



SELF-CARE CIRCLE

"Nourishing yourself in a way that helps you blossom in the direction you want to go is attainable, and you are worth the effort."

—Deborah Day

OVERVIEW

Students or staff sit in a circle, center themselves with a Mindfulness Moment, and reflect on and share ways they can practice self-care.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- At a staff retreat or during professional development to build positive connection and emphasize the value of well-being
- In health class or advisory to cultivate the practice and importance of self-care
- As a classroom activity at the beginning of the school year or the New Year
- At a particularly stressful time of year, e.g., testing, winter, political tensions

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 15 -30 minutes (depending on the size of the group)

LEVEL

- Middle School
- High School
- College
- Adult

MATERIALS

- Chairs arranged in a circle (or all participants seated on the floor) with no furniture in the center
- Talking piece
- Bell or chime
- Paper/pens

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Practice skills for self-reflection and personal goal setting
- Increase positive connection with others
- Practice active listening

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Responsible Decision-Making

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to reflect on how you have recently practiced caring for yourself physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. What else might you do to practice self-care in each of these areas?

INSTRUCTIONS

OVERVIEW

This Circle from [Circle Forward](#) is designed to focus our intention and support for our personal practice of self-care. Indigenous cultures use the symbol of the Medicine Wheel to represent the importance of balance between the four dimensions of the human being: physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental. This Circle uses this representation to focus participants on cultivating habits of self-care in all these dimensions.

Note: *Application of Circle to resolve conflict or engage in difficult conversations requires [training for facilitators](#).*

THE PRACTICE: "SELF-CARE" CIRCLE

Through the structure of the circle practice, create a space to encourage all participants to speak their truth respectfully to one another on an equal basis and seek a deeper understanding of themselves and others.

It is recommended that you try out this exercise yourself before practicing it with others, being sure to ask yourself all the questions that will be posed within the Circle. If you are not acting as the Keeper of the Circle, have the Keeper do the same.

The Circle presented here is simple and can be practiced with the easy-to-follow directions provided.

- Seat all participants in a circle (preferably without any tables).
- Choose one person (teacher, facilitator, or student) to act as Keeper of the Circle.
 - The Keeper welcomes everyone to the Circle, explains its purpose, plans and performs the opening and closing, poses questions, responds to each round as a participant, and passes the talking stick either to the left or the right.

PURPOSE

The Keeper of the Circle explains the purpose of the circle to participants:

- *The purpose of this Self-Care Circle is to encourage care of self in all dimensions.*

WELCOME

The Keeper of the Circle welcomes everyone to the space of the Circle.

MINDFULNESS MOMENT

The Keeper of the Circle leads everyone in a mindfulness moment:

- *Close or lower your eyes, take a deep breath, and listen to the sound. Open or raise your eyes when the sound ceases.*

OPENING

The Keeper of the Circle begins with an opening (and ends with a closing later) to mark the Circle as a distinctive space for dialogue. The following quote can be used to open the Circle or the Keeper can choose one of their own:

- *"Nourishing yourself in a way that helps you blossom in the direction you want to go is attainable, and you are worth the effort." - Deborah Day*

CHECK-IN ROUND

- Use a talking piece passed sequentially around the Circle, giving each person the choice to speak or pass when the talking piece comes to them. Honoring the talking piece means active listening to each person and respecting the right to pass.
- The right to pass reduces the fear and stress that may block higher brain functioning, making it more possible to participate constructively. The choice to say "no" encourages students to engage—provided the questions are real and meaningful and the opportunity to participate is always present.
- Remind students that they are invited to speak when the talking piece comes to them, to listen when they do not hold the talking piece, and are free to pass.
- The Keeper of the Circle poses the question below for a round. The Keeper should always provide their own answer first and then pass the talking piece to their left or right:

- *Please share something that has brought you joy recently.*

MAIN ACTIVITY

- Invite participants to draw a large circle on paper and divide it into four equal quadrants.
- Give one label outside the circle to each quadrant: “mental”, “physical”, “emotional”, and “spiritual.”
- Ask participants to write inside each quadrant what they have done in the last week (or month) to take care of themselves in that dimension of their lives. Then invite them to write a goal for further self-care in one or all the quadrants.
- If you notice that some participants struggle with the “spiritual” quadrant, explain that this relates to how each person thinks about “purpose” and “meaning” in their lives.

ROUND

The Keeper of the Circle asks participants:

- *Please share some things that you do to take care of yourself.*

ROUND

The Keeper of the Circle asks participants:

- *Please share some of your goals to take better care of yourself.*

ROUND

The Keeper of the Circle asks participants:

- *What is most challenging to you in taking care of yourself?*

CHECK-OUT ROUND

The Keeper of the Circle asks participants:

- *Share something you learned from this Circle or anything you would like to say as we close our Circle?*

CLOSING

Self-Affirmation Activity: The Keeper of the Circle asks everyone to hold up any number of fingers on one hand. Once they have done so, explain that for each finger, each participant will make a positive statement about themselves. Thank everyone for participating in the Circle today and encourage them within the week (or month) to take care of themselves according to the goal they set!

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Do you notice whether students and/or staff are taking better care of themselves? If so, how?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Restorative practices are proactive processes, such as the Circle process, used by educators to foster strong relationships and community among school staff and students in order to prevent conflict.

While the research on the effectiveness of restorative practices is limited, one [study](#) of Pittsburgh public schools looked at the impact of these practices in 22 schools versus 22 control schools. Outcomes in the implementation schools included improved school climate (according to teachers), and reduced suspensions, especially among African-American and low-income students. Overall, the disparity in suspensions between African-American and white students, and low- and higher-income students decreased as a result.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

A [positive school climate](#) is built on a foundation of trust and care among students and staff members. Indeed, students who feel [a sense of safety and belonging](#) at school have greater academic success and well-being. They're more motivated to learn and less likely to engage in risky behavior.

Teachers and school staff [benefit](#) from a positive school climate as well. A supportive work environment lessens staff emotional exhaustion and feelings of low personal accomplishment. It also increases their commitment to the profession, lessening attrition rates, and bolsters their belief that they can make a difference in students' lives.

SOURCE

[Circle Forward](#) is a resource guide designed to help teachers, administrators, students, and parents incorporate the practice of Circles into the everyday life of the school community with comprehensive step-by-step instructions for how to plan, facilitate, and implement the Circle. It provides over one hundred specific lesson plans for the application of Circles in many areas of school life.

[The Center for Restorative Justice](#) offers training and professional development in restorative justice practice for K-12 schools and universities. Also see the book [Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School](#).