



HEALING TOGETHER

TIPS FOR ORGANIZING AND FACILITATING MEN'S CIRCLES VIRTUALLY

When our relationships are safe and healthy, so are our children, families, and communities.

Men's circles are spaces where men can discuss healthy manhood and healing, as well as take steps to end partner violence in their family and community.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations may be interested in offering men's circles in a virtual format instead of in-person. While in-person circles are ideal to create a safe space for men to share their truths, a virtual format can still be valuable and safe with the right planning and facilitation.

PLANNING A VIRTUAL CIRCLE

Platform Options and Setup

- **Video conference platforms (w/ free trials):**
 - Zoom: <https://zoom.us/freesignup/>
 - Google Hangouts: <https://gsuite.google.com/products/meet/>
- **Considerations:**
 - Video calls require strong internet bandwidth to handle both audio and video.
 - Check the internet bandwidth requirements for the platform and match it to what your participants most likely have.
 - Consider ease of joining and choose a platform that best fits your participants' needs. Some platforms require a software or app download, and others participants can simply join by going to a link.
 - Review the privacy statement for the platform you choose.
- **Settings:**
 - Minimize the collection of participants' personal information.
 - Utilize host control features, such as: mute participants, assign a co-host, create breakout groups, or screen share.

Facilitation Planning

- **Considerations for facilitators:**
 - Will you need one or two facilitators?
 - Does the facilitator have experience supporting people when they share serious or heavy thoughts?
 - If someone is carrying something really heavy and shares that, how will facilitators respond and support the individual and group?
 - Who can manage the technology, so the facilitators can focus on their role?

A Circle or a Check-in?

Finding balance between offering a process for men to connect and respecting the medicine traditionally offered through a circle can be a challenge. For those who are not experienced in circle facilitation, we recommend "check-in" circles as an opportunity for men to connect in an environment that does not seek to go as deep and potentially open wounds that would benefit from in-person support and healing.

- Plan for around 2 hours for the circle.
- **Invitations:**
 - Is this virtual event open to the public? Or invitation-only? Decide on this before determining how you will send invitations to the circle.
 - Use a variety of methods to invite people: calendar appointment, by text, email, social media (FaceBook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)
 - Clearly communicate who the circle is intended for. While the intention of the circle is to create a space for men to take steps to end partner violence, consider how the circle can welcome people of all genders. We've found that conversations about violence against women are stronger and have greater accountability when men, women, and people of all genders participate.
- **What to bring to the screen:**
 - Consider inviting folks to bring a "sacred object" to share with the circle that symbolizes or holds meaning to them as it relates to intimate partner violence.
 - Encourage participants to have water nearby so they can stay hydrated during the session.
 - Having tissues readily available may be helpful for participants.



- **Plan ahead for follow-up:**

- Participants may want more support after the circle, as they may have feelings that are unresolved or want help processing their thoughts and emotions.
- Are you, or others available for conversations in the hours and days after for those who wish to talk?
- Are there any websites, videos, readings, or other resources you can point people to as a follow-up?

FACILITATION TIPS AND PROCESS SUGGESTIONS:

Technology Setup

- Launch the videoconference 20 minutes early to allow yourself time to troubleshoot any tech issues.
- Do **NOT** record the videoconference
- The technology administrator should be knowledgeable of the host control commands.
- Check for audio inputs if you are using live music or sharing music.

Introduction

The organizer(s) of the circle should introduce themselves, take a moment to honor the space, the land, and thank those who joined, and clearly state the intention and purpose for the gathering. Some facilitators offer participants an opportunity to share a prayer, a song, or reflection.

Important: Suggest that participants dedicate time immediately after the Circle for processing and reflection (45 min) before moving on to another task.

Walk through the different functions and engagement options on the technology platform.

Agree Upon Ground Rules

The facilitator should offer ground rules for the group and ask for additions or modifications.

Potential ground rules:

- Hold all stories shared within the circle confidential.
- Be present and limit distractions.
- Listen with compassion and curiosity.
- Honor each other's unique ways of healing and do not try to advise or fix each other.
- Be comfortable with silence.
- Be mindful of the space we are taking up.

- Participate with their whole selves, including mind, heart, body, and spirit.
- Use "I" statements to speak about your experience and not generalizations.
- Mute your line when you are not speaking.
- If you have a question, or want to speak, use the "raise hand" button or the chat feature.
- Try to make questions and discussion points as concise as possible due to limited time.

If a participant is not abiding by the ground rules, first try to restate the ground rules clearly or consider sending a private chat note. If it is still an issue, have the host mute them or close the call to them (kick them off).

Potential Discussion Questions

Opening

- *What's your name and what brings you to this circle?*
- *How does your sacred object represent who you are in the context of this circle?*
- *What is your intention for this circle?*

Issue

- *What were you taught about women and girls growing up?*
- *In what ways has violence impacted your life or the lives of your loved ones?*
- *How do you think ideas about what it means to be a man influence the use of violence in relationships?*
- *What are some ways people can end violence in their relationship?*
- *What does healthy manhood mean to you?*
- *What is your role in preventing violence from occurring in your home, family, and community?*
- *How do we engage more men in work to end violence against women?*
- *What are you willing to risk to ensure all violence against women stops and we build safe and healthy relationships?*

AFTER THE CIRCLE:

Follow-up and Thank Your Participants

- See how they're doing, what additional support do they need to create safe and healthy relationships?
- What progress have they made regarding action steps?
- Share additional resources (websites, readings, videos, etc) that may be helpful for participants.