



PFDL Recommendations  
For Holding A  
Virtual Community Circle  
To Build Connection  
During COVID-19



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## Project Fleur-de-lis (PFDL)

PFDL, a community and school based program of Mercy Family Center, welcomes and invites you to a very new part of our programming. Restorative Practices are at the heart of everything we do, and we have recently been challenged to adapt these practices virtually. We have found the virtual circle to be very helpful within our own community and our team. We hope the following information gives you an outline and guide for holding your own circles in your community whether that be with your team, staff, those you serve, or family. Please reach out to us with any questions about implementation or facilitation. We want these circles to be areas of connection for everyone and are happy to walk with you through that process.

Offering a circle and trusting the process gives everyone within an organization, business, network, or community permission to engage with one another and their own vulnerability during a time of immense stress and forced change. We think it could benefit anyone interested. To get started, please read the entirety of this document. It is important to be intentional, vulnerable, and supportive in preparing for and facilitating a circle. We provide information about community circles and ways we have adapted them to the virtual platform. We offer a sample agenda with scripts as a guideline. We have also created a bank of quotes and potential prompts so that you can choose what is most appropriate and helpful to your community. If you have any questions, please contact our Restorative Practices Director, Tuyl Mogabgab, LCSW-BACS, MPH at [tuyl.mogabgab@mercy.net](mailto:tuyl.mogabgab@mercy.net).

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## Virtual Community Circles

Due to the COVID19 pandemic and the stay at home orders that are in place, many people are experiencing disconnection, overwhelm, and isolation. One way to help organizations and coworkers connect is to offer a virtual circle. We at Mercy Family Center and Project Fleur-de-lis have found virtual circles very helpful to our teams. These circles offer community to build connection during what may feel like a very disconnected time. The purpose of the circle is to share space, reflect together on the difficulties surrounding COVID19 as well as the lessons, gifts, and growths. Brene Brown recently said, "This pandemic experience is a massive experiment in collective vulnerability." The virtual circle is a community space for acknowledging that vulnerability and naming the struggles and the triumphs as we navigate newness together.

Circles are an essential component of restorative practices which inform everything that we do at PFDL. Circles are an ancient practice handed down from Indigenous People. They offer a way of engaging with one another to build community, share, and heal. In a circle, everyone has a voice. We create structure within the circle to provide the safety for everyone's voice to be heard, for collective vulnerability to occur.

Below are some of the ways we create structure.

- We are explicit about **the purpose of the circle** and give **clear expectations**.
  - o The purpose of these community virtual calls is to build connection and reflect together on the impact of COVID-19. It is a space for collective vulnerability. It is not the place for problem-solving business-related issues, getting updates on policies, or filing complaints. It is a place for building relationship during these difficult times.
  - o The circle "agenda" is as follows:
    - Opening quote
    - *Brief introduction prompt if needed (go around to all participants)*
    - Check-in prompt (go-around)
    - Follow up prompt or reflective question (go-around)
    - Gratitude prompt (go-around)
    - Check-out prompt (go around)
    - Closing quote
- A **talking piece** is used to facilitate go-arounds, where we each have an opportunity to respond to prompts that the circle keeper poses to the group. The circle keeper offers a prompt, shares their own response and models appropriately. The talking piece is then passed to the left, and it is a reminder of the privilege it is to share as well as the privilege it is to listen.
  - o In place of the talking piece, we have implemented alphabetical order in our circles. The circle keeper facilitates that with an accountability buddy. It is always okay to pass if that feels right at the time, and there is no judgment in passing.
- There are **agreements** we acknowledge together, and everyone collaborates to honor them. Those agreements should include the following:
  - o Offer respect
  - o Honor the talking piece
  - o Speak from your heart
  - o Practice nonjudgment with self and others
  - o Be present, *as present as possible*.

This is a sample outline for designing your circle. The **BOLD** headings should stay the same each time, but you will take time before the circle to identify which quote, prompts, and closing you will utilize.

## Sample Virtual Circle

### **WELCOME**

"Thank you for joining our community call. We hope this is a space for you to connect in what may feel like a very disconnected time. We want to offer this space for us to build and nurture the relationships we have within this community. Thank you for showing up today."

### **CIRCLE ORIENTATION**

"Being in a circle is a different way of engaging. Most of us are used to meetings that are either lectures or dialogues. A circle is more of a practice, it is an intentional way to communicate. Each time we come together, we have a unique community. In this community circle, everyone has an equal voice so we will take turns speaking and sharing so that each person here has a space for their voice to be heard. We hold our thoughts until it is our "turn" to share, and we recognize the privilege it is to listen while doing so. While sharing, we allow ourselves to be honest, to show up as we are, to be vulnerable. It is okay to pass if that feels right for you when it is your turn.

So, I will open us up with a quote, and then I will offer a prompt to the group and we will virtually "pass the talking piece." The way we have chosen to do that virtually is to go in alphabetical order. I will ask \_\_\_\_\_ to be my accountability partner in facilitating that, and you are welcome to remember the person you follow and chime in as they finish. If not, I'm happy to remind you when it's your turn.

### **GROUP AGREEMENTS & EXPECTATIONS**

- Offer respect
- Honor the talking piece
- Speak from your heart
- Offer nonjudgment to self and others
- Be present, *as present as possible*

### **OPENING**

Mindful moment: *"Before we begin, I want to invite everyone to take a deep breath." Model deep breath. "And another, this time dropping your shoulders as you exhale. Ahhhh. Now let's open our circle with a quote to ground us in this space."*

Opening Quote: *"We can be our worst selves when we're afraid, or our very best, bravest selves. In the context of fear and vulnerability, there is often very little in between because when we are uncertain and afraid our default is self-protection. We don't have to be scary when we're scared. Let's choose awkward, brave, and kind. And let's choose each other." – Brene Brown*

**PROMPT 1:** What has been the most difficult thing for you to adjust to during this pandemic?

**PROMPT 2:** What is one personal strength you have had to lean upon during this time?

Gratitude go-around: What is one thing you are grateful for **today**?

**Closing go-around:** What is one word you're leaving with today?

### **CLOSING**

Gratitude to participants: *"Thank you so much for showing up today and participating."*

Closing quote: *"It isn't more light we need, it's putting into practice what light we already have. When we do that, wonderful things will happen within our lives and within our world." – Peace Pilgrim*

## Quotes

“We can be our worst selves when we’re afraid, or our very best, bravest selves. In the context of fear and vulnerability, there is often very little in between because when we are uncertain and afraid our default is self-protection. We don’t have to be scary when we’re scared. Let’s choose awkward, brave, and kind. And let’s choose each other.” – Brene Brown

“Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into the places of pain, to share in the brokenness, fear, confusion and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human.” Henri J.M. Nouwen

“Listen to your life. See if for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness...because in the last analysis all moments are key moments and life itself is grace.” Frederick Buechner

“It isn’t more light we need, it’s putting into practice what light we already have. When we do that, wonderful things will happen within our lives and within our world.” – Peace Pilgrim

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.” – Theodore Roosevelt

“Daring greatly means the courage to be vulnerable. It means to show up and be seen. To ask for what you need. To talk about how you’re feeling. To have the hard conversations.” – Brene Brown

“Vulnerability is not winning or losing; it’s having the courage to show up and be seen when we have no control over the outcome.” – Brene Brown

“I do not know if you have ever examined how you listen, it doesn’t matter to what, whether to a bird, to the wind in the leaves, to the rushing waters, or how you listen in a dialogue with yourself, to your conversation in various relationships with your intimate friends, your wife or husband.... If we try to listen we find it extraordinarily difficult, because we are always projecting our opinions and ideas, our prejudices, our backgrounds, our inclinations, our impulses; when they dominate we hardly listen at all to what is being said.... One listens and therefore learns, only in a state of attention, a state of silence, in which this whole background is in abeyance, is quiet; then, it seems to me, it is possible to communicate.” — Krishnamurti

“Words need to be heard. When we give words to what we are living, these words need to be received and responded to. A speaker needs a listener. A writer needs a reader. When the flesh — the lived human experience — becomes word, community can develop. When we say, ‘Let me tell you what we saw. Come and listen to what we did. Sit down and let me explain to you what happened to us. Wait until you hear whom we met,’ we call people together and make our lives into lives for others. The word brings us together and calls us into community. When the flesh becomes word, our bodies become part of a body of people.” – Henri Nouwen

“The Chinese philosopher Chuang-Tzu stated that true empathy requires listening with the whole being: ‘The hearing that is only in the ears is one thing. The hearing of the understanding is another. But the hearing of the spirit is not limited to any one faculty, to the ear, or to the mind. Hence it demands the emptiness of all the faculties. And when the faculties are empty, then the whole being listens. There is then a direct grasp of what is right there before you that can never be heard with the ear or understood with the mind.’” —Marshall Rosenberg

“Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world. All things break. And all things can be mended. Not with time, as they say, but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you.” — L.R. Knost

“Talk to yourself like you would to someone you love.” — Brene Brown

“Imperfections are not inadequacies; they are reminders that we’re all in this together.” — Brene Brown

“It is good people who make good places.” - Anna Sewell

“The miracle is this - the more we share, the more we have.” — Leonard Nimoy

“Patience is not just the ability to wait, it’s how we behave while we’re waiting.” — Joyce Meyer

“In every community, there is work to be done. In every nation, there are wounds to heal. In every heart, there is the power to do it.” — Marianne Williamson

“Sometimes our light goes out but is blown again into instant flame by an encounter with another human being. Each of us owes the deepest thanks to those who have rekindled this inner light.” — Dr Albert Schweitzer

“If you restore balance in your own self, you will be contributing immensely to the healing of the world.” — Deepak Chopra

“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.” — Leo Buscaglia

“Your task is not to seek love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.” — Rumi

“If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.” — Mother Theresa

## COVID19 Prompts Bank

If you have to choose one word to describe your experience during COVID19, what would it be and why?

What is one challenge personally or professionally that you've experienced because of COVID19?

What is one thing that surprised you about yourself during this time?

Name one thing you miss about life pre-COVID19.

What is one word you would use to describe how you have been impacted by COVID19.

How have you been most deeply impacted by COVID19?

What is a question you have had to ask yourself due to COVID19?

What is one thing you're disappointed you won't be able to attend or engage in?

Share a peak and a valley from this last week.

What is one way you have changed or had to change during this time?

Where do you find support right now?

How are you staying connected during this time?

In what ways do you see potential growth happening as a result of this global pandemic?

Name someone you have supported or received support from during this time.

What is one resource you have found helpful the last couple weeks?

What is your favorite way to virtually engage?

What is one problem with virtual connection?

What are you proud of that your community (however you define community) has done in response to COVID19?

Name a strength of yours that you have had to lean on in adapting and adjusting to the current changes.

What sacrifices have you made to join this call? Or in general during this time?

What gives you hope during this time?

What practice have you started or continued that helps you through this?

Everyone is experiencing their "first time" together right now. What messages do you tell yourself that are helpful when you're doing something for the first time, and what messages do you need to hear to show up as your best self?

What resources do you need right now that may be possible to actualize?

What is the most helpful thing you have heard or been told during this time?

Is there anything that PFDL can find for you or offer right now?

What are your school's biggest challenges?

What is one thing you can ask for this week? From a coworker, partner, friend, family member, or yourself?

What keeps you present?

What are you grieving right now?

How do you release or express your grief?

## Community Building Prompts

What is one thing coworkers might not know about you?

What is your greatest achievement?

When you think about respect, who comes to mind that embodies respect to you?

How do you define community? Where are you finding it right now?

What is something you've done for yourself this week?

How do you relax best?

What was one of your favorite celebrations of your life?

Think about your favorite birthday and in 2-3 sentences, describe why it was so special.

If you had an unexpected free day and could do anything you wanted, what would it be?

If you were an animal, what would it be and why?

What is a core value that you live by?

If you were an animal, which would you be?

What was a challenge you overcame that you'd be willing to share with the group?

Who has been a major support in your life?

If you could go anywhere for 2 days, where would it be if money, time, and home responsibilities were not an issue?

## Facilitating a Circle

It is an honor and a privilege to facilitate a circle. Before each circle, we recommend taking a mindful moment and doing a calm or safe place exercise. It is important that before you offer others a safe space, you offer the same to yourself. Circle keepers model during the entirety of the circle. They model respect, silence, agreement-keeping, appropriate sharing based on time and prompts, and authenticity. Yet, a circle is a process that you facilitate, not one that you own. Take a deep breath and trust that process. Remember that it is your job to welcome others, discuss agreements, offer intentional prompts, and close the space. Circle-keepers model respectful and engaged participation. They refrain from cross-talk such as validation, modeling the importance and privilege of active listening. More information about circle keepers is below from Kay Pranis' Circle Keeper's Manual. While we cannot offer a training on circle-keeping, we want to give tips for leaders who believe in offering this space to their community members. We believe that the benefits of providing a safe and collective space for sharing and reflecting outweigh the risk of leading this space without training *during this time*. Please read the following before holding a circle.

### What is a circle keeper?

Keepers are also known as servants, facilitators, carriers and other names. Whatever name is used, the roles are the same. Keepers are the caretakers and servants of the process. As a keeper, you must ensure that everyone takes responsibility for helping to keep the circle, and for making the "circle" a safe place for open dialogue. The keeper has responsibilities before the circle, during the circle, and after the circle.

### Qualities of the keeper - Am I striving to exhibit keeper traits?

When you agree to serve as a circle keeper, you are taking on a sacred trust. It can feel intimidating at first. The first thing to remember is to relax, and to forgive yourself for being imperfectly human like we all are. No keeper is perfect. We do the best we can.

Here are some traits that can help you to best serve the circle.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A good listener</li><li>• Present</li><li>• Supportive</li><li>• Nonjudgmental</li><li>• Fair</li><li>• Inclusive</li><li>• Courageous</li><li>• Reflective</li><li>• Trusting</li><li>• Encouraging</li><li>• Respectful</li><li>• Aware</li><li>• Tolerant</li><li>• Humble</li><li>• Organized</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Able to keep the process moving</li><li>• Detached</li><li>• Appreciative</li><li>• Patient</li><li>• Well-disciplined</li><li>• Watchful</li><li>• Approachable</li><li>• Holistic</li><li>• Able to appreciate humor</li><li>• Open to other opinions</li><li>• Honest</li><li>• An anchor</li><li>• Willing to forgive</li><li>• Consistently flexible</li><li>• Able to keep the space safe</li></ul>
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## Self-Care for Circle Keepers

from the **Oakland Unified School District** Restorative Justice Implementation Guide

To be a great circle keeper for others, take good care of yourself.  
Take a moment to check in with YOU.

### BEFORE THE CIRCLE

Check in with yourself and notice how you are doing.

- Are you tired, hungry, sleepy?
- Do you have personal emotions about the circle you are going to facilitate?

**tip** Sleep and eat as well as possible before you go into circle. Take some time to ground yourself and get into a good space. Remember, your feelings will enter the circle with you and impact participants.

### DURING THE CIRCLE

You may find yourself bothered by something someone else says about a person or issue. Or, you may recognize that how you are feeling is negatively impacting what you are thinking or what you want to say or do next.

**tip** Breathe deeply and invite circle participants to breathe with you as well. Remember, the circle is not about YOU, and you are not alone. Circle is about US as a community. Think about what you can do or say to keep everyone in the circle together.

### AFTER THE CIRCLE

At times, you may feel energized from joy and pride in doing your job well. Other times, you may feel tired, drained, or have a heavy heart.

**tip** Whatever the feelings, it is most important that you are nonjudgmentally aware of your emotions. Take a moment to figure out what you need to come back into balance. Make sure to follow through with the self-care needed.

## Contact

This guide has been a team effort by the staff at Project Fleur-de-lis. If you have any questions, please see contact information below for our Restorative Practices Director who is happy to assist you. Email is currently the best and quickest way to get in touch.

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