



## Roles, Agreements, and Basic Circle Format

### The Circle

*"Circle started around the cook-fires of humanity's ancestors and has accompanied us ever since. We remember this space. When we listen, we speak more thoughtfully. We lean in to shared purpose."*

Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea, *The Circle Way*

The focus of a circle is the center, where the campfire is imagined. This is why each individual reflection is directed to the center of the circle with no expectation that others respond. Circles are not conversational in the traditional sense; they are a series of sharings and listening.

### Role of the Host

Hosts tend to the fire by facilitating the circle process, opening and closing the circle, and maintaining the flow of participation. They set the intention for the circle, invite participants into presence, offer a prompt or probing question that speaks to the intention, and then open heart-sharing. Hosts make sure that each person who wishes to has an opportunity to share, knowing that each contributes to the communal experience.

### Role of the Guardian

Guardians tend to the "temperature" and sense of safety among circle participants. They notice when something is said or felt within the circle that needs an extra moment of recognition, acknowledgment, or the space of a breath to clear the air before moving on. Guardians may make a statement or provide a bell to signal a pause that "resets" the circle.

When circles meet in person, the host and guardian sit opposite each other, so they can observe both sides of the circle. In the virtual landscape, the guardian monitors the screen. For example: If the guardian notices that participants have turned off their video, they may check in to ensure they are OK.

## Role of the bell

The bell signals a pause, which calls for everyone to take a moment. Again, the bell is used as recognition or a chance to “reset” the circle. The bell has a “voice of its own,” and anyone in the circle can ask for it.

A bell may also be used to keep time. For example, the guardian can ring the bell to signal that it’s time to bring someone’s share to a close so everyone has enough time to share.

## Agreements

Our commitment to the agreements is what helps us cultivate an accepting and healing environment where we’re invited to share what’s on our hearts.

The agreements:

- We treat each other with kindness and respect.
- We listen with compassion and curiosity.
- We honor each other’s unique ways to healing and don’t presume to advise, fix, or save each other.
- We hold all stories shared in the circle confidential.
- We trust that each of us has the guidance we need within us, and we rely on the power of silence to access it.

The agreement that is often hardest to keep is not to “presume to advise, fix, or save one another.” This is why each individual reflection is directed to the center of the circle, where the campfire is imagined. We each speak to the center using “I” statements with no expectation of others to respond.

The general framework for a healing circle is simple, yet powerful, involving the following four elements. These elements can be used in informal ways and in different order, as the guidelines are not set in stone.

1. **Welcome:** Includes introductions, reading the agreements, stillness and breath, and check-in (approximately 10 minutes)
2. **Heart sharing:** An invitation to share how participants are right now (approximately 30 minutes)
3. **Harvest:** For further reflection (approximately 15 minutes)
4. **Close:** Check out (approximately five minutes)