



THE LEARNING CIRCLE

Created by ActionPact, the Learning Circle is a simple yet incredibly powerful process that often yields astounding results. The Learning Circle fosters a deep level of sharing and respect and broadens the perspectives of all participants.

Participants: These may include team members, residents, family, and community members, or any combination thereof. The ideal number of circle participants is 10-15. If more are involved, consider suggesting that everyone limit responses to a sentence or two.

Goal: To develop common ground and mutual respect among the diverse population of nursing home residents, care partners, families, management, various departments, and professionals.

RULES FOR THE LEARNING CIRCLE:

- All participants sit in a circle, ideally without tables or other obstructions blocking their view of one another. You may also conduct learning circles virtually or with social distancing.
- One person acts as the facilitator, posing the question or issue. Both facilitator and question may have been determined ahead of time by the team or individual planning the circle. For questions likely to elicit a lot of negative responses, consider shaping the question into two parts. For example: "Share one thing that worries you and one thing that excites you about ..."
- Be aware that emotional topics can be overwhelming in large circles. If the facilitator believes a question may elicit strong feelings of sadness, depression, grief, or anger, limit the number of participants to 8-10 and keep them apprised of the time allotted for the circle; this allows them to emotionally adjust themselves accordingly. Keep the time per person fairly short (30 seconds is good). Remember, you'll be opening the circle up for discussion immediately afterward. Participants should focus on stating their feelings in those first two rounds, rather than providing explanations for those feelings.
- The facilitator poses the question or issue and asks for a volunteer from the circle, who responds with his or her thoughts on the chosen topic. The person sitting to this person's right goes next, and so on, until everyone has spoken on the subject without interruption.
- No cross talk is allowed. The facilitator should make this rule clear at the beginning in order to minimize later interruptions to enforce this rule. Involuntary laughter and simple expressions of empathy need not be quelled. But participants shouldn't insert their thoughts or opinions on an issue until it's their turn to speak.
- People may choose to pass rather than to speak when their time comes. After everyone else in the circle has had a turn, the facilitator then goes back to those who passed and offers them in turn the opportunity to respond. Of course, no one is forced to speak,

though they often do contribute with gentle encouragement. (The facilitator may also need to prompt talkative participants to hold their tongues.)

- The facilitator opens up to general discussion on the topic after everyone has had a chance to speak.

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Possible Learning Circle Questions During COVID-19:

- Regarding our current situation... What's one thing that's going well? What's one thing not going well?
- What's one thing that worries you right now? What's one thing that gives you hope?
- What are you grateful for today?
- What has surprised you during the pandemic?
- How might we help other people during this time?
- How have you found meaning during the challenges of COVID?
- What one thing would you like to learn?
- What's one thing you would change right now if you could?
- Thinking back on our experiences so far, what one thing would you do differently?
- What have you learned from your life experiences that might help others during this challenging time?