

Youth-Police Dialog in Circle

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Many young people in our society experience difficult circumstances in their daily lives. Most youth have little opportunity to have thoughtful conversations about those difficulties with adults who listen deeply. Adults are often afraid to open those conversations out of fear of volatile emotions or a sense of helplessness to fix the problems. The result is that adults may seem oblivious to or unconcerned about issues that are urgent for youth.

The circle process is a space for difficult conversations. The structure of the process helps manage strong emotions, offers everyone a chance to speak and promotes deep listening. The circle provides a structure that can support adults in having those difficult conversations with youth. The relationship between police and youth is an issue with great urgency for all of us. Young people are dying because the fault lines are so deep.

Following is a packet of circle plans for possible circles with youth, with police, and with youth/police together. The process is designed for three circles for just youth three circles for just police, and three circles for youth and police together. The circles can be adapted for other circumstances. The circles build intentionally from relationship building to more difficult questions. If changes are made, it will be important to maintain the pattern of relationship building before using the questions that may trigger more emotion or sense of vulnerability.

Two elements of the circle process are critical for these conversations. It is very important to always have the talking piece go in order around the circle, and only the person with the talking piece speaks. The talking piece should not bounce around. Additionally, it is critical to establish values to guide the process for these circles. These circle are intended to be respectful, but they may not always be comfortable.

Youth Circle 1

Purpose: Experience the circle process to understand how it works. Create a space for young people to reflect on their lives.

Materials: talking piece, center, paper plates, markers, art materials (paper, scissors, markers, glue, pipe cleaners, yarn)

- Arrange everyone present in a circle of chairs without tables.
- Welcome everyone to the space of the circle.
- Mindfulness moment

Opening: Invite everyone to take a deep breath and exhale slowly. Invite them to continue breathing deeply while you read the following:

I believe everyone does the best they can. Everyone does what they know. If people act in improper ways it is not because of a flaw in their spirit, but due to lack of information and clarity of incentives. That is why I try hard not to judge others, or tell them what to do. I understand that everyone sees a different piece of the puzzle. Carlos Miceli

Introduce the talking piece – how it works and its meaning

Introduction round: *Who are you? What is a passion in your life?*

Values round: *Think of two values that you think show being a good human being. Please write those on the paper plate at your seat. When the talking piece comes tell us what values you wrote and why they are important to you. After you speak please put your plate with the values in the center of our circle.*

Guidelines: *I will offer several basic guidelines that are intended to help us have a productive conversation. As the talking piece is passed please let us know whether those guidelines are okay with you and if you think we should add any other guidelines.*

- *Speak only when you have the talking piece.*
- *Speak and listen with respect.*
- *It is always okay to pass the talking piece without speaking.*
- *Listen for understanding.*
- *Personal information shared in the circle stays in the circle.*
- *Take care of yourself physically.*

Activity: Read the following slowly with pauses:

“Take several deep breaths and close your eyes if you are comfortable doing so or use a soft focus on the floor. Just follow your breath – you do not need to breathe in any special way. Feel the rhythm of in and out – in and out. Now, imagine a place where you feel completely accepted for who you are. There are no judgments. You do not need any protections. Imagine relaxing in this place where you can most be yourself and where you are not judged. Notice who and what are around you. Notice what you see, feel, hear, smell, and taste. (Allow some time.) Now I invite you to bring your awareness to this room, the floor beneath your feet, the chair you are sitting on. If you have had your eyes closed I invite you to open them now.”

Instruct participants to use the art materials on the table to create something that represents that place where they are completely accepted. This creation could be a poem or rap as well as with the art materials. Allow about 15 minutes and then bring everyone back to the circle.

Round: *I invite you to tell us about what you created, what it represents and then place it in the center before you pass the talking piece.*

Round: *What have you learned about yourself in doing this and what did you notice in hearing others stories?*

Round: *I invite you to tell us about a time you felt really listened to – what was the situation and who was it that really listened to you?*

Round: *I invite you to tell us about a time you listened really deeply to someone – what was the situation and who was it that you listened to so deeply?*

Round: *I invite you to tell us about different parts of your life or different worlds in your life and how they fit together. Does your life feel like there are different worlds you move between? If so, what are those worlds and how is it to move between them?*

Round: *What part of your life is the most difficult right now?*

Round: *What strengths do you have that help you in the difficult parts of your life?*

Round: *Where would you like your life to be like in ten years?*

Closing round: *How has the circle been for you today?*

Closing ceremony: Invite everyone to stand; invite them to stretch as high as they can – reaching for their dreams; invite them to bend down low to the ground – to touch their roots; invite them to stomp their feet alternately – stomping out oppression; invite them to wave their arms back and forth in front of them, swaying their upper body – swaying with the winds of change. Repeat a second time through.

Thank everyone for being part of the circle.

Youth Circle 2

Purpose: Explore community challenges and identify community strengths from perspective of youth.

Materials: talking piece, center, values and guidelines from previous circle, art creations from previous circle, art materials

- Arrange everyone present in a circle of chairs without tables.
- Welcome everyone to the space of the circle.
- Mindfulness moment

Opening: Read the following:

“A wise woman who was traveling in the mountains found a precious stone in a stream. The next day she met another traveler who was hungry, and the wise woman opened her bag to share her food. The hungry traveler saw the precious stone and asked the woman to give it to him. She did so without hesitation. The traveler left, rejoicing in his good fortune. He knew the stone was worth enough to give him security for a lifetime. But a few days later he came back to return the stone to the wise woman. ‘I’ve been thinking,’ he said, ‘I know how valuable the stone is, but I give it back in the hope that you can give me something even more precious.’ ‘Give me what you have within you that enabled you to give me the stone.’”

Review values and guidelines from previous circle

Introduce the talking piece – how it works and its meaning

Check-in round: *I invite you to tell us about a rose, a thorn and a bud in your life at this time* (rose = a good thing, thorn - a difficulty and bud = something hopeful)

Activity: *From the art materials or other forms of creativity (rap, poetry, etc.) please create something that represents your community or neighborhood. Allow about 10 minutes and then bring everyone back to circle.*

Round: *Please share what you created and tell us what it means to you.*

Round: *I invite you to tell us about one very good thing in your community or neighborhood.*

Round: *What else is good in your community or neighborhood?*

Round: *Are there things in your neighborhood that make your life difficult?*

Round: *I invite you to tell us one thing you would like to change in your community or neighborhood.*

Round: *How do you think positive change can happen in a community or neighborhood? Have you seen positive change?*

Round: *Who is a role model for you for making positive change in the neighborhood?*

Closing round: How has the circle been for you today?

Closing ceremony:

Rainstorm activity –The keeper starts by rubbing her hands together, then looking at the person to the left, who when eye contact is made, starts rubbing his hands together. He then looks at the next person and that person starts rubbing and so on until the eye contact comes back to the keeper. Everyone keeps on doing the hand rubbing until their neighbor has looked at them and has ‘sent’ a new action. In this way, the keeper then sends around finger snaps, then thigh slaps, then foot stomps. The sounds are then reversed—thigh slaps, finger snaps, hand rubs, until the keeper has sent around only eye contact and there is eventually silence. Everyone has made rain.

Thank everyone for being part of the circle.

Youth Circle 3

Purpose: Explore youth perspectives on relationships between police and youth.

Materials: talking piece, center, values and guidelines from previous circle, art creations from previous circles

- Arrange everyone present in a circle of chairs without tables.
- Welcome everyone to the space of the circle.
- Mindfulness moment

Opening: Read the following meditation at a relaxed, leisurely pace.

Find a place where you are sitting comfortably. If you feel okay doing so, close your eyes. If you do not want to, then just find a place in front of you where you can gently focus, maybe on the floor or the wall across from where you are sitting.

Now, take four deep breaths. Feel your chest rise and fall as you take the air in and let it out. Each time you breathe in, imagine taking in a calm, peaceful feeling. As you breathe out, let all the stress leave your body. Let your shoulders relax and soften. Let your eyes relax and soften.

Mediation is simply paying attention to your breathing. One place in your body to follow your breathing is your nose. Notice how the air feels as it comes in through your nostrils. Perhaps the air is cooler as you breathe in but slightly warmer as you exhale. Follow the breath completely as you breathe out.

Another place to become aware of your breathing is in your belly. It sometimes helps to gently place your hands across your stomach – almost like you are holding a basketball. Notice how your belly expands or gets bigger as you take a breath in and the air fills your lungs. As you breathe out, you will feel your chest and belly sink – just like letting the air out of a basketball. Let your breath come and go out naturally. You don't have to 'try' and take deep regular breaths. Just let your body's natural breathing rhythm happen. Your job is not to change your breath; it is just to pay attention to what is going on already.

As you meditate, your mind will naturally wander. This is just how the brain works. Each time this happens, your job is simply to bring your attention gently back to your breathing. Your mind might wander many times as you meditate.

When you are ready, slowly open your eyes and bring your awareness back to the room and to all of us sitting here.

Review values and guidelines from previous circles

Introduce the talking piece – how it works and its meaning

Check-in round: *Tell us about something unusual happening in your life recently.*

Round: *Do police have much impact in your life? How often do you think about police?*

Round: *How do you feel when you see a police officer?*

Round: *Do you have a physical reaction in your body when you see a police officer?*

Round: *What is the best interaction you have had with a police officer?*

Round: *What is the worst interaction you have had with a police officer?*

Round: *What is your family's experience with police?*

Round: *What responsibilities do police have for a better relationship with youth?*

Round: *What responsibilities do youth have for a better relationship with police?*

Round: *If you could sit down with a police officer and have a respectful conversation what would you want to say?*

Closing round: *How has the circle been for you today?*

Closing ceremony: Read the following:

We find these joys to be self-evident: That all children are created whole, endowed with innate intelligence, with dignity and wonder, worthy of respect . . . We commit ourselves to peaceful ways and vow to keep from harm or neglect these, our most vulnerable citizens. Raffi

Thank everyone for being part of the circle.

Police Circle 1

Purpose: Experience the circle process to understand how it works. Create a space for reflection about choosing to be a police officer and the experience of being a police officer.

Materials: talking piece, center, paper plates, markers

- Arrange everyone present in a circle of chairs without tables.
- Welcome everyone to the space of the circle.
- Mindfulness moment

Opening: Read the following

One Christmas I hiked down the Grand Canyon, whose bottom lay a vertical mile below the rim. Its walls were layered like a cake, and a foot-high stripe of red or gray rock indicated a million-plus years of erosion by the Colorado River. Think of water – so soft and gentle– gradually carving through the hardest stone to reveal great beauty. Sometimes what seems weakest is actually most powerful.

In the same way, speaking from an open heart can seem so vulnerable yet be the strongest move of all. Naming the truth – in particular the facts of one's experience, which no one can disprove – with simplicity and sincerity, and without contentiousness or blame, has great moral force. You can see the effects writ small and large, from a child telling her parents “I feel bad when you fight” to the profound impact of people describing the atrocities they suffered in Kosovo or Rwanda.

. . . (In fact, when people do communicate in a heartfelt way, it's dignified and compelling, and it usually evokes support and open-heartedness from others. —Rick Hanson

Introduce the talking piece – how it works and its meaning

Introduction Round: *What is your name? Where do you work? Where is home for you?*

Values Round: *Please tell us about a value that guides you in your daily work and why that value is important to you. I invite you to write that value on the paper plate and then place it in the center after you have told us about it.*

Guidelines: *I will offer several basic guidelines that are intended to help us have a productive conversation. As the talking piece is passed please let us know whether those guidelines are okay with you and if you think we should add any other guidelines.*

- *Speak only when you have the talking piece.*
- *Speak and listen with respect.*
- *It is always okay to pass the talking piece without speaking.*

- *Listen for understanding.*
- *Personal information shared in the circle stays in the circle.*
- *Take care of yourself physically.*

Round: *I invite you to tell us your story of becoming a police officer – where that started for you and the path it has taken.*

Round: *I invite you to tell us about a proud moment in your work as a police officer.*

Round: *What surprised you most in the early days of being a police officer?*

Round: *What are your hopes for the impact of your work as a police officer? What would like to accomplish in your work?*

Round: *Who is a role model for you as a police officer? Please share a story about that person that shows why that person is a role model for you.*

Round: *What is an important life lesson you have learned in your work as a police officer?*

Closing round: *How has this circle been for you today?*

Closing ceremony: Read the following:

“You are already that”

Do you know what you are?

You are a manuscript of a divine letter.

You are a mirror reflecting a noble face.

The universe is not outside of you.

Look inside yourself;

Everything that you want,

You are already that.

—Rumi

Thank everyone for being part of the circle.

Police Circle 2

Purpose: Reflect on difficult aspects of the work of police officers and the strengths participants bring to that challenge.

Materials: talking piece, center items, values and guidelines from previous circle

- Arrange everyone present in a circle of chairs without tables.
- Welcome everyone to the space of the circle.
- Mindfulness moment

Opening: Read the following:

I believe that to meet the challenge of our times, human beings will have to develop a greater sense of universal responsibility. Each of us must learn to work not for his or her self, family or nation, but for the benefit of all mankind. Universal responsibility is the real key to human survival . . .

Whether we like it or not, we have been born on this earth as part of one great family. Rich or poor, educated or uneducated, belonging to one nation, ideology or another, ultimately each of us is just a human being like everyone else. Furthermore, each of us has the same right to pursue happiness and avoid suffering. When you recognize that all beings are equal in this respect, you automatically feel empathy and closeness for them. Out of this, in turn, comes a genuine sense of universal responsibility; the wish to actively help others overcome their problems. . . .

The need for a sense of universal responsibility affects every aspect of modern life. Nowadays, significant events in one part of the world eventually affect the entire planet. . . In the context of our new interdependence, considering the interests of others is clearly the best form of self-interest.

—Dalai Lama

Introduce the talking piece – how it works and its meaning

Check-in round: *How are you doing today? I invite you to tell us about a high and a low in your life in the past week.*

Review the values and guidelines established in the last circle. Place them in the center.

Round: *Has anything from our last circle been on your mind since then?*

Round: *What specific skills or strengths do you bring to being a police officer?*

Round: *What is the hardest part of being a police officer?*

Round: *I will pass the talking piece again for you to respond to others or add additional thoughts to what is*

hard about being a police officer.

Round: *What has been the most disappointing aspect of being a police officer?*

Round: *Is there anyone you can talk frankly to about your work? If so, what makes that possible?*

Round: *What gives you the strength to go forward when it is tough?*

Round: *How has being a police officer changed you?*

Round: *I invite you to tell us a story of an experience as a police officer that helped you grow as a person.*

Round: *What are you grateful for in your work?*

Closing round: *How has the circle been for you today?*

Closing ceremony: Invite everyone to take four deep breaths and focus on their breathing while you read the following:

Ultimately, we have just one moral duty; to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves, more and more peace, and to reflect it toward others. And the more peace there is in us, the more peace there will also be in our troubled world.

—Etty Hilesun

Thank everyone for being part of the circle.

Police Circle 3

Purpose: Reflect on the impact of policing on youth and relationships between police and youth.

Materials: talking piece, center items, values and guidelines from previous circle, pens and paper

- Arrange everyone present in a circle of chairs without tables.
- Welcome everyone to the space of the circle.
- Mindfulness moment

Introduce the talking piece – how it works and its meaning

Opening: Pass the talking piece inviting each person to take a deep breath as they hold the talking piece and then in a word or phrase say something they are feeling gratitude for.

Check-in round: *How are you doing? Is there anything particular on your mind that it would be helpful for the circle to know about?*

Review the values and guidelines from previous circles. Place them in the center.

Round: *Have you thought any further about our conversation in the last circle?*

Round: *Using the paper and pen at your seat please write down five words that come to mind when you think of teen-age boys. (Allow time) As the talking piece comes to you I invite you to share the five words you have written down and tell us a bit about that if you wish.*

Round: *Now write down five words that come to mind when you think about teen-age girls. (Allow time) As the talking piece comes around I invite you to share the five words you have written and tell us a bit about that if you wish.*

Round: *What struck you as you listened to your own and others' words about teenagers?*

Round: *What was your experience with police when you were a teenager? I invite you to share a story of an interaction with police as a teenager.*

Round: *How do you think young people would characterize your interaction with them?*

Round: *What do you want young people to understand about you that you think they do not understand?*

Round: *What individuals or groups are the most difficult for you to interact with and to treat fairly?*

Round: *Have you ever been embarrassed to be a police officer or to say that you are a police officer?*

Round: *What teen-age behaviors trigger deep anger, resentment or fear in you?*

Round: *I invite you to share a story of an unexpected positive experience with a youth.*

Round: *What are your wishes for the young people in your personal life?*

Closing round: *How has the circle been for you today?*

Closing ceremony: Read the following:

People won't remember what you did. People won't remember what you said. But people will always remember the way you made them feel.

—Maya Angelou

Thank everyone for being part of the circle.

Police/Youth Circle 1

Purpose: Build relationships and understanding as a basis for future honest conversations to explore the feelings between police and young people in communities of color.

Materials: talking piece, center items, paper plates, markers, guidelines from previous circles, small pieces of colored paper

- Arrange everyone present in a circle of chairs without tables.
- Welcome everyone to the space of the circle.
- Mindfulness moment

Introduce the talking piece – how it works and its meaning

Opening: Invite participants to think of someone for whom they would like to make the world a better place. Ask them to write down this person's name on a piece of paper. Pass the talking piece inviting participants to say the name they wrote down and then to put the name in the center of the circle. When the talking piece returns invite participants to close their eyes or use a soft focus on the floor and picture the person they named. *Breathing deeply and exhaling slowly, imagine that person smiling and happy. (Pause) Feel yourself as a source of support and strength for that person. Feel the strong energy in your body to make the world a good place for that person. Inhale deeply, exhale slowly.* (Repeat this two times.)

Explain anything you have in the center.

Introduction round: *What is your name? Where do you live? What is positive in your life right now?*

Values round: *Please think of one or two values you think are important in how young people and police treat one another and write those down on the paper plate at your seat. When the talking piece comes please tell us the values you wrote and why they are important. Then please put your plate in the center of our circle.*

Offer basic guidelines used in previous circles

Round: *Respect – what does it look like to you when you are being respectful to others and what does it look like when others are being respectful to you?*

Round: *I invite you tell us about the places or situations where you feel you are most respectful – even when you might disagree with someone.*

Round: *I invite you to tell us about a time when you witnessed a police-youth interaction that was respectful.*

Round: *I invite you to tell us what fairness means to you and tell us about a time when you felt fairly treated by an authority figure.*

Round: *I invite you to tell us a story of a time when you messed up as a teenager.*

Round: *I invite you to tell us a story of a time when you were treated unfairly or judged by your appearance.*

Round: *I invite you to tell us about what brings you joy in life.*

Round: *If you have younger brothers or sisters or children what do you hope for in their lives?*

Round: *I invite you to tell us about a person who is a role model or mentor in your life and what it is about that person that is important to you.*

Closing round: *How has the circle been for you today?*

Closing ceremony:

We don't have to engage in grand, heroic actions to participate in the process of change. Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can quietly become a power no government can suppress, a power that can transform the world . . .

And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory.

—Howard Zinn

Thank everyone for being part of the circle.

Police/Youth Circle 2

Purpose: Share youth and police perspectives in a respectful way.

Materials: talking piece, center items, values and guidelines from previous circle, slips of paper with names from previous circle, large children's puzzle with enough pieces for the number of people in the circle

- Arrange everyone present in a circle of chairs without tables.
- Welcome everyone to the space of the circle.
- Mindfulness moment

Opening ceremony: Pass basket with puzzle pieces inviting each person to take a piece – continue until all pieces are distributed (some people may have more than one.) Invite participants to look only at their own piece and imagine what the whole picture might be and then to put their piece upside down under their chair and take several deep breaths

Review values and guidelines from previous circle.

Introduce the talking piece – how it works and its meaning

Check-in round: *I invite you to tell us about a rose, a thorn and a bud in your life at this time (rose = a good thing, thorn - a difficulty and bud = something hopeful)*

Round: *Have you thought any more about anything that came up in our last circle?*

Round: *When you are/were an adolescent what is/was the most frustrating thing on the adult authority figures in your life?*

Round: *For youth in the circle – what do you want the police to understand about you and your life that you think they do not understand?*

For police in the circle- what do you want youth to understand about you and your work as a police officer that you think they do not understand?

Round: *I will pass the talking piece again for further thoughts or to respond to what you heard others say.*

Round: *For police – I invite you to tell us about becoming a police officer – when you first wanted to be a police officer, why, what you hoped for in your work as a police officer.*

For youth – I invite you to tell us what kind of work you would like to do as an adult and why.

Round: *For the youth: What is your first reaction to seeing a police officer? For the adults: When you were an adolescent what was your first reaction to seeing a police officer? Tell us why you had that reaction.*

Round: *What do you think is the biggest problem between youth and police officers?*

Round: *Can you see any hopeful possibilities in police-youth relationships? If so, what are those hopeful possibilities?*

Closing round: *How has the circle been for you today?*

Closing ceremony: Clear a space in the center of the circle and invite the participants to bring their piece(s) to the center and put the puzzle together collectively. When the puzzle is complete ask everyone to stand in a circle. Pass a handshake around the circle by each person, one by one, turning to the person to their left and shaking hands.

Thank everyone for being part of the circle.

Police/Youth Circle 3

Purpose: Engage in frank and respectful dialog about the deep divisions common between police and youth in communities of color in order to reduce the alienation of young people and build stronger communities.

Materials: talking piece, center items, values and guidelines from previous circle, names on pieces of paper from first circle, ball of yarn or cord

- Arrange everyone present in a circle of chairs without tables.
- Welcome everyone to the space of the circle.
- Mindfulness moment

Opening: *I invite everyone to take a deep breath and exhale slowly. You may close your eyes if you are comfortable or use a soft focus on the floor. As you inhale think of pulling in good energy to all parts of your body. As you exhale think of releasing anxiety or tension as much as possible. Just continue to follow your breath – in and out – in and out – in and out. Follow your breath – you do not need to breathe in any special way – just notice the breath coming in and going out. Scan your body and notice how each part of your body feels. Again notice your breath. Now bring your attention to the chair you are sitting on, the floor beneath your feet. If you have had your eyes closed I invite you to open them and notice who is in the room with you.*

Review values and guidelines from previous circles.

Introduce the talking piece – how it works and its meaning

Check-in round: *For check-in today I invite you to choose one of our values that you want to work especially hard on bringing to our circle today.*

Round: *Have you thought any more about anything that came up in our last circle?*

Round: *What is the hardest part of being a police officer or of being a youth in this community?*

Round: *I invite you to tell us more about what is really hard about your role in the community as a youth or police officer.*

Round: *What is the most painful experience you have had or witnessed between police and youth?*

Round: *How are you impacted by the difficult relationships between youth and police? What has been the hardest part for you around this relationship?*

Round: *What is your greatest fear concerning this deep division between police and youth in the*

community?

Round: *What is crying out in you that wants to be heard concerning this issue?*

Round: *What else do you want to say about youth and police?*

Round: *Why does it matter? Why is it important to change these relationships?*

Round: *Where can you find hope regarding police-youth relations?*

Round: *What could you do to bridge the divide between youth and police officers?*

Closing round: *What would you like to say in closing this circle?*

Closing ceremony: Stand in a circle. One person holds the ball of yarn or cord. He/she hangs on to the yarn at the end and makes a specific commitment to making the world safer for the person he/she named on the paper in the center (of first police-youth circle). He/she tosses the ball of yarn to someone else in the circle. Each person makes his/her commitment, holds onto the yarn where they are and tosses the ball to someone else in the circle who has not yet had a turn. The activity continues until everyone in the circle has made a commitment. The keeper invites everyone to pull on their point and reflects on the strength of the web and the importance of every point of support.

Thank everyone for coming to the circle.