



FACILITATING LEARNING CIRCLES

From: Lavrene Norton, "The Power of Circles: Using a Familiar Technique to Promote Culture Change," Journal of Social Work in Long-Term Care, 20 (3/4) (2003).

Purpose

The learning circle is a leveling technique that encourages quiet people to speak, talkative people to listen, and everyone to share in making decisions. Participants observe, interpret, and experience not only their own feelings about an issue but also broaden their perspectives by considering the many viewpoints around them. Circles are most effective when they become a way of life in the nursing home and everyone takes turns facilitating.¹

Procedure

1. Participants sit in a circle without tables or other obstructions blocking their view of one another.
2. The ideal number of participants is ten to fifteen. If the facilitator believes the discussion will provoke strong feelings of sadness, depression, grief, or anger, it is helpful to limit the number to five to ten.
3. One person is chosen to be the facilitator. He or she poses the question or topic to the circle, gives encouragement, and keeps the circle moving in an orderly fashion.
4. The process begins when the facilitator poses the question or issue.
5. A volunteer in the circle responds with his or her thoughts about the topic.
6. The person sitting to the right or left of the first respondent speaks next, followed one by one around the circle until everyone has spoken on the subject without interruption.
7. Participants may choose to pass rather than speak. After everyone else in the circle taken a turn, the facilitator goes back to those who passed and allows each another opportunity to respond.
8. Only after everyone has had a chance to speak is the floor opened for general discussion.