

Everything the power of the world does is done in a circle. The sky is round and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars.

The wind, in its greatest power, whirls.

Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours.

The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle.

The moon does the same, and both are round.

Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were.

The life of a person is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves. Black Elk, *Black Elk Speaks*

Community. Somewhere there are people to whom we can speak with passion without having the words catch in our throats. Somewhere a circle of hands will open to receive us, eyes will light up when we enter, voices will celebrate with us whenever we come into our own power. Community means strength that joins our strength to do the work that needs to be done. Arms to hold us when we falter. A circle of healing. A circle of friends. Someplace where we can be free. Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark*.

**S**ocioDynamic counselling is done in various formats: one-to-one, by telephone or letter, and in circles:

listening circle, activity circle, and networking. Circle counselling contributes to at least six self-constructing experiences and activities:

- 1 Feeling of belonging, a place to experience acceptance and validation
- 2 Developing personal strength and self-confidence
- 3 Clarify and deepen personal insight and awareness
- 4 "Normalizing"--finding out that 'I'm all right'
- 5 Learning and refining psychosocial skills (communicating, relating, negotiating)
- 6 Expansion of mindfulness

**The basic elements of circle counselling:**

- 1 Depending upon purpose, use one of two basic circle formats: 1] listening circle, or 2] activity circle (sometimes called workshop)
- 2 Group members should have needs which can reasonably be met by group counselling.
- 3 Group size should be at least 6, but not more than 12 in a listening circle and from 10-20 in a structured activity group
- 4 Circle: sit on chairs, floor, bean bags, or couches--generally not wise to use tables except where an activity requires table surface
- 5 Read group statement such as:

*This is our group. Success or failure in our group is up to us. We meet to share, to be honest, to learn, to give and receive respect. We meet to express our fears, our hopes, our dreams, our feelings, our uncertainties. Our rewards are friendship, and understanding ourselves and others better. We meet to try to learn things that we can use to be more successful in our lives. We will respect each other's privacy by keeping what we say and do within the group. What we say here, and do here, let it stay here. We will help each other to follow two group rules:*

*b. When someone is speaking, others listen--no side conversations or disruptive interruptions.*

*a. We treat each other with kindness and respect*

- 6 When appropriate, decide on a group name

7 As a facilitator be sure to use language which is familiar to group members

8 Use a three step method to deal with disruptiveness:

First, mention rule. If that does not work, move the disrupter. If unruly conduct continues, ask the disrupter to take a recess from the group for the day. Try to see that disrupters are able to leave the group (and return) without attribution of blame, guilt or humiliation.

9 Keys to group facilitator success:

- a. Establish personal contact with each person
- b. Be congruent--be who you say you are, keep what you say and what you do congruent with each other
- c. Show respect and practice non-judgmentalism
- d. Model good listening and relating skills, and demonstrate empathy
- e. Stay with what is culturally relevant in terms of customs, dress, music, food and language.
- f. Watch for, and affirm, signs of success on the part of group members or the group as a whole
- g. Be present, let your self be seen, and your values made clear. You are a role model, and potential mentor.
- h. If you are guiding members in an activity, make instructions clear, give a supportive, helping hand as needed, and reward success.
- i. When appropriate, share food or use a ritual to solidify group membership
- j. Combine activity, discussion and reflection as tools for self construction

Remember that a circle(group) is an evolving, dynamic system. You and each member are part of that system. Yourself, the members, the group atmosphere--if you neglect any of these, you are risking disorder and harm to yourself and others as well. Practice mindfulness.

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Whatever we call reality, it is revealed to us only through an active construction in which we participate. Ilya Prigogine, Nobel laureate in chemistry

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*Counselling formats:*

1] **Listening circle:**

**Members remain silent as each person speaks freely**

on whatever he or she is concerned about. A 'talking stick', rock, or other object may be passed from speaker to speaker.

2] **Activity circle: The group facilitator guides group members through a learning activity. This combines activity, discussion, and reflection--all transformative learning modes.**

3] **Networking: a method of forming coalitions to enhance, share, and focus personal and community resources for use in problem solving.**