

## Facilitator's Guide for Online Listening Circles

Thank you for being willing and interested to facilitate an Online Listening Circle, for the Charter for Compassion Youth Summit! Below you will find all you need to know in preparation for and during the listening circle calls.

### As inspiration....

*"There is a conversation in the room that only these people at this moment can have. Find it" - Adrienne Maree Brown, Principles of Emergent Strategy*

### Why Listening Circles? (Aim)

Listening circles are an excellent way of **connecting with the people around us**. They help us to **create understanding** of people's thoughts, opinions and perspectives. In a Listening Circle participants have **space to express** their feelings and ideas.

Such circles play a crucial role in **building relationships and community**. Hence, effective facilitation of such circles becomes very important. This guide provides basic instructions and tips for facilitating such circles in different groups.

### Role of the Facilitator

- Facilitation of Listening Circles requires confidence, authenticity and improvisation. The facilitator needs to be well prepared as the atmosphere in the circle is greatly influenced by him/her.
- A Co-Facilitator can also be chosen for assistance during the circle.
- A facilitator's role is to guide the process (not dominate or control!), but rather make the experience easy and comfortable for learning and growth to occur.
- It is the facilitator's responsibility to make all the participants feel safe and respected in the circle and make it a "Safe Space."

### PRE - CIRCLE PREPARATIONS

#### Be clear on your **purpose** and aim for the call (see above also)

- The theme and purpose of the circle has to be decided, and appropriate questions and points of discussion have to be finalized. (Optional) You may wish to send this material to the participants before the circle, so that they can give the topic a thought.

#### Organise the **technology**

- Has a Zoom link been created? Has it been sent to participants? Who will open the Zoom Room, and at what time? Make sure you know the answers to all these questions!

- Assign roles - who will be supporting participants with tech concerns? Who will be managing the background technology? (ie. assigning breakout rooms, monitoring any background noise and muting participants accordingly and appropriately) Who will take notes? Do you want to record the call?
- It is also helpful to make sure you have a stable net connection, to avoid any disturbances during the call.

### Plan the **Process**

- It is important to have a rough plan for the process, particularly if you are working with a co-facilitator, make sure you have answers to these questions:
- How will the meeting begin? How do we plan to open the space? How do we plan to close the space? How much time will we give to each element of the call?
- Is it important for everyone on the call to introduce themselves? How will we do this?

**Facilitators Tip:** While having a plan for the process is important, remember that the beauty of a listening circle is letting **what needs to emerge** from the group do exactly that - emerge! So **trust your participants** to bring to the conversation what they want to talk about, and **create enough space** in your programme to be flexible and adaptable to where the group wants to go.

### Some additional Resources:

- Here's a link to a helpful set of questions in preparation for setting up great Zoom calls: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cbhdDn-jm47RMrLVXOvlpW88E4UblRFw/view>
- And a list of Zoom Icebreakers and Best Practices: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1129VnAuWoyt\\_R1kD5zJKmW7tSm-i-gPP3weBZnmVlvi/edit#](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1129VnAuWoyt_R1kD5zJKmW7tSm-i-gPP3weBZnmVlvi/edit#)

## DURING THE LISTENING CIRCLES

### A rough guide / suggested layout to a Listening Circle:

#### 1. Welcome

- Ideally, the Facilitator has to be present/online before the participants, to welcome them and make them feel comfortable when they join.
- Online, participants can sometimes feel nervous joining the Zoom Room, so if you can welcome each person by name as they appear on the screen (wait until their audio is connected)
- Share your excitement or feelings to help the group feel relaxed and comfortable.

#### 2. Opening the Meeting

- Draw everyone's attention to a desire to start the meeting, and open the space in the way you had planned (a poem, a moment of silence...etc)

### 3. Opening Icebreakers (Optional)

- A small warm up game/activity can be performed with the group for fun and developing connections - this can also be incorporated into the check in.

### 4. Check In

**Why** → Check-in's are important so that everyone has a chance to **hear their voice in the space!** This helps to **break the ice**, and will allow participants to feel more confident to share later. It will also give you and the group a sense of where everyone is and how they are feeling.

This activity also helps everyone in the group to **know something about each other**, and it also acts like an Ice Breaker. It has a casual approach which puts people at ease. It also functions as an Introduction of the people in the group. Please note that if a participant does not want to share, it is okay if he/she passes.

**How** →

- Introduce the check in, and tell the group that everyone will have a chance to speak in this as we go around, if they would like to.
- As the facilitator you may wish to invite each person by name to share, or use a metaphorical talking stick which will be passed around, with participants calling on who will go next.
- Invite participants to share the following by way of checking in -
  1. Name.
  2. Place. (Optional)
  3. How are you feeling today? / Tell the group something about yourself.
  4. The speaker says, "IN" or "I am in" after he/she is done sharing. The speaker passes the chance to someone else from the circle after they're checked in.

*Note: This is just a suggestion, and your check in questions can be designed to the purpose of your meeting. The third question for example, can be changed according to the theme/topic of that particular circle.*

**Facilitators Tip:** In the 'check in' make sure you keep track of who has spoken and who needs to speak to make sure no-one is left out.

### 5. Introduce the Aim and Agreements of the Space

- Share with the group aims and intentions of the Listening Circle
- Share the guidelines and agreements for the Listening Circle, and ask the group if they would like to add any or if they agree. (See suggested agreements below)

### 6. Discussion

- After the *Check In* and agreeing on the aims and community agreements of the space, move into your plan for the discussion.
- Depending on the size of the group you may prefer to do break out rooms to help participants have more space to share and connect with each other.

#### **Using Break-Out Rooms:**

- If there are more than 15 members present, the person who is managing the technology will divide participants into break-out rooms. This helps to save time and also ensures that everyone is heard.
- Co facilitators can be selected for every small group to help guide the conversation, but this isn't always necessary.
- If you don't have facilitators in the breakout rooms, make sure your instructions are clear before participants go to the rooms.
- Generally, 3-4 points/questions are enough for a long and meaningful session.

#### **Ideas for managing group sharing:**

- This can happen in two ways:-
  1. If a person in the group wants to share something on the question asked, he/she can raise their hand and then speak when they are given the chance. This can make others feel comfortable, if they wish to just listen and not speak. It sends out a message that everyone doesn't HAVE to speak, and it is completely okay if they just want to listen.
  2. Similar to the *Check In*, the talking stick or the chance can be passed to anyone in the group. Again, people can pass if they do not wish to speak on the topic being discussed. But, this method ensures a fair chance for everyone in the group and can help to save time.  
The Facilitator can decide which method resonates with him/her and choose to follow it.
- The chosen method has to be followed for all the points/questions decided for the session. Once all of them are covered, it is the facilitator's responsibility to give a smooth conclusion to the circle. If the participants are divided into smaller groups, all of them have to be re-united for the concluding activity.

## **7. Conclusion**

- The concluding activity can be a short meditation or a check out. They can be conducted as follows:

#### **A. Meditation:**

1. The facilitator asks the participants to close their eyes. Everyone can hold each other's hands if the meeting is taking place in person.
2. The participants are asked to feel the connection with everyone in the group, and think about all the new things and perspectives they have heard today from them.
3. The facilitators can thank everyone for their valuable presence and contribution in the circle.
4. He/she asks the participants to take a deep breath and slowly open their eyes.

**B. Check Out:**

1. Name.
  2. How was your experience in the circle today? (In short)  
(The *Check Out* follows the same procedure as the *Check In*)
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**POST CIRCLE - FOLLOW UP**

If it feels appropriate, you can encourage the group to stay connected even after the session ends. Decide collectively on how they would like to do this.

**Make sure to invite all participants to join the growing online community and to attend the first event of the Compassion Summit!**

**Debrief with your co-facilitator:** What went well? What could we have done differently? What have we learned about the group? What have we learned about ourselves? Is there any affirmation or appreciation that needs to be given?

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**Listening Circle Community Agreements**

**(This list is a suggestion for collaboration and input!)**

We practice treating each other with respect and kindness  
(Golden/Platinum rule)

We strive to question assumptions and look for new insights

We strive to give each person a fair chance to speak and to not interrupt

We bring a willingness to learn, and seek to grow

We show up with honesty and authenticity - speaking from experience and a space of truth-telling

We aim to listening deeply and compassionately

We practice offering appreciation from the heart

We aim to remain present with each persons sharing

We are invited to show our support when something is said that resonates with our experience (a hand to the heart, heart reactions on Zoom)

We practice moving at the speed of trust - focus on our connections and building the relationships

We practice self-care, taking care of our own needs in the space as well as others.

We respect the need for confidentiality and holding another's story in our hearts.

- Compiled by the Design and Content Team