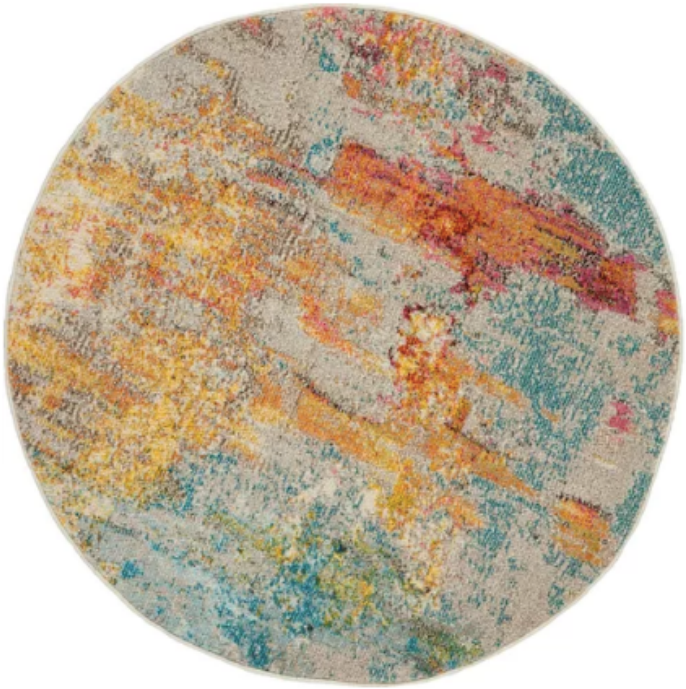


CONTINUE. BUILDING. COMMUNITY.

ONLINE CIRCLE KEEPER TOOLKIT

SUFFOLK UNIVERSITY
Center for Restorative Justice

Covid-19 has hit everyone hard, especially our education centers and their communities. The virus is dangerous, but the scariest thing about this pandemic is the injustice it has perpetuated, causing the inequities we have lived with to come out in high relief. In this time, we need more than anything to be in a restorative way. We need connection, we need belonging, we need compassion. This tool kit is an effort to foster interdependence in this moment.

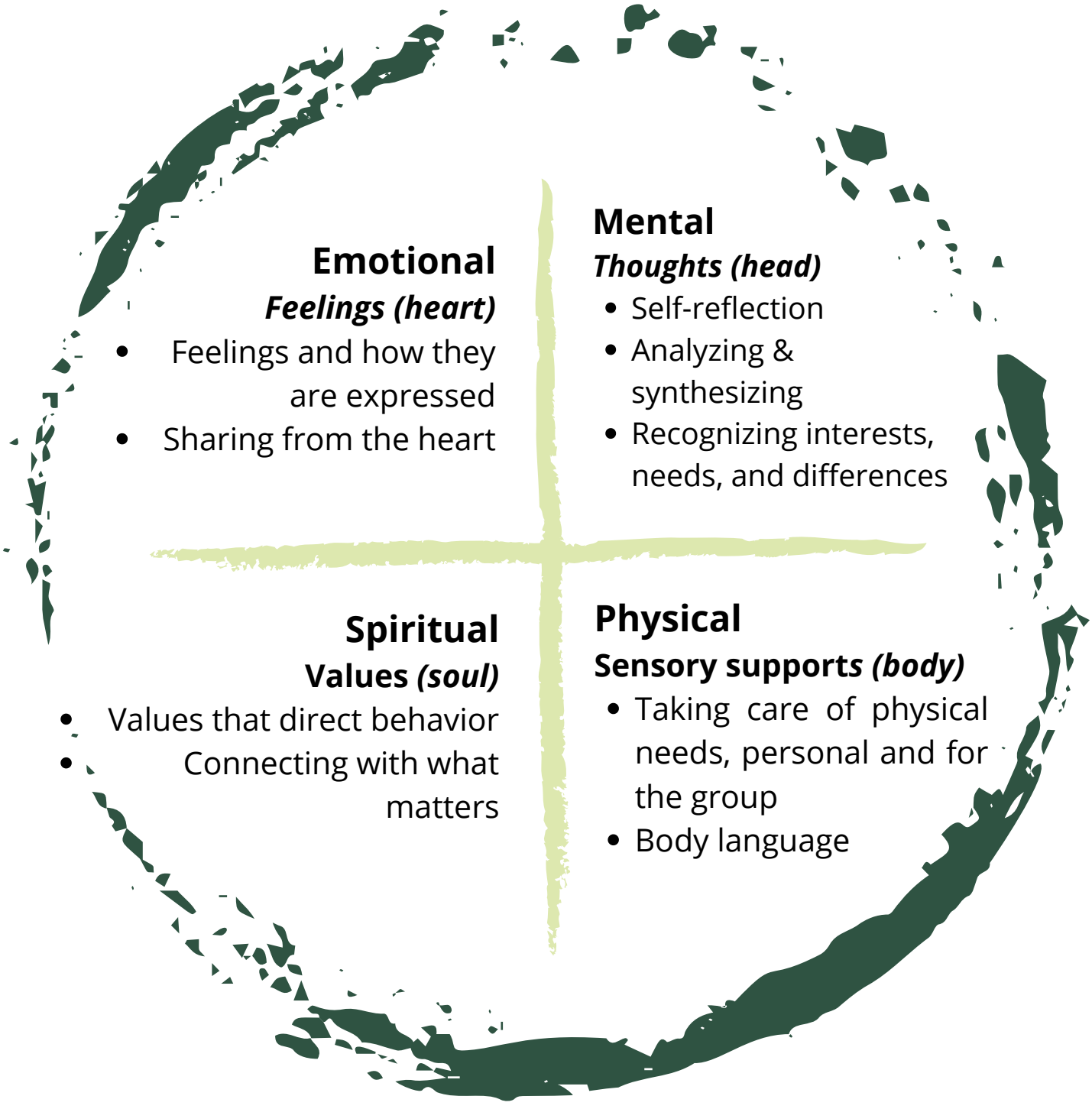
"Healers and warriors are not opposites; they are complementaries. Moving beyond binaries, we need not embrace one and reject the other. We can hold them both as one." - Fania Davies, *The Little Book of Race and Restorative Justice*

Table of Contents

- Medicine Wheel (2)
- How to Circle Up Online (3)
- The Basic Work Check-in (4)
- Question Toolbox (5)
- Openings & Closings (6)
- Why talk about trauma? (7)
- Trauma & Assessment (8)
- Pod Mapping for Resiliency (9)
- Trauma & the Brain (10,11)
- Pre-made Circles (12,13)
- Covid-19 Relief Links (14-16)
- About us & contributors (17)

MEDICINE WHEEL: BALANCE

As we transition to an online platform, it is essential that we stay connected to what makes us human: our thoughts, feelings, values, and physical realities. We are indebted to the indigenous elders who have brought circle practices forward into modern times. Below is a representation of the Native American Medicine Wheel, thought to encompass healing and the cycles of life. As you check in with your communities, be thoughtful in engaging them with questions, openings, closings, and activities that connect to all aspects of their humanity. You may notice that many of our circles touch on these elements as well.



HOW TO CIRCLE UP WITH YOUR PEOPLE ONLINE

Information is changing rapidly and sharing information with each other effectively can help us to feel more stable & connected and make decisions based on accurate information. This online toolkit explores the use of Circle Process to facilitate communication in online formats.

Circle process is an indigenous tool used over thousands of years to facilitate communication, community and relationship building, decision making and conflict resolution. For more information about the lineage of Circle practice in North America, please read along here. To respect the tradition of Circle process we use a talking piece, an opening and closing, a center piece, a series of questions to facilitate dialogue. Below, we explore how to do that in a digital form.

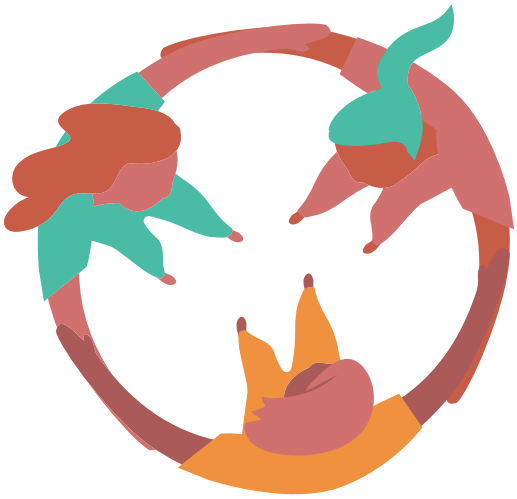
Here are some online Digital meeting tools to use: Facetime (free), Google hangouts (free), Zoom (free for an hour, paid after an hour), Maestro (professional use, monthly subscriptions)Here are the steps to planning digital gatherings. Prepare - check with people for availability, decide on a time and date, send a link to the call (if calling method allows), we recommend not inviting more than 18-20 people.

Here are the steps to digital gatherings

1. **Prepare** - check with people for availability, decide on a time and date, send a link to the call (if calling method allows), we recommend not inviting more than 18-20 people if possible.
2. **Set an agenda** - it's good to have a clear end point for your call and a plan - the plan we offer below can help everyone share their thoughts equally.
3. **Pick a keeper of the conversation** - this person observes the time, asks the questions, and ensures that each topic is addressed.
4. **Have your questions set** ahead of time, adjust them as needed.
5. **Make some ground rules** - useful ones we use are: if you're not talking, please mute yourself; minimize outside distractions; listen and share honestly; respect the person who's talking by giving them your full attention.
6. **Decide on the order** you want people to respond to your questions and use the same order for each question. We recommend the facilitator writes the determined order in the chat for continual reference. The facilitator can predetermine the order, allow participants to determine the order, nominating the next up by saying, "pass to," or more simply, the circle could follow an alphabetical order.

We also recommend...

- In place of using a talking piece, you can also ask participants to choose an object that is significant to them and hold it in their hands as they share
- If you have a particular flow of questions that you've prepared to Circle up your people, you can copy and paste the questions in the chat bar of a video conference in Zoom or Google Hangouts
- Use an opening quote, piece of music or activity to mark the the Circle. For a list of movement based activities and popular openings and closings, please read more here.
- Many people don't feel comfortable with their video on - this could be for lots of reasons. We don't have a strong stance on whether video on/off is better but we do want circle keepers to remember that Circle is a consensual process and we should trust that any participants will do their best to list and share fully whether video is on or off.



THE BASIC WORK CHECK-IN

Opening: [poem, quote, reading, meditation, etc. See page 6 for ideas]

Check-in: What's a high/low from your day or week?"

Round 1: How are you doing?/What work have you done around this issue (that you're discussing on the call)?

Round 2: What's a challenge you're facing?/What gaps are you aware of that we need to address?

Round 3: What's something you're looking forward to?/What's a point of potential, given what gaps exist and what work has been done?

Round 4: What support do you need from the group and what support are you willing to offer?/What is the next step that you plan to take - include people you will collaborate with and the timeframe for your work.

Check-out: "What's something you'll do after this call that will bring you joy?"

Closing: [poem, quote, reading, meditation,etc. See page 6 for ideas]

Note: *Depending on the allotted time and the number of members in your group, you may not have time for all 6 questions. Identify the most important questions to address before facilitating your circle.*

QUESTION TOOLBOX

"Always use one or more positive questions after you have allowed opportunity for participants to talk about fears, concerns, pain. It is very important to end with a sense of positive possibility and hope even in very difficult situations. Toward the end you want a strong sense of connection and support for one another." -Kay Pranis

What does this moment mean to you?
How is anxiety manifesting for you—body, mind, spirit, heart?
In this new reality, what are you grateful for?
What is your greatest fear? Where does the fear lodge in your body?
What personal practices are feeding your fears?
What are you doing to support someone else at this time?
Who can you talk with about your anxieties and concerns?
What gives you hope?
Do you have intentional practices to interrupt thoughts of hopelessness or anxiety?
What is the gift of this moment?
What is bringing comfort at this time?
What is a source of strength for you at this time?
What forms of connection are you discovering or recovering?
How would you like to use this time? What is the growth opportunity of this time, personally and professionally?
Who is a role model for you in this situation?
What would you like to release into the center of our Circle?
What helps you to remember that you are never alone?
What is your favorite music for lifting your spirit?
What tickles your funny bone—something you can laugh at even in tough times? (movie, TV show, etc.)
How is this situation impacting your relationships in your family?
What is the hardest part of this situation for you?
What is one positive thing you can do for yourself in the next week?
How can we support each other through this difficult time?
What are you proud of in your response to this difficult time?

Content from this page is cited from:
Pranis, Kay. “Online Support Circles in Response to Social Distancing .” Circle Forward – Living Justice Press , 6 Apr. 2020.

OPENINGS & CLOSINGS

survival plan
light your candle
practice your skills.
order your medicines.
pack your 'we out' bag.
put a little cash aside
save some seeds.
learn your self defense.
increase your stamina.
memorize folks' numbers.
strategize your plans.
call upon your history.
prepare your long game. l
earn and share.
return to your library.
live your praxis.
parent your babies.
pray your hardest.
make your art.
soak in music.
document your stories.
run yourself salt baths.
dance until sweaty.
let your tears flow.
be soft with yourself.
dig your hands in this earth.
wash yourself in seawater.
walk amidst grandmother trees.
root yourself there.
kiss your lover.
breathe from your belly.
sit on your cushion.
remember your laughter.
remind yourself who you are.
call your family.
gather your team.
get with your people.
lean on your ancestors.
do your work now.
do your work now.
-remedial dimension
survival plan, part 1
by **Deepa Philips**

Inner Strength Visualization

[Read out loud.]

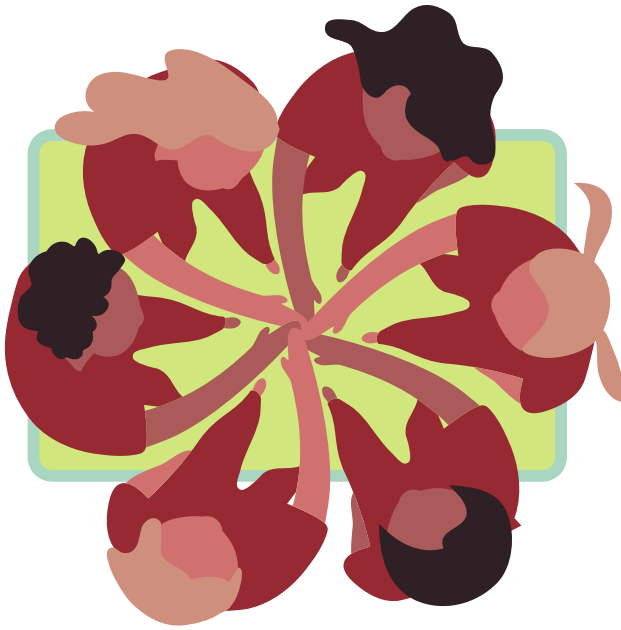
Take three of four deep, relaxing breaths. As you breathe out each time, picture all of the noise and problems in your life going out of your body with each breath. All that is left behind is the quiet, calm, and peacefulness of your core self. [pause]

Imagine that this calm energy is at the center of your body near your heart. It is like a bright light glowing deep inside of you. As you breathe out, feel the light getting brighter. Each time you breathe in and out, that light gets stronger, like the sun's light growing. All of the troubles you have had to face in your life can't put the light out. In fact, all of those struggles made you wiser and more powerful. These troubles have made the light more brilliant and stronger.

The next time you are faced with a difficult situation or a painful problem, remind yourself of this light that is always within you. Let this peaceful energy help calm you and guide you in making positive decisions. Think of how your life up to now has made these powerful qualities in you even stronger. See these strengths as part of your wisdom and power. See yourself deal with the challenges in your life using the strength you already possess.

Exercises for Activists

Reach high
for your dreams.
[reach up on your toes]
Bend down low
to touch your roots.
[reach down and touch your toes]
Rise up
to yourself.
[bring hands to heart center]
Stomp out
oppression *[stomp feet on the ground]*
Sway
with the winds of change *[sway arms back and forth while rotating torso]*



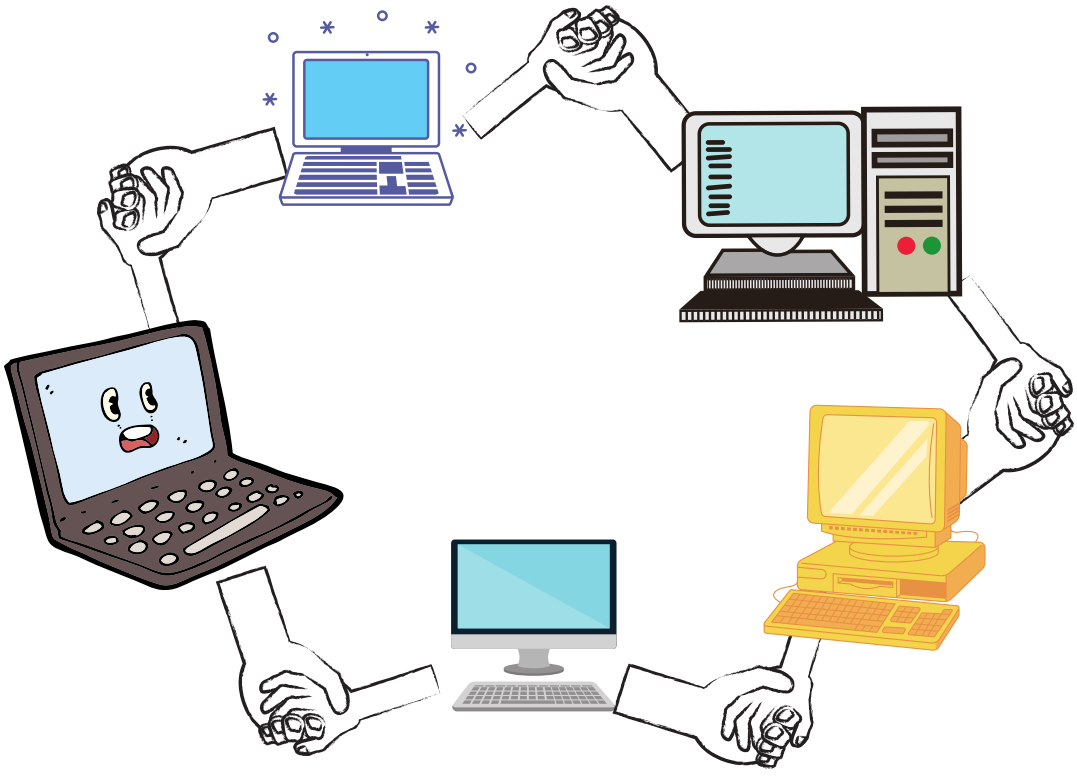
Name what you are grateful for...

WHY TALK ABOUT TRAUMA?

Why talk about a trauma-informed approach and Restorative Justice in this moment of the Coronavirus pandemic? Instability and fear are key features in all crises. In such moments, stable community connections are one of the biggest factors that promote health and wellness. There is a tremendous amount of overlap between a trauma-informed framework and Restorative Justice. Both emphasize trust and connection as a foundation.

One of the biggest impacts of trauma is feeling helpless. One of the biggest healing factors is being in community and using your voice to shape your circumstances and to claim agency. Circle is an antidote to some of the biggest stresses trauma causes because its a tool that enables us to find our voice, act with collective agency and nurture each other with love. Being in circle has the potential to create hope and make meaning in such a chaotic time.

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated levels of stress related to the on-going economic and social impact of the pandemic will have wide-ranging effects. Some individuals are impacted by trauma more deeply for a variety of reasons - based on race, sickness, lack of access to resources, various levels of marginalization, as well as those with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) or other life stressors. In addition to death and sickness caused by the virus, the injustice of the system is what is creating the trauma of this moment. A restorative approach can help us move from hopelessness to possibility.



TRAUMA & ASSESSMENT

Approaching the current moment with a trauma and restorative justice approach can help us to navigate this moment more effectively. Below are some tools and resources that can help.

Here are some things you can casually check-in with young people about. Checking in about normal bodily functions can help reduce stigma associated with trauma and be less invasive. Everyone deals with stress differently. Some young people will seem fine, while others may need extra support. You don't need to be a mental health professional to check in on people you care about and this tool can help you to understand how this moment is impacting them.

How is their:

- **sleep** - are they having trouble sleeping?
- ability to **focus** on work in groups or independently (has theis changed significantly?)
- **eating** - are they eating significantly more or less than normal?
- **fatigue** - are they feeling overly tired?
- aches/pains in the **body**

Here are other things to monitor that are also signs of the on-going impact of trauma. These are things to check-in about and normalize with young people and are natural ways that our bodies respond to trauma and stress

- **irritability** - increased over a normal level that a young person may experience
- **worried**- are they worried about particular things such as food shortage, rent payments, legal or immigration issues, etc?
- **bad dreams**
- are they experiencing persistent **emotional distress** related the death of a loved one?
- **intense guilt** related to feeling like they could have done something to prevent what happened
- emotional **numbness**
- **withdrawal** from friendships/relationships with others
- difficulty with **memory**
- **increased substance** use to cope with emotional pain
- **hopelessness** about the future or decreased interest in activities of day-to-day life

POD MAPPING FOR RESILIENCY

"***During the spring of 2014 the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective (BATJC) began using the term 'pod' to refer to a specific type of relationship within transformative justice (TJ) work. We needed a term to describe the kind of relationship between people who would turn to each other for support around violent, harmful and abusive experiences, whether as survivors, bystanders or people who have harmed. These would be the people in our lives that we would call on to support us with things such as our immediate and on-going safety, accountability and transformation of behaviors, or individual and collective healing and resiliency."***

The excerpt above, as well as those below, were taken from Mia Mingus', "Pods and Pod Mapping," article written for the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective. This activity was created as a way for transformative justice practitioners to respond to incidents of sexual harm. Our intention in including this tool here is that we think it is a useful exercise to help us all to develop strong and robust community connections. While it is one tool that you could use, it's not the only tool and we'd invite you to experiment with other activities that help students, families and teachers build strong mutual support networks.

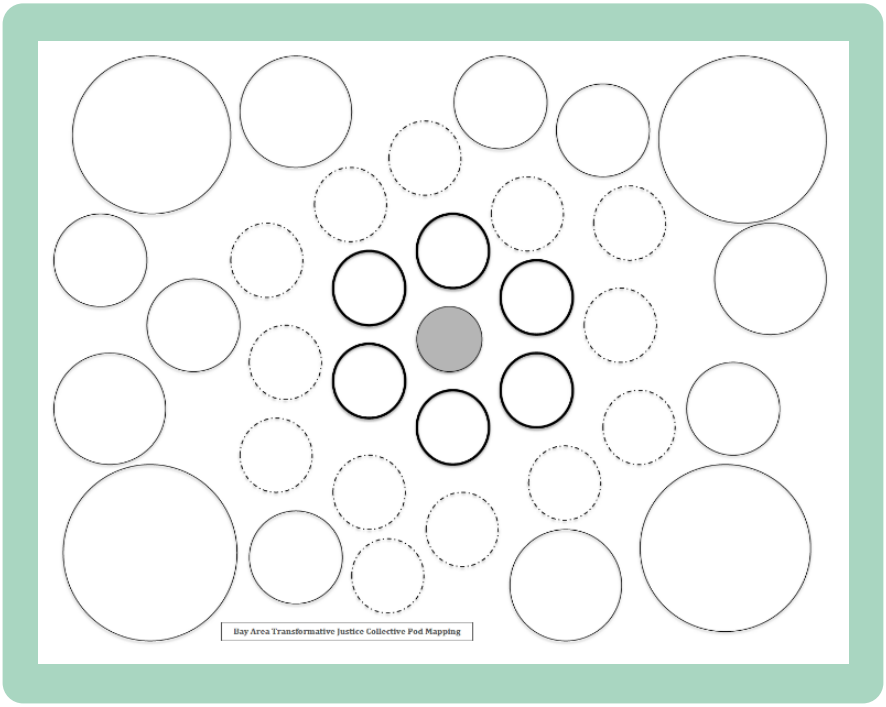
How to use the map:

1) Write your name in the middle grey circle.

2) The surrounding bold-outlined circles are your pod. Write the names of the people who are in your pod. We encourage people to write the names of actual individuals, instead of things such as "my church group" or "my neighbors."

3) The dotted lines surrounding your pod are people who are "movable." They are people that could be moved in to your pod, but need a little more work. For example, you might need to build more relationship or trust with them.

4) The larger circles at the edge of the page are for networks, communities or groups that could be resources for you. It could be your direct service organization, or your cohort in nursing school, or your youth group, or a transformative justice group.



Map linked here

Your pod(s) may shift over time, as your needs or relationships shift or as people's geographic location shift. We encourage people to have conversations with their pod people about pods and transformative justice, as well as to actively grow the number of people in their pod and support each other in doing so. Growing one's pod is not easy and may take time. In pod work, we measure our successes by the quality of our relationships with one another and we invest in the time it takes to build things like trust, respect, vulnerability, accountability, care and love. We see building our pods as a concrete way to prepare and build resources for transformative justice in our communities.

Written by Mia Mingus for BATJC, June 2016.

TRAUMA AND THE BRAIN

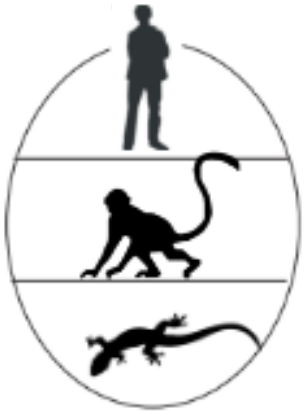
Opening: Take a minute to be aware of your surroundings. Find 1 green thing in your environment.

Check-in: Where are you on a scale of 1-10 in terms of your level of stress?

Round: How do you know you're stressed (or not)? What about your thoughts, feelings or body helps you know when you're feeling stressed?

So now that we've talked about how we know if we're stressed, lets go over a short lesson about what we know scientifically about the body, the brain, and stress.

Activity First I'd like you to look at this first handout. It's a representation of the human brain. in the brain, there are three areas that govern our human bodies response to stress.



1. The **prefrontal cortex** - this part of our brain is the "human" brain. It controls areas like thought, language, social skills, reasoning, and other things that we typically think of as "human" behavior. The prefrontal cortex is something that is highly evolved in humans.
2. The **Limbic system** - this part of our brain evolved when humans were mammals. This governs our fight or flight response *ask students if they've ever heard this term before and if so, what they know about it*. (Here and here are some links that explain this more if you need it).
3. The **amygdala** - this is the brain stem. Many people describe this as our "reptilian" brain. The least evolved part of the brain. It is connected to the limbic system and typically is associated with our "freeze" response to stress.

On our second hand out we have something called the window of stress tolerance - it's a different way to talk about the body's response to stress. Ideally, when our prefrontal cortex is operating, we're "inside" the window. BUT when we get stressed out, our limbic system or amygdala can kick in ("activated" or "triggered"). There are two ways our bodies and brain can respond to stress - a high energy response - our "fight or flight" (the technical term is "hyper-arousal)" and a low energy response - our "freeze" response (the technical term is "hypo-arousal"). There is a very teen-friendly video here and more reading on this here. For info about the impact of prolonged exposure to stress check out this VERY USEFUL video.

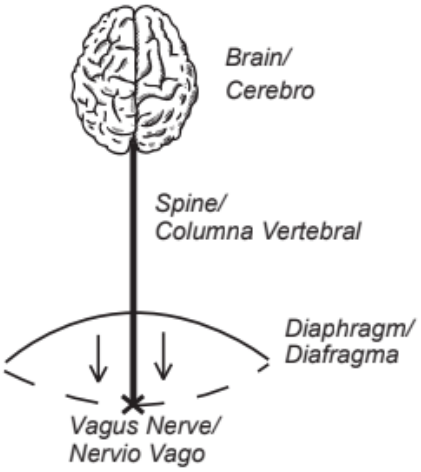
Round/popcorn: Ask students to brainstorm what "fight or flight" looks like for them. What does it look like for teachers?

Round/popcorn: Ask students what "freeze" looks like for them. What does it look like for teachers? (Use the handout or whiteboard to brainstorm a list)

Activity

Ask people to stand up. Now we're going to practice a skill that can help get our prefrontal cortex back online when we're stressed. It's very simple and it's called belly breathing or "diaphragmatic breathing". First, let's practice to be sure our brains are online. Put one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Now take a deep breath in, filling your stomach with breath first and then your chest. *breath in/breath out - practice three breaths*.

*When we breathe in this way, the diaphragm (the muscle under your lungs) gets pulled down and it's a nerve in your spine called the "Vagus nerve". When the diaphragm hits the Vagus nerve, it sends a message to your brain telling you that you're safe and that your limbic system and amygdala can hand control over your brain back to your prefrontal cortex (*please use visual guide on the attached handout to explain). This can be one skill we practice to help us call down when we know our stress system is activated. For more info on this process and why it works, click here.*



Now let's do a couple of rounds to check-out.

Round: What's one thing you learned today about stress and the brain/body?

Round: What's one thing you'll practice when you get stressed to help you? What's one thing you need form others when you get stressed?

Check-out: What's one thing you'll do the rest of the day that will bring you joy?

Closing (Suggested/optional): Drinking water (need bottles of water for everyone). When we're feeling stressed or talking about stress, our bodies release lots of stress chemicals that can be toxic for our bodies. it's important to exercise or drink water to flush these chemicals out of our bodies. As we close, let's each take a bottle of water and try and finish it by the end of the day so we can flush the stress chemicals out of our bodies (again here is a very useful video that discusses the long-term impacts of stress/trauma).

Continued reading: The Brain and Culturally Responsive Teaching, by Zaretta Hammond

QUICK MORNING CHECK-IN CIRCLE

Opening: “We are stronger together than we are alone.” -Walter Payton
Check-in: What is on your heart today?
Round: What is something you can do to take care of yourself physically/mentally/spiritually in the next few days?
Round: Who is someone who you can count on for support?
Closing: “Lean on me, when you’re not strong. I’ll be your friend. I’ll help you carry on. For, it won’t be long, till I’m gonna need somebody to lean on.” -Bill Withers

REFLECTING ON CHANGE CIRCLE

Opening: “If you can make it through the night, there's a brighter day." -2Pac
Check-in: What's your emoji today?
Round: Is change good or bad? Argue your case.
Round: What is a new routine you have since working from home?
Round: What is the biggest change you see/are experiencing in this time? Does it worry you?
Round: How can this circumstance create change for the better?
Closing: "If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading." - Lao Tzu

WHAT ARE YOU WORRIED ABOUT? CIRCLE

Opening: "Being fully present is the best guarantee for a bright future." - Guy Finley

Check-In Round: Out of a scale of 1-5 (one being the worst and five being the best) how are you feeling today?

Explain: *As many of you know, there has been a lot of unpleasant news that has come to surface these past few weeks. This news can bring up many different feelings. Today we are going to explore what gives us hope and what causes us to worry.*

Round: What gives you hope?

I*nvite participants to find a piece of paper to write or draw the answer to the question: What are you worried about?*

Round: I invite you to share something about your worries from your paper

Round: How can you tell if you or someone else is worried or very stressed?

Round: What is something you can do to take care of yourself physically/mentally/spiritually in the next few days?

Round: Let's talk a little more about self-care. Tell us more about what brings you joy, especially when you are worried?

Check-out: Do you have anything else you would like to say about our circle today?

Closing: "Hope is like soap, use it daily." -unknown

COVID-19 RESOURCE GUIDE

This guide consists of a variety of different resources for people and families who may be impacted by those closing of schools and workplaces. To learn more about the resources listed here, please click on the hyperlinks (underlined in blue)

Food

Map of Meal Sites for Youth and Teens
Map of where students can receive free breakfast and lunch while schools are closed

Solidarity Supply Distro
Free groceries! Mondays at 5:30 at Makeshift Boston

Free Lunch & Dinner
Violence in Boston Inc & Food for the Soul is serving free lunch and dinner. By delivery only. 651 Warren Street.

Mutual Aid East Boston
A resource for people who may need financial assistance

Mutual Aid (JP/Roxbury)
A resource for people who may need financial assistance

Housing

City Life/Vida Urbana
Housing advocacy group that provides support for tenants facing mistreatment and eviction. If you are struggling with a displacement emergency: call (617) 934-5006

Internet

Free Internet from Spectrum
Spectrum is offering free internet to student households

Free hotspots in Boston
Map of free wifi networks in Boston

COVID-19 RESOURCE GUIDE CONTINUED...

Accessibility

Concerned to Go Out

A resource for those who cannot obtain items (groceries/mail/etc.) due to a disability, emotional limitation and/or are immunocompromised

Mutual Aid (JP/Roxbury)

A resource for people who need assistance for things such as grocery delivery, childcare and a variety of other needs

Mutual Aid East Boston

A resource for people who may need assistance with grocery delivery

Resources for Undocumented Immigrants

A series of resources for undocumented immigrants. Resources include health, food, shelter, and more

Mental Health

Coping with Crisis

A resource for how to engage with youth during this time

Emotional Self Care Video

A video about self care and mental health in the midst of COVID-19

Managing Anxiety

A website that includes resources for anxiety and mental health in the midst of COVID-19

Meditation for kids

Age appropriate meditation videos for kids.Sign up required.

COVID-19 RESOURCE GUIDE CONTINUED...

Advocacy/Volunteer Opportunities

Concerned to go out
A volunteer opportunity for those who are healthy and able to deliver items to those in need

Tell Marty Walsh: Rent Freeze Now!
A petition asking Marty Walsh to freeze rent in Boston until workplaces start up again

Mutual Aid (JP/Roxbury)
Volunteer opportunities for people who are open to grocery delivery, physical assistance, childcare and more.

Mutual Aid (Allston)
Volunteer opportunities for people who are open to grocery delivery, physical assistance, childcare and more.

Educational Time Passers

Distance Learning Resources (All Ages) - WGBH Distance Learning Center

Aquarium: Virtual Aquarium Visit

African American Culture: The Museum of African American Culture and History, DC

African American History: Museum of African American History, Boston

Look at the front page of newspapers from around the world: Newseum, DC

World History in Art: The British Museum Virtual Tour: The Museum of the World

European Art: National Gallery of Art: Washington, DC

European Art: Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Modern Art: National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art

Art: Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand: São Paulo, Brazil

Visit the World 3D/Iconic Locations: World Heritage

Movement Breaks: Go Noodle

Astronauts Reading Children's Books in Space: Story Time From Space

ABOUT US:

The Center for Restorative Justice (CRJ) at Suffolk University was founded to foster collaborative partnerships to support a growing social movement to build just and equitable communities and to institutionalize restorative approaches to problem-solving, harm and violations of legal and human rights. Since 1997, the Center has served as a regional, national, and international thought leader in restorative justice policy and practice development.

The Center for Restorative Justice mission is to act as a bridge between the academy, professionals, and communities through public education, training, technical assistance, research, evaluation and scholarship. As a community-engaged center based in the University, the Center fosters restorative practices in building just and equitable schools and communities.

For the most up-to-date training offered by the CRJ **(online)**, please contact us at **crj@suffolk.edu.**

A SPECIAL THANKS TO COLLABORATORS WHO MADE THIS RESOURCE POSSIBLE:

Carolyn Boyes-Watson, Susan Maze-Rothstein, Jon Barry, Ashley Rose, Colette Lima, Martin Henson, Kyrk Morris, Elaine Hackney, Dana Thorsen, JD Fergus, Adina Davidson, Trinity Boston Foundation, Jess Madden-Fuoco, Vanessa Quiñones, Mariam Levy, Margarita Muñiz Academy, Rafael Hernandez School

A SPECIAL THANKS TO PEOPLE WHOSE MATERIALS WE HAVE CITED:

Living Justice Press, Kay Pranis, BATJC, Mia Mingus, Circle Forward, Fania Davis, The Little Book of Race and Restorative Justice

"Challenge yourself to be a healer and activist for justice. Don't feel you have to choose one or the other. Be both. See activism as a form of social healing and interpersonal healing as a form of social justice. Transform and heal yourself as you transform and heal the world."

-Fania Davis, *The Little Book of Race and Restorative Justice*