

# Community-Building Circles & COVID

Community-building circles are an essential element of restorative practices. In this resource, you will find recommendations for facilitating those circles in a virtual or in-person and physically distant setting. Additionally, we have compiled multiple examples and frameworks for circles to discuss COVID and its impact.

## COVID Facilitation Considerations:

### In-Person & Physically Distant Circles

- Participants should space themselves 6 feet apart, either by referencing markings on the floor or by using “airplane arms” to keep a safe distance.
- A talking piece might be replaced by a pantomimed one (or a bottle of hand sanitizer) that participants pass from one person to the next.
- If it becomes hard to hear folks due to masks, distance, or the noises of the great outdoors, consider announcing the prompt collectively and then allowing participants to respond in pods of four.
- Circles could also be adapted into walking prompts, where participants pair up and walk a designated lap with the expectation that they have both answered by the time they return to their starting place.

### Virtual Circles

- Post the questions in the chat or on a shared screen.
- Responses can be shared visually (e.g., “hold up a 1 to 5 on your hand”), in the chat, and out loud as the facilitator calls on participants in a designated order.
- You might also post the order (e.g., class roster) in the chat. FlipGrid is a great tool for asynchronous responses.
- Be intentional about how the chat function is used during circle time. We recommend requesting participants only use the chat function during a circle if that is how they are responding to the prompt. Additional commentary, even if validating the responses of other participants, can often be distracting and take away from the essential element of circle that everyone has the opportunity to share their voice.

### Hybrid Circles

- Have all participants log into devices so you are only running one virtual circle
- Use virtual breakout rooms and small groups (pods of four by where they sit) to respond to the prompt

- This can be a built in “first step” to a group assignment
- For one circle: put the order in the chat for all students, with virtual mixed in to in person
- Train a virtual student leader and an in-person student leader (or have Allison do it) so you are just monitoring the two circles
- Provide a prompt at the beginning of class, have students share in the chat or write on a sticky note on their desk. Pepper in responses throughout your time together.
- Use digital tools, such as Jamboard, FlipGrid, Padlet and more

## Circles for Processing COVID

As we return from summer break, we know all stakeholders in our community are both still experiencing and processing many emotions related to COVID. This year may also take many forms -- remote, hybrid, socially distant in-person -- and may transition rapidly between those modes of learning. The circles below are designed to inspire how you might process those emotions, transitions, and impacts related to COVID with staff and students.

### Circle for Processing COVID Impacts

**Purpose:** To provide space for reflecting on how COVID has impacted our lives

Opening (reading, quote, meditation, etc)

Icebreaker and/or Check In Round

**Round 1:** How are you feeling about learning \_\_\_(in person, remotely, hybrid)\_\_\_ this year? Hold up a fist (not so great) to 5 (this is awesome!) and take a minute to see how your peers are feeling.

**Round 2:** What’s one experience you have missed out on because of COVID closures?

**Round 3:** What is one thing that you are enjoying or has been positive about this experience?

**Round 4:** What’s something you have learned about yourself through this experience?

Closing (reading, quote, song, thumb-o-meter check out, etc)

Additional Prompts:

These prompts could also be incorporated into the circle or used as stand-alone circle questions.

- What is one thing that you expect to like about what school will look like this year?
- What is one thing that makes you nervous about what school will look like this year?

- What is one thing about our society that you think will be forever changed by COVID?
- What is one thing people might be more appreciative of following COVID?
- What has been your favorite way to spend down time during COVID closures?
- What is one invention that would have been helpful during COVID times?
- What is one superpower that would have been helpful during COVID times?

**Worth Noting:** *Some students have experienced additional trauma as a result of COVID and its far-reaching impact. These circles prompts are designed to allow space for them to still access community-building circles, but it is also important to allow students to “pass” so they can self-manage what they are willing to share. Additionally, these prompts are designed so that we do not inadvertently message to all students that they have been traumatized by this pandemic, as many have not. Connect with your school’s mental health providers for more support for students who experienced trauma as a result of COVID.*

## Circle for Talking about Health Precautions

**Purpose:** To reflect on the new health precautions

Opening (reading, quote, meditation, etc)

Icebreaker and/or Check In Round

Review the health precautions that will be in place in this space.

**Round 1:** On a scale of zero to five, how are you feeling about the health precautions we need to take this year? Hold up a fist (this is going to be hard) to 5 (easy peasy!) and take a minute to see how your peers are feeling.

**Round 2:** What questions do you have about these health precautions? (Note that you may not be able to answer those questions, but that it is helpful to know what people are thinking. Track questions you can answer and report back at another time.)

**Round 3:** What’s one thing you are worried might get in the way of you following the guidelines?

**Round 4:** What’s one guideline you know will be easiest for you to follow? Share a strategy you’ll be using to uphold that health precaution.

Closing (reading, quote, song, thumb-o-meter check out, etc)

\*This circle was adapted from *Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community*, by Carolyn Boyes-Watson & Kay Prannis.

## Circle for Checking our Progress on New School Rules

**Purpose:** To assess how we are doing on following health precautions and identify steps to do better

Opening (reading, quote, meditation, etc)

Icebreaker and/or Check In Round

**Round 1:** What grade would you give our class in following this rule (e.g., social distancing or wearing masks)?

**Round 2:** Why do you think this rule was put in place?

**Round 3:** What is the hardest thing about following this rule?

**Round 4:** What would help you personally comply with this rule?

**Round 5:** Are there things you can do to help others comply with this rule?

Closing (reading, quote, song, thumb-o-meter check out, etc)

\*This circle was adapted from *Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community*, by Carolyn Boyes-Watson & Kay Prannis.

## Circle for Talking about our COVID Comfort Levels

**Purpose:** To provide space for reflecting on comfort levels and fears related to COVID and health precautions

Opening (reading, quote, meditation, etc)

Icebreaker and/or Check In Round

**Round 1:** On a scale of zero to five, how would you describe your comfort level with being at school (or in large groups of people)? Hold up a fist (I'm very worried all the time) to 5 (this is awesome!) and take a minute to see how your peers are feeling.

**Round 2:** What's one thing that has made you nervous or apprehensive as you've been around more people?

**Round 3:** What's one thing that has put your mind at ease as you've been around more people?

**Round 4:** What's something you can do to be more mindful of how others are feeling about COVID and their wellbeing?

Closing (reading, quote, song, thumb-o-meter check out, etc)

## Circle to Process Transitions between Remote, Hybrid, and In-Person

**Purpose:** To process transitions between different modes of learning

Opening (reading, quote, meditation, etc)

Icebreaker and/or Check In Round

**Round 1:** How are you feeling about moving into \_\_\_(in person, remotely, hybrid)\_\_\_ learning? Hold up a fist (not so great) to 5 (this is going to be awesome!) and take a minute to see how your peers are feeling.

**Round 2:** What is one thing you will miss about our current form of learning?

**Round 3:** What is one thing that you worry about as we move into our new form of learning?

**Round 4:** What is one thing you are looking forward to with our new form of learning?

**Round 5:** Is there anything adults could do to make this transition easier for you?

Closing (reading, quote, song, thumb-o-meter check out, etc)