

RESTORATIVE CIRCLES

Decision-making Circles

TIME REQUIRED

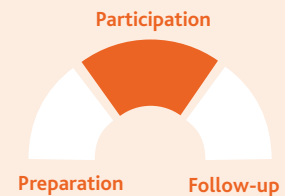
50 minutes minimum

FORMAT

Small groups, whole-group discussion

OBJECTIVES

- To explore and develop an understanding of Decision-making Circles.
- To practise and critique the effectiveness of a Decision-making Circle.
- To consider ways of using Decision-making Circles across the school community.

PROCESS PHASE COVERED**COMMENT: WAYS OF USING DECISION-MAKING CIRCLES**

The purpose of a Decision-making Circle is specifically to reach consensus. The decision making is generally facilitated by a staff member, but the responsibility for the decision rests with all the participants in the group. When they share in the decision making in this way, participants are more likely to engage with and adopt more effective ways of working together.

Some preparatory work is often needed before a Decision-making Circle. For example, a Community-building or Dialogue Circle may be used first to build trust among a class and to explore the values, expectations for learning, and expectations for behaviour in the class. The class might then divide into several small groups, each of which uses a Decision-making Circle to establish the rules for maintaining the values and expectations agreed on.

Decision-making Circles can also be used to identify which members of a group or class are suitable for particular roles and responsibilities (for example, as student representatives, house leaders, and leaders of cultural and sports groups).

Decision-making Circles can include low-risk prompting questions such as:

- What actions could we take to strengthen the ways that we learn? What support do we need to do this?
- What are two things group members can do to support each other to learn in the classroom more effectively?
- What are two things staff and adults within the school can do to support us to learn more effectively?
- What are some of the challenges to learning in our group? How can we work through them?

More low-risk prompts can be found in Appendix 1.

ACTIVITY**Small groups of five**

Decide on who will be the facilitator to keep your group on track, summarise the key decisions, and record how the group reached each solution.

Use a Dialogue Circle to discuss how serious each issue listed on the resource sheet **Finding solutions with Decision-making Circles** is for your school.

Then select three of the significant issues. Discuss your school's current approaches to them and identify one or two new solutions for them.

When you have worked through the issues, reflect on the questions on the resource sheet and record the main points from your discussion for sharing with the whole group.

Whole-group discussion

Listen as each group shares the main points of their reflection. What responses emerge most strongly? Discuss the suggested possibilities for using Decision-making Circles and record them on large sheets of paper. It will be particularly useful to note the comments from groups with members who have experience of Decision-making Circles. Others may wish to arrange a time with them to observe how this type of circle is facilitated in the classroom.

Use a Dialogue Circle to discuss how serious each of the following issues is for your school. Then select three of the significant issues. Discuss your school's current approaches to them and identify one or two new solutions for them. When you have worked through the issues, reflect on the following questions:

- Were you able to agree on solutions for the issues you selected?
- What was it like to work towards a consensus using a Decision-making Circle?
- What are the possibilities for using Decision-making Circles in your faculty or department (for example, to address differing approaches to learning and behaviour)?
- How useful would students find this type of circle when making decisions on expected behaviour and learning in the school?

ISSUES

Use of I-pods and cellphones in class

Disruptive behaviour

Smoking

Drugs and alcohol at school

Incorrect uniform

Truancy

Swearing and inappropriate language

Eating in class

Physical assault

Damage to school property

Lateness to class

ISSUE	NEW SOLUTIONS	NOTES FROM DISCUSSION
1.		
2.		
3.		