

Let's Circle Up

Character Descriptions: Copy, Cut, and Hand Out

SCENARIO #1

Mr. Henry—I'm seventy-two and own a neighborhood grocery store that has been in my family and has served the community over forty years. I watched Mitch grow up and witnessed his fall over the years. A similar pattern seems to run through the lives of most of the neighborhood kids I've watched grow up. Lately my wife has been urging me to retire and sell the store. Since the robbery, I've been seriously considering her advice.

Dan—I'm thirty-nine and Mitch's father. At age eighteen, I left Mitch's mother soon after his birth. I've been in and out of prison all of Mitch's life and most of mine, largely because of cocaine and alcohol addiction. I am currently on parole, have been clean for three years, and am holding down a steady job in construction. I try to talk to Mitch but he doesn't want to hear anything I have to say. News of his latest arrest hit me hard. I figured bailing him out is the least I could do for a son I failed to raise. Maybe this will bring us together.

Tommy—I am thirty-eight and have lived in this community all my life. I'm feeling hopeless by the recent increase in violence around me. I've organized voter registration drives and elderly outreach programs. Now it's time to do something about the harm that is tearing apart our community. In an attempt to initiate productive dialogue on the issue, I've called a community meeting and have invited all concerned citizens.

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Officer Harvey—I grew up in this neighborhood and have been a police officer for eighteen years. I joined the force to make a difference in the community, to put away bad guys, but my efforts sometimes seem pointless. For everyone I arrest, two or three fill the void. The robbery of Mr. Henry’s store is personal to me. I’ve known him all of my life. I also know Mitch and his father Dan, who I went to school with and arrested a couple times over the years.

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Rep. Cole Nelson—I’m forty-two and in my fourth term as State Representative of the 23rd District where Mr. Henry’s store is located. I grew up in this community and my office is two blocks from Mr. Henry’s store. Mr. Henry has been a father figure to me and many others in the community. Although I voted for various “tough on crime” policies in the past, it’s becoming more and more clear to me that those policies are failing—and might even be causing more harm than good. I’m rethinking how we do justice and I’m willing to introduce some new ideas to my colleagues in the legislature.

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Troy—I’m fifty-five and a hardworking, law abiding, lifelong member of this community. I’m feeling helpless and outraged because I’ve watched the neighborhood I love deteriorate over the years. Hearing about Mr. Henry’s robbery is the last straw for me. Something has to happen. I have grandchildren who deserve to grow up in a safe environment. What we need are tougher laws. We need to lock up the criminals and throw away the key!

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Reverend Peters—I’ve been a pastor at New Jerusalem Church for over thirty-three years. Mr. Henry is one of my closest friends and has been a faithful member of our church all of his life. Mitch and his mother are also members of the church. Mitch stopped attending services with his mother years ago. She remains a dedicated, active member and comes to me often for spiritual advice, especially concerning Mitch and his recent troubles.

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Big Lou—I am sixty-two and own a sandwich shop a block from Mr. Henry’s store. Groups of kids hang in front of my shop selling drugs, drinking, and smoking day and night. I hear gunshots regularly. I’ve asked them many times to take it somewhere else, to no effect. The police chase them away occasionally and make an arrest here and there, but within hours the front of my shop is crowded again. After hearing about what happened to Mr. Henry, I’m concerned I might be next. So now I carry a firearm at all times.

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Carl—I’m twenty-five and work at the community recreation center. The kids who come to the center are mostly poor and come from unstable homes. Although it’s rewarding to give back, the stories I hear every day from the kids overwhelm me. No child should have to live so hopeless and powerless. I have kids of my own and wish there was more I could do to improve the quality of life in our community.

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Margie—I’m thirty and married with three kids. I have two sons, ten and eight, and a daughter who’s three. My eight-year-old son and I were in Mr. Henry’s store during the recent hold-up. We ducked for cover in one of the aisles, praying that we wouldn’t be seen or shot. It lasted minutes, but seemed like forever. Having to go with the police to the precinct to give a statement was almost as traumatizing as the robbery itself. I now fear leaving the house and my son is having nightmares. My husband wants to retaliate but I’m begging him not to.

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Rob—I’m thirty-two and married with three kids. A job at a nearby battery plant brought me to this area about thirteen years ago. My wife of twelve years and eight-year-old son were in Mr. Henry’s store during the robbery. They ducked for cover in one of the aisles the whole time, hoping not to get shot. My wife is traumatized and now fears leaving the house. My son is still shaken up and has nightmares. I did my fair share of harm as a kid, but now I’m a family man. Situations like this make me want to go back to the old me, though.

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Alicia—I’m a twenty-nine-year-old mother of three, a boy and two girls ages fourteen, eleven, and eight. I was fifteen when I had my oldest, Damond. Their father has been in and out of prison for the last seven years. This time he’s been in for three months on a five-to-ten-year sentence for selling drugs. I’m concerned that our son is following his footsteps. His grades have been slipping, he’s coming home late, and I’ve even smelled weed on him. It’s hard being on my own. I’ve been looking for a job for the last month. Meanwhile, I’m supporting the kids by doing hair out of our house.

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Jake Henry, Jr.—I’m Mr. Henry’s son and have four children of my own, two are teen boys. They were getting into trouble so we recently moved away from the area. We return regularly to visit my parents. I’m furious about what happened to my dad. It’s the second time in five years, but this time he’s been physically harmed. It’s better for Mitch to stay in prison. I don’t know if I’ll be able to control myself if I see him.

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Tone—At age sixteen, I was arrested for a string of armed robberies, certified as an adult, and sentenced to fifteen-to-thirty years in prison. I am now thirty-two and just came home. While in prison, I changed my thinking, and now I want to redeem myself to the community I once terrorized. I’m trying to make it, but I’m finding it hard to overcome the many obstacles that come with transitioning from prison to the outside world. So far no one has been willing to hire me.

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DJ Smalls—I host the afternoon slot at the city’s hottest local hip-hop and R&B station. The issue that has everyone buzzing of late is the explosion in drugs and senseless violence on our streets. Is music to blame? Is society to blame? Are parents to blame? The debate is heated, and there are no clear answers.

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Nate—I am twenty-two and was a high school classmate and friend of Mitch. We played sports together and partied on weekends but went separate ways when he began drinking and getting high daily. Soon after that, he dropped out and I didn’t see him until a week ago when he approached my car at a stoplight and begged me for money. I was shocked to see how low he had fallen.

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Barb—I am fifty-four and have been the crossing guard on 6th and Tucker for eighteen years. I enjoy my job and was devastated to hear about the robbery at Mr. Henry's store a block away, especially because I crossed Mitch for years when he was a boy in school. It broke my heart when I started to see him hanging on the corners and getting high. I've seen this happen with too many of the kids I used to cross.

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Mrs. Rodriguez—I am forty-three and have been teaching at Northern Middle School for fifteen years. I see so many kids start to lose their way during their early teen years. With so many problems these kids face at home and on the streets, there seems to be little I can do. I try my best and it never seems to be enough. But I keep trying.

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Al—I am forty-two and drive a school bus between the north side of the city and the high school. I pick up the students in front of one of the local elementary schools a block from Mr. Henry's store at 7:30 am and drop them back off at around 3:15 pm on weekdays. I see a lot of hanging and drug dealing in the neighborhoods and worry every time I drop off the kids.

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Rachel—I'm forty-eight and a nurse at St. Francis Hospital. Our trauma unit is busy every day with people who are injured by violence. They seem to be getting younger and younger. Recently there's been an increase in overdoses as well. A fifteen-year-old just died from heroin last week. I see firsthand what drugs and violence bring and am concerned for my own children. Something has to change.