**When Circles Go Bad**

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| **If this....** | **Try this….** |
| It takes too long for students to get into circle | * Practice getting in and out of circle before actually conducting a circle * Figure out possible alternate furniture or room arrangement * Use a time and build in an incentive for meeting time expectation * Have students sit on top of desks in a circle * Consider holding the circle outside or in an alternate location * Ask the students to come up with suggestions |
| The circle process takes to long | * You can do a check-in circle in a few minutes with 32 students. You can ask for a one or two word check-in around how students are feeling or what they did over the weekend * Time spent up front building relationships and coming up with shared values and norms will save time dealing with problem behavior on the back end |
| No one is talking or English is a second language for my students and they are hesitant to speak | * Use alternate forms of expression such as drawing, freestyle poetry, journaling, movement, poses, or activities with no words * It is ok not to share as long as everyone participates by being present in the circle * Use a partner share icebreaker or a concentric circle so students have an opportunity to share and engage without speaking to the whole class * Try to set a fun community building tone before engaging in more serious topics * Specifically acknowledge and praise students for bravery and stepping out of their comfort zone * Allow students to brainstorm topics they would like to discuss or are interesting to them * Start with low level questions that don’t require a great deal of vulnerability |
| There are specific behaviors that derail the circle | * Revisit the shared guidelines or values that were created together * Identify the function or need behind the behavior rather than focusing on the behavior itself * Provide leadership opportunities for students misbehaving, allowing them to think of questions and facilitating the circle * Have 1:1 conversations with students to identify root causes of behavior * Consult with colleagues for ideas * Allow students to express how they are being impacted by the misbehavior in the circle |
| One or a few students do all the talking | * Have students bring their own talking piece and allow them to talk about why it is important to them * Consider giving “natural leaders” jobs within the circle and planning * Engage in private conversations with quiet students asking if there is anything you can do to make the circle feel safe and allow them to share more fully |
| Students make rude or mean facial expressions | * Clarify unacceptable non-verbal behavior as not following circle guidelines * Acknowledge respectful non-verbal behaviors * Allow students to identify and reflect on what unacceptable non-verbal behaviors look like |
| Students talk about private family issues, abuse, suicide, drugs or alcohol | * When starting a circle, clarify with students what types of things you are required to report * Clarify the limits of confidentiality - anything that threatens the safety of self or others * Consult with administrators, counselors or other mental health professionals for guidance * Follow up with necessary personnel on anything that you are required to report. This could include escorting a student to the appropriate space |
| The circle just doesn’t seem to go well overall | * Consult with colleagues or coaches for support and ideas * Observe a colleague facilitate a circle * Reach out to the CCT department for someone to model, co-facilitate or support planning a circle * Ask students to identify ways to improve the circle |