

TALKING CIRCLE

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By Joe Stone, Ph.D.

The traditional “talking circle” is a very old way of bringing Native people of all ages together in a quiet, respectful manner for the purpose of teaching, listening, learning, and sharing. When approached in a certain way, the circle can be a very powerful means of touching or bringing some degree of healing to the mind, the heart, the body, or the spirit. One could call it a very effective form of Native group therapy.

The circle leader, teacher, or facilitator begins by passing around sweetgrass, cedar, or sage so that the participants may “smudge” themselves. Our ancestors have taught us that these sacred herbs have a purifying effect upon our total being. As smoke from the herbs surrounds us, we are better able to connect on many levels, including with others within the circle, with ourselves, and with what we are about to experience.

The group leader (or a volunteer) then opens the circle with a prayer. The circle is now in the hands of the Great Spirit, Grandfather, God, or whatever one chooses to call the Higher Power. Next, the leader might have the people shake hands to acknowledge each other. It is a good thing to do, especially if this is a new circle of people.

The group leader then begins to talk to the people without interruption, talking not to one person, but to all who are present.

All are expected to listen respectfully until the speaker is finished. All who sit within the circle will have an opportunity to express themselves if they choose, or they may simply listen, but all who speak will be given the same respect – they will be listened to.

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The group leader, and most likely others within the circle, may bring eagle feathers, stones, or other sacred objects that are passed around the circle and shared. We believe these sacred things to be helpers in furthering the connections to spirit and to other higher selves. They help us listen; they aid in our learning.

Within the sacred circle we are encouraged to speak not only from the mind, but also from the heart; we are free to share our innermost feelings if we choose. Regardless of whether one brings a traditional teaching or a personal problem to the circle, all persons are valued, respected, and listened to. There is an Indian belief of: right time/right place/right people/hearing right things; we rely on that belief within the circle.

When all have spoken, anyone may request that this be a “closed circle”, meaning that all that has been said and all the identities of the participants shall be confidential. If no one requests a closed circle, all may freely share what they have learned.

The circle is closed with a prayer. So – in this old way we have come together again to teach, to learn, to touch each other’s spirit; that we may find strength to live in these two worlds; that our people may live.

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