

Peacemaking Circles

Polly Hyslop*

Peacemaking Circles can be designed in any community by any group of people. The strengths of the circle are the people who bring their values of living a good life (no judgments) and their personal experience of being to hell and recovered (stories of recovery).

Elders** provide a powerful presence with their strong knowledge and experience and stories of living a good life that they share. A good leader with commitment to making a circle happen can facilitate the circle.

The values of respect for self and others, helping others, respect for nature - are a few values the elders bring to the Tlingit circle. However, elders can offer their values and facilitate circles - no matter what their ethnicity.

Circle Peacemaking is an informal process that uses a talking piece. Any circle that contains a group of well-meaning, committed people who share their experience, strength, and hope make a circle work anywhere, anytime!

There is no right way or wrong way here. It works if all participants want to help the offender and victim, are committed to guiding them in their journey to wellness.

Indigenous people and peacemaking practitioners prefer to call the RJ process "restorative practices."

We are all Indigenous peoples - just that some people are generations removed from their land and place of being.

I love asking my non-Indigenous students where they came from. Our stories connect us to who we are – we are all humans.

- Polly Hyslop is of Dineh (Athabascan)-Scottish heritage from the Village of Northway, Alaska. She is a 2016 PhD candidate studying indigenous peacemaking at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks where she also teaches indigenous peacemaking practices. Her case study is Circle Peacemaking in Kake, Alaska, a Tlingit community in Southeast Alaska. She is the author of several articles on indigenous peacemaking, and she may be reached at: physlop@alaska.edu

** An "elder" can be any wise person of any ethnicity