

SOLUTION FOCUSED CONFLICT MANAGEMENT & RESTORATION CIRCLES
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FACILITATORS' 7-STEP GUIDELINES

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- 2) OPENING THE CIRCLE
- 3) STRENGTHS BUILDING
- 4) DESCRIBING GOALS
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STEP 1. CONVENING THE CIRCLE

- a) Everyone who wants to find solutions to the conflict/harm done is invited to participate voluntarily.
 - This is done in cooperation with the main stakeholders, the people most affected by the conflict, by asking them prior to the circle: “Who should come to the circle to help find solutions?”
- b) There should be a balance of participants for conflicting sides.
 - (e.g., if someone brings 3 supporters, the other participant should know and have the opportunity to also bring that number of people).
- c) Everyone sits in a circle facing each other without a table or any barrier in between them.
- d) The facilitator provides simple refreshments to make the conversation more informal.
- e) Time schedule: 1.5 hours or 2 hours+ with a bigger group (> 4 people).
- f) The meeting may be audio- or video recorded if all agree.
- g) Flipchart and felt pens are in the room.
- h) One facilitator, a co-facilitator or ‘recorder’ (writes the group’s comments on flipchart) if the group is more than 4 participants.

STEP 2. OPENING THE CIRCLE

- a) Facilitator starts:
 - “Welcome. My name is and I will be facilitating this circle.
 - Thank you all for coming and your help in addressing this situation concerning [name of individuals in conflict, or
 - if it is a large group in conflict, the name of their group is identified, e.g. “4th grade students.”
- b) Facilitator asks: “Please introduce yourself.”
- c) Facilitator: “There are only two ground rules. Each of you agrees to respect confidentiality and speak one at a time.”

STEP 3. STRENGTHS BUILDING

- a) Depending on the relationship between the people in the conflict, e.g. family members, students in same school, neighbors, employees at same workplace, facilitator asks them each to say what they like about that commonality that they share, e.g. “What do you like about your family, school, classroom, neighborhood, workplace...?”
- b) If someone says “nothing,” facilitator responds: “What one small positive thing has ever happened there for you in the past?” If still “nothing”...
- c) “What would your best friend say happened positive for you there in the past?”
- d) Facilitator gives lots of credits and compliments to all present during the whole meeting.

STEP 4. DESCRIBING GOALS

- a) Facilitator asks participants: **“What are your best hopes from this circle?”** “What else?” “What else?”
 - Facilitator points out when people hope for the same things, when they have common grounds.
 - No specific order in who starts or ends in steps 4 - 6.
- b) Facilitator keeps on inviting participants with “What else” until participants say something like: “I think this is about it” or indicates that they have exhausted their description of their best hopes and says something like: “Don’t you think this is enough?”
 - In that case facilitator replies that he/she is impressed with the answers the participant came up with and moves on to the next participant.
 - Ask “What else?” at least 3 times. It often takes repeated questioning for people to come up with creative answers and solutions.
- c) Facilitator then asks – using the future tense - participants about **positive differences**:
 - “What will be different when this conflict has been solved/when you hopes specified above are met?”
 - “What else will be different?” “What else?”
 - Positive differences may be individual and/or relational:
 - “What will be different between you?”
 - “What will others see you doing differently when this conflict has been solved/goals are attained?”
- d) Step 4 gives a clear description of the **goals** (the preferred future) of the participants.

STEP 5. FINDING EXCEPTIONS

- a) Facilitator asks participants for exceptions: “**When is the conflict happening less?**”
- b) Looking for successes in the present and/or the past. “What else is working?” “What else?”
- c) Facilitator *may* ask (of pessimistic participants): “**Could the situation be worse?**”
 - Participants often think that the situation can be worse.
 - Next question is: “**How come it is not worse?**” (noticing their competences and coping strategies)
- d) Then facilitator introduces **scaling questions** and uses a flipchart to visualize the scaling.
 - “*On a scale from 10 – 0*, where 10 means your goals are met and 0 means the opposite, where are you at this point in time?”
 - Facilitator *makes a big deal out of even a 2 or 1* with responses like “Wow, what tells you are at that number (and not lower)?”
 - At the same time facilitator draws a vertical line with 10 at the top and 0 at the bottom on the left side of the paper. Then he/she *invites participants to give a number on the scale* and puts that number and name on the flipchart.
- e) Facilitator may ask those who are higher than others “*What do you know about this situation that [name of lower scored person] doesn't know (yet)?*”

STEP 6. DESIGNING PROGRESS

- a) Facilitator stays with flipchart and asks each participant:
- “What will be a sign of progress?”
 - “What will show that you are one point higher on the scale?”
 - “What will others notice about you when you are one point higher?”
 - “What will you notice about others when they are one point higher on the scale?”
- b) Facilitator asks:
- “What will be your next step?”
 - “What is one tiny step you can take today or in the near future to move you toward that higher number?”
 - Think about baby steps, because small steps may lead to big changes.
- c) In case participants want the other(s) to change – which is the case in many conflicts - , facilitator asks:
- “Suppose he/she changes in the direction you desire, what will you do differently?”
 - “What else?” “What else?”
- d) Facilitator may also address a sometimes more realistic option:
- “Suppose he/she/they will not change in the direction you desire or they say they will and then don’t, what can you still do to make the situation better?”
 - “What else?” “What else?”
- e) Facilitator may summarize the steps that show there is progress being made to reach the goals.

OPTIONAL STEP: RESTORATIVE WORK IN CASES OF INJUSTICE

- a) When an individual or group is accountable and takes responsibility for causing harm, facilitator *uses restorative questions* to address how the harm might be addressed and relationships repaired.
- b) Facilitator first *compliments the person(s) for being accountable*, e.g., “Wow, good for you. Stepping up to the plate and taking responsibility for that. It is not easy to do. Good job.”
- c) Facilitator asks the person who takes responsibility:
 - “*Who was affected* by your behavior?”
 - “*How* do you think they were they affected?”
- d) If the harmed person and *no representative is in the circle*, facilitator asks the person who takes responsibility:
 - “*What can you possibly do* to repair the harm?”
 - “What else?”
 - Others in the circle are also invited to share ideas they might have for how to repair harm
 - ***What is one small step that can be taken today in repairing the harm done?***
- e) If the harmed person is not participating, but *loved ones or other representatives are participating*, facilitator asks:
 - “If [name of harmed person] was sitting here today *what would he/she say* about how he/she was harmed?”
 - And “What would he/she say that [name of person who harmed them] can do *to work on repairing the harm?*”
- f) If the harmed person is participating, the facilitator asks:
 - 1) The person being accountable and responsible for addressing the harm they have caused is asked "How do you think _____ (name of harmed person participating) was affected?"
 - 2) The facilitator looks to the harmed person and asks: "How were you affected?" and after getting a response, next asks: “What can _____ (name of person being accountable who is participating) do to help repair the harm?"
 - 3) Going back to the person who caused the harm and is being accountable: "Can you do that?" (stating whatever it is the person harmed said that could be done to help repair it.

It is vital that whatever is agreed on is clearly specified. For example if the person who did the harm has agreed to "write an apology letter to a school" that date the letter is written and when it is to be mailed needs to be stated. All plans to repair harm need to be as clear and concrete as possible to avoid future misunderstanding.

- 4) One final question to the person who caused the harm: “Is there anything else you’d like to say?”

STEP 7. CLOSING THE CIRCLE

- a) Facilitator *compliments participants* for attending the circle -
 - (“Thank you for your great contributions”) and active participation
 - Participants are invited to *compliment each other*.
- b) If not all topics are addressed during the first circle, facilitator asks if participants think it is useful to return.
 - If so, facilitator asks: When would you like to schedule the next circle?
- c) Facilitator asks the group if they want *a follow-up meeting*:
 - a. **“Do you want a follow-up circle?”**
 - b. The opening question of the follow-up circle is: **“What is better?”** since the first circle.
- d) If required, facilitator prepares a *written agreement or summary*.
- e) Facilitator allows participants time to *socialize after the meeting*, this informal period is very useful. Facilitator provides *refreshments* (even a simple bag of cookies or crackers is

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