

6 UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT/HEALING CIRCLES

RESTORATIVE CIRCLES

Conflict/Healing Circles

TIME REQUIRED

60 minutes minimum

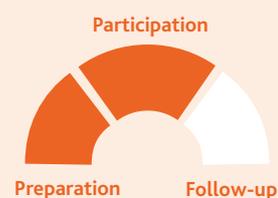
FORMAT

Small groups, whole-group discussion

OBJECTIVES

- To explore and deepen understanding of the Conflict/Healing Circle.
- To practise preparing for and facilitating a Conflict/Healing Circle.
- To give feedback on one another's practice.
- To develop strategies for using Conflict/Healing Circles.

PROCESS PHASE COVERED



COMMENT: MANAGING LOW-LEVEL CONFLICT IN THE CLASSROOM

A Conflict/Healing Circle is a facilitated process involving those who have caused low-level harm, those who have been harmed, and those there to support their peers. It is used as the next step when a Restorative Conversation has not been successful in addressing the low-level behaviour. It provides those who have caused the harm with an opportunity to repair it and supports them to make positive changes to their behaviour. This type of circle is usually facilitated by a classroom teacher. However, if the classroom teacher is the person harmed, another staff member, such as the head of department or dean, will be required to facilitate the circle.

The fundamental difference between a Conflict/Healing Circle and a Restorative Conference (see Kete Book Four) is that the circle process allows the classroom teacher to explore and repair low-level harm, whereas a Restorative Conference requires a trained facilitator. For example, if two students have been covertly picking on another student in the class and one-on-one Restorative Conversations with the students have not changed their behaviour, the next step can be to prepare all three students for a Conflict/Healing Circle. The teacher may choose not to include whānau or the dean at this stage, but has the opportunity to alert those who have harmed that if the behaviour continues, whānau and the dean will become involved.

A Conflict/Healing Circle requires the facilitator (teacher) to follow the three phases of the restorative process (preparation, participation, and follow-up). In the preparation phase, before running the circle the facilitator interviews each participant using a restorative script. This allows the facilitator to prepare them for the process and to gauge what the dynamics may be like within the circle and the extent of the harm caused.

The Conflict/Healing Circle uses the five steps of a restorative script (see page 36). Because the circle involves both those who have harmed and those who have been harmed, its script includes questions to explore the harm from both points of view.

Student behaviours that may require a Conflict/Healing Circle include:

- one or more students are singling out or excluding another in the class (sometimes in covert, hard-to-pinpoint ways)
- an item goes missing from a student's bag, and so one student is accusing another of theft
- some students are intimidating others (for example, by standing in the doorway and not allowing others to enter the classroom)
- some students are using culturally inappropriate language during class
- an issue between a small group of friends in the class is affecting their learning.

Conflict/Healing Circles can also be used to resolve issues among adult members of the school community – for example, by heads of department for an issue among department staff, by cultural group leaders for an issue among whānau, or by the principal for an issue among staff or cultural groups.

ACTIVITY

Small groups (8–10)

Run a Conflict/Healing Circle using the scenario on the resource sheet **Restorative script for Conflict/Healing Circles**. Five members of the group role-play the characters from the scenario; the rest observe the process.

The facilitator (the 'teacher') prepares the 'students' separately for the circle by using the restorative script (page 36) to explore the harm caused and who has been affected. Points to cover include:

- Do the students who have caused harm understand the effects of their behaviour, and are they prepared to put things right?
- What are some of the expected outcomes from the circle, for both those who have been harmed and those who are responsible for causing the harm?
- Is the student who has been harmed comfortable about taking part in a circle? What do they need to feel safe?
- What do those who have been harmed want to see as a result of the circle?

The others in the group observe the facilitator's questioning and listening skills during preparation.

Once everything is prepared the facilitator begins the circle, using the restorative script and with the objective of reaching an agreement to put things right with the student harmed and to change the other two students' behaviour in the future.

In the first four steps (Tell the story, Explore the harm, Repair the harm, Reach an agreement), the order of speaking should begin with the students who have caused the harm, followed by the student who has been harmed. In the fifth step (Plan follow up), the participants are free to contribute in any order.

At the end of the role play, the observers give their feedback:

- What was challenging?
- What worked well?
- What would be some of the barriers to facilitating a successful Conflict/Healing Circle?
- What might happen if you didn't use the script in your preparation for this type of circle?

Whole-group discussion

Listen as each small group feeds back their observations and comments on their role play. Then discuss other possible ways of using Conflict/Healing Circles in the school community and share past experiences (if any) of this type of circle.

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RESOURCE SHEET: RESTORATIVE SCRIPT FOR CONFLICT/HEALING CIRCLES

Run a Conflict/Healing Circle using the scenario below. Five members of your group role-play the characters; the rest observe the process. The facilitator (the 'teacher') should prepare the 'students' separately for the circle by using the restorative script (page 36) to explore the harm caused and who has been affected by the behaviour. The others in the group observe the facilitator's questioning and listening skills during preparation.

Once everything is prepared, the facilitator should begin the circle with the objective of reaching an agreement to put things right with the student harmed and to change the other two students' behaviour in the future. At the end of the role play, the observers give their feedback.

SCENARIO

The form teacher of a year 10 class overhears some furtive, culturally insensitive comments made by two female students to a male student in the classroom. Seeing the same behaviour in the following two form classes, the form teacher tries to stop it by standing close by, making eye contact, and shaking her head to show disapproval. After discussing the behaviour with a colleague, she decides to address it with the two girls.

The next day she engages each of the girls in a Restorative Conversation. She feels that they listen and agree to stop the behaviour. However, a week later she notices the same thing happening again. The form teacher talks to the year level dean about the incidents. They decide that the form teacher will hold a Conflict/Healing Circle to address the behaviour and put a stop to it. The dean offers to support this process by participating in the circle.

SCRIPT QUESTIONS FOR THOSE WHO HAVE HARMED	SCRIPT QUESTIONS FOR THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN HARMED
<p>Tell the story</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What happened? • Tell me your story. • What was happening when you became involved? • What were you thinking about when you did that? 	<p>Tell the story</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What happened? • Tell me your story. • What did you think when this was happening?
<p>Explore the harm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who do you think has been affected? In what ways? • Who else may have been affected by your behaviour? • What do you think it must have been like for them? 	<p>Explore the harm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have things affected you? • What has the class been like for you since? • What's been the worst thing about this for you?
<p>Repair the harm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What needs to happen to put things right again? • What do you think _____ needs to hear from you right now? • Is there anything else you can think of that might help? 	<p>Repair the harm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would make things better for you right now? • What do you think needs to happen to put things right?
<p>Reach an agreement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If this happens again, what will you do differently? • What do you need from me/us to support you? • What will the plan for the future include? • If this happens again, what will we do about it? 	<p>Reach an agreement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would you like to see happen as a result of the circle? • What would make you feel safe in class?
<p>Plan follow-up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When would be a good time to check in with you and see how you're going? • What will happen if our agreed outcomes haven't been reached? <p><i>Adapted from Thorsborne and Vinegrad, 2004</i></p>	<p>Plan follow-up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When would be a good time to check in with you and see how you're going? <p><i>Adapted from Hansberry and Thorsborne, 2008</i></p>