

Intervention 2: The Talking Circle

“Indigenous cultures from time immemorial, came together and sat in circle. Always at the centre of the circle was a small fire - offering warmth, a repellent for insects and prey and a source to share food. From this instinctive process - finding ones place in the circle, community developed.” - Unkown



Objective(s):

The Talking Circle is a healing process that allows a group to come together in a quiet, respectful manner for the purpose of teaching, learning and sharing. For the purpose of this intervention, the Talking Circle is used The Talking Circle is a healing process that allows the youth and those affected by his/her fire to share their thoughts and feelings about the incident as a way to:

- understand and learn from one another
- teach the youth and others in the circle to communicate more effectively
- educate the youth about the consequences his/her fire and the impact their fire has had on others
- provide the youth and others in the circle an opportunity to relax, heal from the incident

Materials Needed:

- 'talking staff' – choose a meaningful object or create one from wood, paint, leather, or fur to use as a 'talking staff' that will identify the person whose turn it is to talk

Instructions:

1. Invite those affected by the youth's decision to set a fire to a Talking Circle. If possible, include the youth's parents, siblings, and grandparents. Others that may be invited include tribal elder(s), youth's counselor/teacher/school administrator, victim (property owner of where items or property burned), and emergency personnel who responded to the fire (i.e. fire department, police officer).
2. Place the 'talking staff' in the center of the circle and explain the rules of the Talking Circle (provided). Explain the reason for the Talking Circle is to meet the objectives identified above.
3. Once you've gone over the rules, pick up the 'talking staff' and begin the talking circle.



Rules of the Talking Circle

1. The person holding the object is the only one with the right to speak, even if s/he takes a long time to think about what to say and there's a pause in the conversation.
2. If somebody else in the circle wants to comment on what's being said, those comments are limited to noises which can be made through the nose, usually just a soft grunt of agreement. Negative comments are strongly discouraged or outright banned. Otherwise, each person must wait her or his turn.
3. The focus of this Talking Circle is on the fire incident but no one is limited, in any way, to discussing what is on their mind or commenting on anything anyone has said. The person with the 'talking staff' may talk about whatever is in their heart or on their mind. A person is absolutely free to say whatever is in their heart, without limitation, and in the safe and comfortable knowledge that nobody will criticize it or interrupt it.
4. If a person talks overlong, people around the circle begin to discreetly cough. "Overlong" is usually defined according to the situation, but could be three minutes to ten minutes, depending on the size of the group, the topic, and how long the group wants to spend together. If you have the object and notice that others are coughing, it's time to pass it along. (Use of a timer or gong would be highly inappropriate for a Talking Circle, as it's an artificial imposition on the organic process of the Circle.)
5. The circle can go around several times or until everybody has had at least one opportunity to talk. After everyone has had the chance to talk, the 'talking staff' can be passed around once again to give everyone the feeling that they have left nothing unsaid.
6. This is a healing circle with the goal of helping the youth to understand the impact of their decision. It is not acceptable to shame or belittle anyone in the talking circle or to use scare tactics or threats.
7. What is said in the circle must stay in the circle. It is disrespectful to discuss or repeat anything that was shared during the circle after the circle concludes.