://www.edutopia.org/school/glenview-elementary>

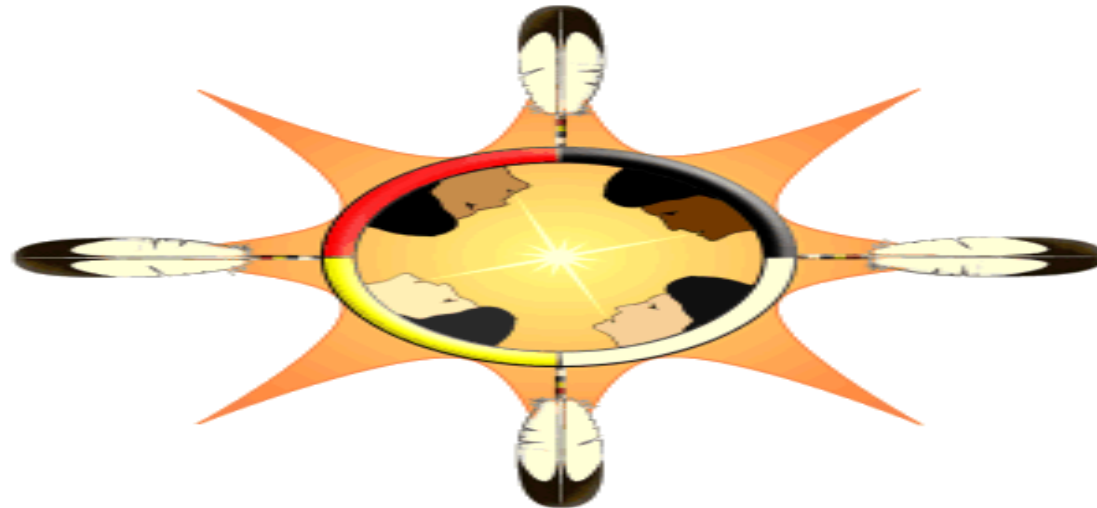
(videos and information about dialogue or talking circles in elementary)

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/talking-circles-for-restorative-justice-and-beyond> (information about restorative justice at middle school)

<https://www.kipp.org/news/giving-kids-say-schools-switch-suspensions-restorative-justice/> (information about restorative justice practices at HS level)

Philosophy of Circles

The underlying philosophy of circles is build around the idea that we are all in need of help as we navigate life events and that helping others helps us at the same time. Participants are simultaneously both givers and receivers. Circles arise from ancient traditions all over the world. They are also called peacemaking, restorative, and healing circles.



Characteristics of Circles

- Circles are a way of bringing people together. In a circle, everyone is:
 - Equal
 - Respected
 - Allowed to talk without interruption
 - Allowed to tell their stories
 - Allowed to share various aspects of their experience without judgement



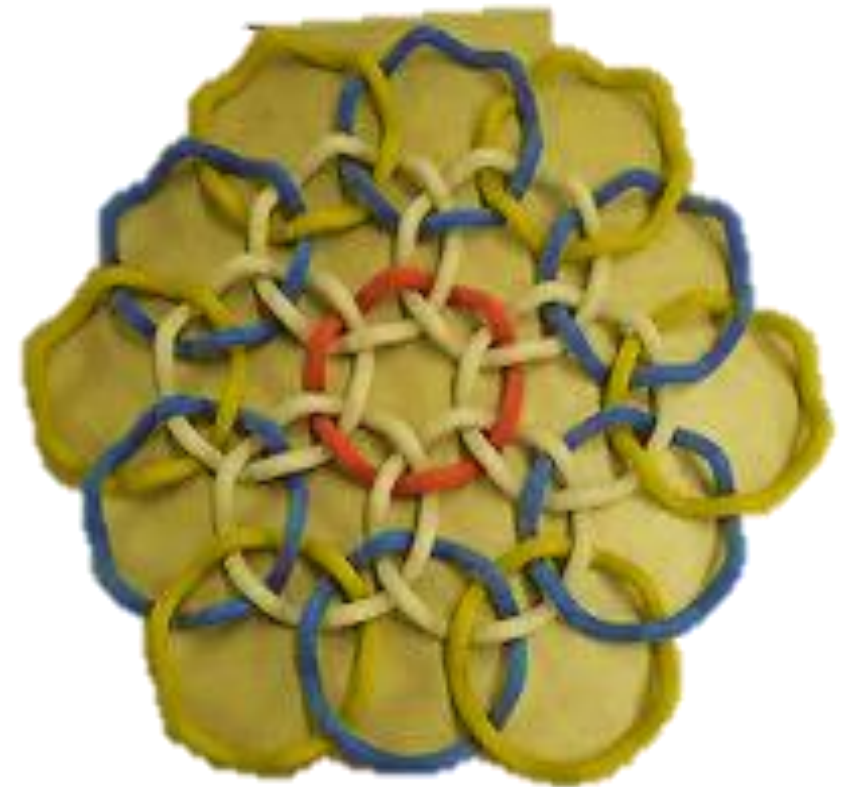
Philosophy of Circles

- Circles, whatever their purpose, have certain underlying philosophies:
 - Every participant deserves honor and dignity
 - Every participant has something valuable to contribute
 - Within our universe, everything is connected in some way
 - Every participant deserves an equal voice
 - Emotional and spiritual expression are supported



Functions of Circles

- Circle processes are used when two or more people need to:
 - Work out a disagreement
 - Make decisions together
 - Address an adverse experience or injustice
 - Work together as a team
 - Celebrate
 - Share experiences, both positive and negative
 - Address restitution
 - Reinstate someone who has been excluded
 - Learn from and better understand each other



Beginning Circles

- If your campus plans to begin utilizing circles for restorative justice or peacemaking, it is important the circles be introduced in all classrooms. A circle is a way to build relationships and to allow all members of the class to be heard. They can be simple check-in circles at the beginning of the day, launch of check-out circles at the end of the day, sharing circles as a way for students to get to know one another better, class meeting circles, re-integration circles for students who have been suspended, in ISS, or out with illness for a time, and problem solving circles. All circle processes have certain elements in common.



Requirements for Circles

- There are certain requirements for circle processes. These include:
 - Shared values that are known to all members of the group
 - Ceremony-used in beginning and ending the circle
 - A talking piece
 - A facilitator or keeper
 - Guidelines known to all members
 - Consensus decision making



The Facilitator or Keeper

Most circles need a facilitator or keeper. The school counselor is a logical choice. However, being a keeper is not like leading a group for any other purpose. Circle keepers must have:

- Patience
- Empathy
- Humility
- Deep listening
- Acceptance of everyone as worthy of respect
- Willingness to sit with uncertainty
- The ability to share responsibility
- The ability to move the group away from disrespectful or chaotic communication and back into the safe space of the circle without being authoritarian
- The strength to communicate the safe, sacred nature of the circle through the beginning and ending ceremonies and through the communication of shared values
- A circle keeper serves as a thermostat-not a thermometer



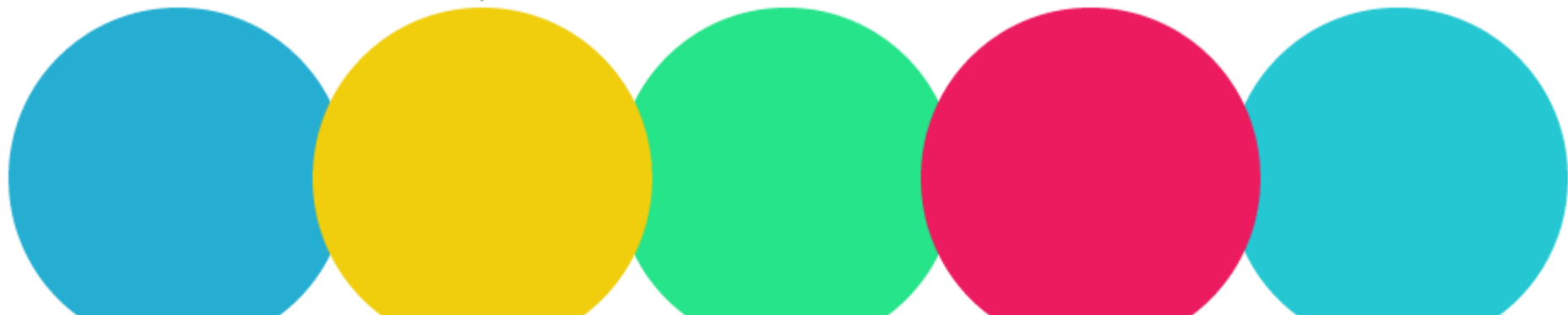
Circle Facilitators

- Keep the group within a respectful space
- Monitor quality and adjust as needed
- Help the group to monitor quality issues and resolve them
- Manage time in the circle



Circle Types

- Sequential Circles
- Real Justice Circles
- Fishbowl Circles



Sequential Circles

- Sequential Circles-In sequential circles, one person speaks at a time. The talking piece moves around the circle in one direction, and each person has a chance either to speak to the topic or to pass.
- Sequential circles are structured around topics or questions raised by the circle facilitator. This format gives both quiet and louder voices an opportunity to be heard. Selecting topics and questions that are important to the group allows you to guide your circle, and give your participants a structured way of voicing their concerns.
- Your job as a circle facilitator is to help guide your circle, but not lead it. Facilitators help keep the circle on track and insure that everyone has an opportunity to be heard, but do not pass judgement or steer the discussion.
- Once students understand the circle process, you can permit them to initiate and carry out groups on their own. Often you can simply trust your students to go around as many times as necessary to deal with their issues.



Real (restorative) Justice Circles

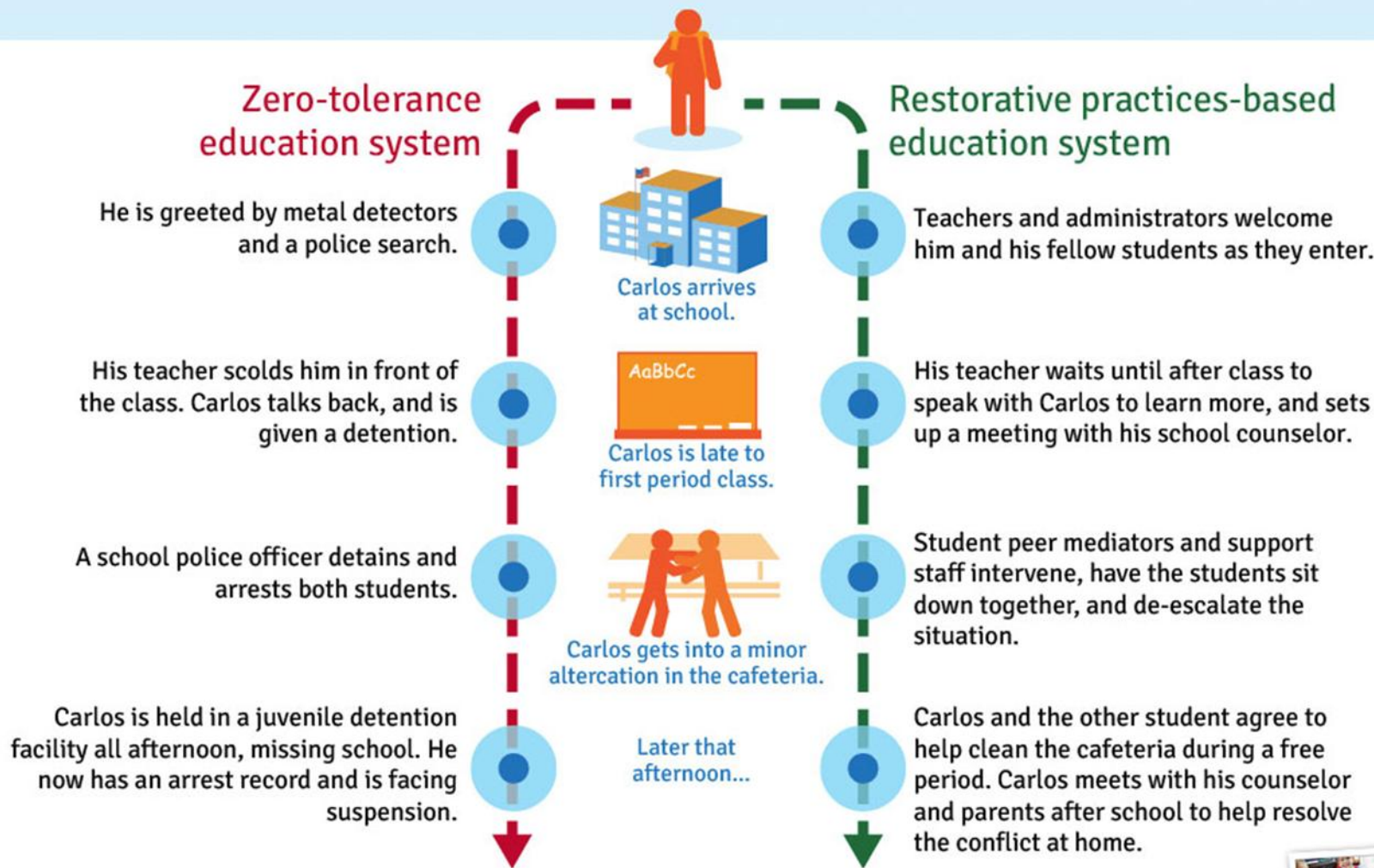
- Real Justice Circles are used when there is a victim (target, survivor, offended) and an offender.
- When using real justice circles, the order of speaking is more structured. This circle usually consists of fewer people-the offender, the victim, a supporter for the victim, and a supporter for the offender. Additional supporters may be used.
- Your participants still sit in a circle, and discussion is still lead by a circle facilitator. However, your order of speaking is not sequential. Instead, follow a specific speaking order. The general format most commonly used is: offender, victim, victim's supporter, and offender's supporter. The circle facilitator asks each person a set of restorative questions and listens to their response.
- Once everyone has responded to the restorative questions, the circle transitions into a more open model of discussion. During this time, the circle discusses what the victim needs and how those needs can be met. Once you're at this point, the previous order is broken down. Everyone is allowed to talk in a non-ordered discussion, adhering to the original guidelines.

Circles Within Circles



A Tale of Two Schools

Carlos had a heated argument with his parents before leaving for school, so he's running late.
Let's see the difference that restorative policies and practices can make.



Fishbowl Circles

- Fishbowl circles are quite different than other circles. First, an inner circle of active participants is created using either a sequential approach or a non-sequential activity. Outside the inner circle are observers, arranged in as many concentric circles as are needed to accommodate the group.
- Fishbowl circles are used when there are many active participants but it is impractical to have them all involved. Observers watch the circle activity and may comment on it, but aren't active members of the circle.
- To create a slight variation on this, place an empty chair in the middle of the room. Have your outside observers sit in the chair, one at a time, say something, and then return to the outer circle. This maintains a limited amount of participation by observers.



Initiating Circle Practices

- Circles require training and preparation for all who are involved. Those who will participate in a circle, especially in a restorative or peacemaking circle, need to be fully prepared for the process to be effective.
- The circle keeper(s) need to meet with all participants in advance. These pre-circle meetings are essential to determine if the circle process is appropriate for all concerned and if all concerned are willing to fully participate in the process.



Preparing Participants

- If you are planning circle practices as whole group or classroom processes designed to provide bonding and opportunities to discuss group concerns, it is necessary to introduce the idea to the whole group. In this meeting, it is appropriate to go over the general format of a circle, the importance of the talking piece, the purposes of the circle, and so on. It is not critical to set up the values for the circle at this time-that will evolve from the first circle meeting. However, it is important that you discuss confidentiality and the need for respecting the circle as a safe space.



Preparing Participants

- For a Justice Circle, it is critical to meet with each participant in advance so that the circle can be effective. In these pre-meetings, the Facilitators should:
 - Hear the story of each person who will participate in the process
 - Explain the process
 - Assuaging concerns about the process
 - Identifying support people (then meeting with them)
 - Clarify confidentiality and informed consent
 - Checking on willingness to talk and to listen
 - Checking on willingness to abide by group consensus
 - Building a trust-based relationship

Restorative Justice processes are not “quick fixes”, but the ultimate outcome is worth the time spent. Restorative Justice allows for repairing relationships and community.



Preparing for the Circle

- Following interviews, circle facilitators will determine:
 - Whether there are additional people whose participation would be helpful (people respected by the key participants who are not aligned with either party, supporters for key participants, others affected)
 - What the key issues for discussion are
 - Whether circle is appropriate for the participants involved
 - How they will share responsibilities within the circle

Should additional participants be indicated, the facilitators will have pre-meetings with those participants as well.

Again, a properly managed circle process is not a quick fix. As individuals participate in more circles, the preparation time can be shortened.

Specific Preparations

- Determine logistics: when, where, what time?
- Consider the talking piece and what might be in the center as a focus.
- Decide upon an opening ceremony and how you will establish values.
- Choose questions for the check-in round and further relationship building, if needed.
- Consider questions for dialog about key issues and further probing questions
- Select a closing ceremony.



Circle Essentials

- Seating-the circle emphasizes the equality of all-with no barriers between participants
- Opening and closing ceremonies-clear beginnings and endings allow participants to see the circle as a safe, special place that allows them to be themselves
- Values-deciding upon circle guidelines/values bonds the circle in consensus on behavioral expectations and creates a safe space
- Talking piece-helps to regulate interaction and insures that all have opportunity to speak. Allowing a group to construct a talking piece is also meaningful and bonding.
- Center piece-the center piece, if used, can reinforce the values of the group or can be representative of the diversity of members of the group
- Guiding Questions-help the group to go beyond the surface and engage meaningfully

Effective Questioning

- Have participants speak from their own experiences; “How has this impacted you? How have you changed as a result of...? What has been hardest for you? What do you need in this situation? What help can you offer others?”
- Have participants share life stories; “Tell about a time when you...”
- Focus on feelings and impacts rather than just facts
- Help participants recognize their strengths not just negatives
- Help participants move from discussion of negative events to “how can things be improved going forward”



More Circle Essentials

- Remember that many issues will not be solved in one circle. If you need to reconvene, reiterate the values from the first circle and do an opening ceremony and check in round before taking up where you left off
- Allow the group to take responsibility “I don’t know where we go from here” than pass the talking piece.
- Use breaks wisely-check in with members who seem to be struggling on breaks
- Use questions to help guide the group back to the original issues, by encouraging participants to raise those issues
- Suspend the talking piece if the group needs to brainstorm, problem solve, or dialogue informally. Be careful about why and how long you suspend the piece, as it is a part of the safety of the group that allows all voices to be heard

Restorative Questions (responding to challenging behavior)

- What happened?
- What were you thinking at the time?
- What have you thought about since then?
- Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way?
- What do you think you need to do to make things right?

(From IIRP-International Institute for Restorative Practices)



Restorative Questions (helping those harmed by others' behavior)

- What did you think when you realized what had happened?
- What impact has this incident had on you and others?
- What has been the hardest thing for you?
- What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

(From IIRP-International Institute for Restorative Practices)



Circle Agreements

- If the circle is making agreements, they are made by consensus.
- Consensus means, “We can all live with it.” Rarely will you reach a consensus that all group members are enthusiastic about.
- Group agreements need to be recorded in detail. Nothing causes failure more quickly than a lack of clarity about everyone’s responsibilities.
- If agreements fail, reconvening the circle is the logical plan for addressing the failure.

Resources

- <http://fromdiaperstodiamonds.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/CIRCLE-KEEPER-HANDBOOK-REVISED-PRANIS.pdf> Kay Pranis's Guide to Circles
- https://www.foresee.hu/uploads/tx_abdownloads/files/peacemaking_circle_handbook.pdf Guide to Peacemaking Circles
- <https://www.healthiersf.org/RestorativePractices/Resources/documents/RP%20Curriculum%20and%20Scripts%20and%20PowePoints/Classroom%20Curriculum/Teaching%20Restorative%20Practices%20in%20the%20Classroom%207%20lesson%20Curriculum.pdf> Restorative practices from san Francisco Schools
- The Little Book of Circle Practices (available from Amazon)

Nurture Groups

- Another type of group designed to help students gain social and emotional skills is a nurture group.
- These groups, developed by The Karen Purvis Institute for Child Development, were started to help students impacted by trauma to develop healthy relationship skills in a supportive environment
- To see these groups in action, go to <https://child.tcu.edu/sale/>. You can access Trauma Informed Classroom and TBRI 101 trainings for free through August 30 2020. This is a great opportunity to develop skills to help your students from hard places.

Nurture Groups

- Nurture groups are designed to help members gain the skills needed for meaningful relationships. These skills are:
 - Seek nurturing care
 - Give nurturing care
 - Autonomous self
 - Negotiate needs



Nurture Groups

- Nurture groups follow a specific plan:
 - Review of group rules
 - Check-in
 - Band-Aids
 - Activity
 - Feeding
 - Closing



Nurture Groups

Rules: Nurture groups are very simple.

- Stick Together-we are here for each other
- No Hurts-inside or outside
- Have fun
- Check-In-Allowing each group member to check in with a simple question
- Band-Aid-Group members pair off. Each one describes a hurt they have had. The other says, “I am so sorry that you were hurt. May I put a band-aid on it?” Group members nurture each other in this activity.

Nurture Groups

- Activity
 - The activity for a nurture group can vary. Sometimes, it will be practicing a script, a life value lesson, or a life skills. Usually, it begins with an “Engine Check”, followed by a calming technique. Then, the lesson. During the lesson, everything is done “With permission and supervision”. Students are to ask for consent before doing anything to another student. During the activity part of the nurture group, students are often deliberately dysregulated in order to give the real-time practice in calming.



Nurture Groups

- Feeding-Following the activity, group members are offered an opportunity to feed each other. Food is passed around the group, and offered to each member by the person next to them. Depending upon age, students may actually “feed” one another, or simply hand food to the next student. Again, as in the band-aid activity, members are practicing giving and receiving.



Groups in General

- Talking Circles and Nurture Groups are just two types of group activities. Groups work is one of the most efficient ways for school counselors to meet the needs of students in an efficient manner. Review your ASCA Ethical Guidelines 2016 to see the current guidelines for group work in schools.
- If you are looking for a guide that will help make your group work easier, and cover lots of different types of groups, look for:

SOS!: A Practical Guide for Leading Solution-Focused Groups with Kids K-12

by Patricia K. Tullison (Author), Katherine O. Synatschk (Author)

It is available from Amazon and from Pro-Ed

Nurture Groups

- Just as with any group, each nurture group closes with a ceremony of some sort. These can be short-passing a hand hug around the group, high fives, round of applause, and so on. The purpose of the closing is to celebrate the group.



Resources

- This presentation was designed to give you an introduction to the need for and the rationale behind using circle processes in schools and the concepts and practice of restorative practices. If you have questions or need further information please contact me at :

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