

Listening Circles



- **What is a Listening Circle**

- An intentional space where we gather to build relation, connection, trust and practice being seen, heard, seeing and hearing
- An agenda-less space. Yes, we will have prompts to guide our space, but there is no aim aside from being present with each other and seeing what emerges

- **How can this approach impact cooperative culture**

- Being and facilitating these spaces can build the muscle of listening deeply, of remembering all the context that can make up each persons life, getting comfortable with space/silence to allow for emergent sharing, improvisation to be able to adapt to what arises or what is needed by the space
- Having more experiences or points of contact with individuals can build a larger repertoire of moments and stories you have of this person. This allows for a fuller picture of who they are and can mitigate future conflicts and support cooperation.
- Learning context of peers and building compassion
- Tuning into intuition - this practice can help define and refine the skill of trusting your own intuition, or improvisation, of life
- Feeling heard and seen by others can be a powerful moment that can encourage the feeling of belonging. This can support in the other ways you will gather because you will have a stronger foundation
- Expresses and models the values of Cooperatives and the Solidarity economy by bringing the whole person into the space

- **Guidelines**

- This is a voluntary space.
- There may be silence and long pauses. This may be uncomfortable for some, and is part of the practice
- Know the capacity of your container and set the expectations at the start

Circle Design



- **Set up**

- Everyone sits at eye level and in a circle
- Leave one seat open for all that could not be here physically and that we want in the space with us

- **Each listening circle has an Open a Middle and a Close**

- This is to indicate that you are intentionally entering a space, experiencing the space, then intentionally closing the space.
- Open: You are intentionally entering the space. This may look like lighting a candle, sharing who, or what issue, the 'open seat' is for, reading a poem etc. This is a brief practice that marks the beginning.
- Middle: you open with a 'warm up' prompt to allow folx to begin acquainting themselves to the space and warming up their vocal chords/practice sharing. Then you will move to the main prompt. Then you will have a round of 'I heard' which is when participants will share something they heard or that resonated with them.
- Close: You want to return the energy of the circle back into the circle and leave it within the circle. Expression like this can have a certain weight to it and we can leave some of this weight in the circle. This can be an activity that is mildly energetic such as a movement, or all clapping unanimously, or taking turns mimicking dance moves of each participant, etc.

- **Talking pieces**

- Participants are welcome to bring an item that is meaningful to them to place at the center of the circle. Talking pieces will be used for participants to grab and hold as they speak and can be returned to the center or passed, depending on what the facilitator suggests, once they are done speaking. The participants are offering a piece of their life to the circle

Circle Design



- **Prompts are very intentionally designed.**

- Prompts must evoke a story, using ‘tell me about a time when’ or ‘tell a story of when’, for example.
- Prompts need to allow for a breadth of possible sharing. From very light, to an openness, allowing participants to share as they feel called to. For example: tell me of a time when you missed an opportunity, or ceased one - in this case one could share of a job they could have obtained or of ‘the one that got away’.
- Prompts should take into consideration that everyone has had different experiences. Always be inclusive. For example: tell me about a time when you received appreciation, or did not receive appreciation. This allows for someone who feels they have never received appreciation to also share and feel as they belong.

- **Responding to Prompts:**

- Round - means the talking piece is passed to one direction for each participant, silence or passing is always an option.
- Spontaneous - who ever is called to speak will grab a piece from the center and return it once they are done.
- All responses to prompts can be verbal, silence, movement, singing - any form of expression

Principles of Sharing and Listening



- **I language**
 - Speak from your experience, not ‘some people feel’ but ‘I feel’
- **Try to stay in touch with the weight of each word you speak**
 - If you find yourself ‘rambling’ or ahead of yourself, pause
- **Keep it pithy/speak the essence**
- **Active listening**
 - Notice what sensations you feel as expressions occur
 - Notice the sensation of the emotion that may arise, not so much the content/thoughts of that emotion or the story you tell
 - If distracted, return
- **Suspend thoughts**
 - While others are sharing you might be remembering when that has happened to you, or be wanting to respond or console, preparing what you will share etc. Try to suspend those thoughts and return to listening
 - Speak spontaneously, not pre planned
- **Try not to respond to what others have said**
 - this is not a conversation, it is a listening circle
- **Share at the pace that your body allows**
 - No need to share anything outwardly to be a part of this.
 - Be mindful of what feels like your threshold in this particular gathering