



About Sharing Circles

Sharing circles are an essential part of the oral tradition of Aboriginal communities. The Traditional Native Feather Wand or Talking Stick is used in these circles when meetings take place and when decisions have to be made. We learn information about our culture through our Elders, families, friends, and other community members who share stories about what their lives were like, why we do things certain ways and to seek the wisdom of their experiences.

A Talking Stick is a very special tool that gives us the courage to speak the truth and the power to speak from the heart. It is a symbol of respect for the thought, stories, and individual histories of each member participating in a circle.

When a person is holding the stick in a sharing circle, they speak from the heart without interruption. Other people in the circle respectfully listen to the speaker and take in their message. Everyone in the circle gets a chance to hold the Talking Stick and share their thoughts and feelings. If the receiver chooses not to speak, he or she respectfully hands it to the next person until the item has been passed to everyone participating.

Creating your own Talking Stick by including aspects that are special to you such as special colours, specific bird feathers, beads, and souvenirs from a trip such as seashells becomes a powerful tool that helps give you the courage to share openly. Instructions on how to create your own Talking Stick are attached.

The following instructions on conducting a sharing circle are meant as a guide to help you along the way to better communication with All of Our Relations. It is recommended that sharing circles become a large part of your daily practice both at home and in the classroom.



Instructions for Conducting a Sharing Circle

Required Materials

- One Talking Stick to pass around the circle.*
- Enough space to sit or stand in a circle formation.

Instructions

- Participants are sitting on chairs, on the floor, or standing in a circle. Explain that in a good circle, everyone can see into one another's eyes by just turning their own head to the right and left. Have them adjust accordingly. (Move in to make the circle smaller or out to make it bigger.)
- Explain that the circle is a very important structure in Aboriginal cultures and world views. In a circle everyone is equal, as well as interconnected. This 'coming together in unity' builds a strong sense of 'community'. Sharing, communication and decision making are facilitated well in a circle.
- Show the Talking Stick and explain that it will be passed around the circle from person to person. Participants are only allowed to talk when holding it, otherwise they are listening. Explain that there is always the 'right to pass' but encourage them to share. *In the case where each participant has a Talking Stick, have each one place their stick under their chair or in front of them and explain that they can only hold their Talking Stick when it is their turn to speak.
- Explain that we can listen with more than just our ears. We can also listen with:
 - a) our eyes...either ask participants to suggest how, or tell them our eyes can listen by looking at the speaker.
 - b) our mouths... either ask participants to suggest how, or tell them by keeping our lips together and not talking.

c) our minds...by thinking about what is being said by others instead of thinking about what we're going to say, or what we're doing later today, etc.

d) our hearts...by caring about others and what they are saying (Ask participants to: *point to the ceiling, point to the floor, point to a window, point to a door, point to yourself*. Most people point to the chest/heart area and this is a quick way to get at the 'caring' aspect of listening, and engaging the heart.)

- Ask each participant to introduce themselves by sharing their name and something personal, i.e. a favourite food, what makes them happy, an opinion or in the case of having one's own Talking Stick , ask the student to share the meaning behind their stick. The teacher can begin by going first (modelling) or by asking if there is a volunteer who would like to begin the sharing circle. Leave room for silence, pregnant pauses – allow the student to find their words in their own time. Explain that the sequence for each person to speak will be in the clockwise direction or as the sun rises and sets as is the custom in the Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) tradition.
- Because participants are facing one another equally in an interconnected circle, all aspects of the human being (mind, body, heart, and spirit) are activated and learning/sharing has more meaning/authenticity. A strong sense of community is established and everyone is accountable to one another. Be sure to reinforce the safety of the circle – what it said in the circle, stays in the circle.



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