

2. Transform Culture: Circle Outlines

This circle outline is a part of a larger facilitation guide and community conversations toolkit from On Our Terms. Check out the full toolkit on onourterms.nyc if you want more background and guidance on how to use this tool.

GROUND AND CONNECT

1. Share the following quote from the On Our Terms project:
“Leadership actually needs to be involved. But the members of the school community have to be stakeholders in the restorative justice process... Parents, students, caretakers, maybe even community members... someone who works at a restaurant in the area or someone who interacts with our young people on a daily basis. Because it all comes back to relationships with our young people. And so the big ideas sometimes come from leadership, but it takes a community of folks who are like, ‘We are going to live and breathe and be restorative and transformative justice.’ That’s what I see in my context really, really pushing the work and moving us past those big ideas and actually doing it.”
2. If you could be any container, what container would you be and why?

COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

1. What are agreements that you want to hold yourself and each other to? When we think of these agreements, we can think not only about agreements for this space, but the kinds of things you would like to see from the world behind you? Below are some starting agreements to kick us off (Note: If you are in a space that meets regularly and has agreements already established, feel free to you use those, and ask each participant to pick one to focus on that they are really strong at supporting the group through, and one they would like to tend to improving).
 - a. One mic, and speak from a place of “I”/our own experience
 - b. Active listening
 - c. Confidentiality, or the stories stay here but the lessons leave
 - d. If you say something that you think might have hurt somebody, say “Oops” and we can pause to address it; If you say something that you have been hurt by, say “Ouch,” and we can pause to address it
 - e. Passing is always an option

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Peer-to-peer circle

1. **EXPLORE.** What do you understand about punishment in society? Who do you see carrying out punishment?
2. **SHARE EXPERIENCES.** Can you think of a time that you were in conflict with somebody you cared about or loved? How did you treat them, or how were you treated?

3. **ENVISION.** If we all knew the experiences one another has been through, how do you think the way we respond to one another in moments of harm or hurt change?

Intergenerational circle

1. **EXPLORE.** When you think about your own culture, what comes to mind? What do those things mean to you?
2. **SHARE EXPERIENCES.** Can you remember a time where a community member supported you in a way that felt important or unique? What was that like?
3. **ENVISION.** What are the steps we need to take in order to better care for one another across the community? What parts of your culture are already contributing to that?

CLOSING

1. Read the following recommendations around transforming culture in schools:
 - a. Institute a restorative justice action team of staff, students, and parents to guide the development and implementation of restorative justice in the school, ensuring there is a critical mass of people within the school pushing this work forward, rather than a single individual or an external group.
 - b. Ensure that teaching staff and administrators actively participate in circles alongside students, breaking hierarchical norms within the community. By building buy-in with staff, it ensures the growth of restorative justice as a community wide practice that is also breaking traditional structural norms
 - c. Leadership must build in time and settings to unpack ideas about discipline, learn about the school-to-prison pipeline, and look at relevant NYC and school-based data (e.g., on suspensions and disparities), and how it all connects to growing restorative justice in schools. While these conversations should begin with school staff, they should grow to include students and their families.
2. After hearing these, close out with asking people to fill in the blanks of the sentence, “My first day of school, I used to be _____, but now I am _____,” either in writing or out loud. If we have all experienced transformation and change in who we are within our schools, then surely we have the power to create that change as well.