



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 give 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 item 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 one's 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 one the courage to share openly.

Opportunities to receive the teachings and instructions to create one's 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.
- Review the following Standards of Presence by listing them separately on small pieces of paper and distributing them out to the group. Allow each participant with a paper to read it aloud.



Standards of Presence

When conducting a Sharing Circle

☆ ***Take responsibility for yourself.***

You are the only person you can change. Use “I” statements. Own your feelings, perceptions, wants, etc. Recognize that this is an opportunity for you to exercise self-care by speaking your truth, being heard and expressing more of who you really are.

☆ ***Confidentiality***

What you see, speak, share or hear that is personal or specific to another, remains with you. When sharing the essence refrain from being name specific and share your story in an honouring manner that relates to your own experience.

☆ ***Adopt a beginner’s mind.***

Consider the possibility that there may be more for you to learn and benefit from, than what you’re currently aware of, or have experienced.

☆ ***Maintain a positive focus.***

Focus your positive attention on the person sharing. Look for the gifts being shared (e.g. their openness, vulnerability, caring, etc.)

☆ ***Connect at a heart level***

Open your heart to the essence of what is being conveyed. Be willing to get “out of your mind” and release the need to evaluate, judge or compare.

☆ ***Be fully engaged with the speaker***

Refrain from side talk, cross talk or interrupting when someone is sharing.

✧ ***When asked for feedback, give only positive support***

Always see what is positive and possible! Don't give any unsolicited advice, criticism or counselling.

✧ ***When receiving acknowledgment or support, take it.***

Be open to receiving acknowledgment and let it sink in. Simply respond with "Thank you".

-
- Begin the sharing circle by asking each participant to introduce themselves by sharing their name and comment on the topic at hand. The topic can be determined by the group or the leader in the circle. Begin by going first yourself (modelling) or by asking if there is a volunteer who would like to go first. Leave room for silence, pregnant pauses allow the participant to find their words in their own time. Explain that the Talking Stick will be passed around 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 connected in a good way.



For more information on Traditional Native Practices, Workshops, Day Retreats and In-School Visitations please go to:

www.ravenspeaks.ca