

## Racial Healing Circles: Creating the Conditions for Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation

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**After a healing circle, is there follow-up that facilitators do to support and give more tools to folks to uphold their new consciousness of the shared human experience?**

- When the racial healing circle experience is integrated as a core strategy in programming work, there is an explicit conversation about how to make the circle experience “habitual” so that those engaging in the work are able to heal and strengthen their relationships- be reminded to re-connect with their humanity, renew their spirits and refill their energy. This means that racial healing circle experiences are consistently built into TRHT gatherings and events before visioning, strategy or implementation discussions. In between racial healing circle experiences, individuals/groups/teams may use a couple of simple practices such as using the Touchstones or taking just 5-10 minutes to set their intentions in their day to day activities/meetings or interactions with each other. How we do something is equally as important as what we do. Dr. Christopher often reminds us that so long as we do what we do from a place of love, the rest of the other work will fall into place.

**I am wondering about the recruitment strategy to those with whom one has credibility and relationship when they do NOT belong to the "same group." My question is coming from my experience that has shown me it is sometimes not prudent to assume similarity with someone who happens to be in one's group. In situations with low levels of a particular dimension of diversity, might this strategy place bounds on recruitment numbers?**

- Racial healing circles work best when the participants come from diverse backgrounds and are not necessarily members of the so-called “choir.” After all, we’re trying to reach out to those who are not consciously aware of the racial hierarchy and who may be skeptical of the process. Often, the best recruiter is one from a similar background. Of course, as you wisely note, it is not always prudent to assume similarity with someone who happens to be in one’s group. So whatever your situation, the priority is to try to recruit a diverse group of participants in whatever way works best for you.

**Can you talk about what a 3-5 hour healing circle would look like?**

- Whether it’s a 90-minute introductory racial healing circle process or a 3-5 hour fuller circle experience, the structure of a racial healing circle does not change. The key components remain the same:
  - (1) welcome and introductions;
  - (2) Group Agreements (using Touchstones);
  - (3) deeper re-introductory exercise(s) in pairs;
  - (4) share responses to a deep prompt or reflection question in dyads and in full circle;

- (5) share group reflection or affirmation of each person's story; and
- (6) circle synthesis and closing.

The primary difference is in managing how many people share their personal stories in the full circle and how much time must be set aside for the group reflection or affirmation of the stories. We believe that the best experiences emerge when groups are between 16-24 people, with times ranging from 3-5 hours.

**What are some of the best evaluation practices and/or metrics for racial healing circles?**

- Because of the nature of the process, qualitative rather than quantitative metrics probably are more appropriate. This could involve before and after surveys, written comments from participants, or perhaps evidence of changed behaviors. One possible quantitative measure might be the number of people who want to participate in the racial healing circle, the demographics of the participants (age, gender identity or racial/ethnic composition), number of requests for additional racial healing circles or how many additional participants may be recruited by those who have participated in a racial healing circle.

**I was honored to attend one of your sessions last summer at the American Library Association conference in Chicago. Is there a schedule available which can be shared so someone could possibly attend a session?**

- I think this is a great question and we will raise it with the AAC&U and the ALA and see if or how this type of information might be made available. We know that the Kellogg Foundation is planning to put together a website on racial healing circles. Perhaps that is the place to list all the racial healing circle events for all their grantees and the TRHT sub-grantees so people in the different areas might be able to participate, if appropriate.
- *FROM ALA:* There will be four 90-minute sessions offered during the 2018 ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans. More information is available on the [Ticketed Events page](#) and may be located by searching for the session title ("Beyond the Racial Stalemate").
- *FROM ALA:* During the [Joint Conference of Librarians of Color](#) (JCLC), there will be two 2-hour sessions offered on Wednesday, September 26, 2018 in Albuquerque, NM. Information will be added later this summer to the JCLC website.

**If we are asking people at the end to share what inspired them/resonated with them when listening to other stories, what do we do (the group or facilitators) when/if/about micro aggressions that might occur?**

- This is an excellent question, and there is no easy answer. Here is where co-facilitators can make a huge difference. They must be alert to potential micro-aggressions and may wish to discuss in advance how they will handle such situations in an affirming manner. One possibility is to refer the group back to the Touchstones and the importance of identifying assumptions, suspending judgment, not trying to fix anyone, turning to wonder, etc. Another possibility may be to remind the group of our common humanity. Sometimes someone else in the group may speak up. One of the purposes of co-facilitation is for one of the co-facilitators to be monitoring the atmosphere in the room while the other co-facilitator is actually facilitating. The key, however,

is to remain affirming and to try to keep people in the heart space.

**Just to clarify, the healing circle should be done more than once with the same group? And (follow-up), could you offer may be 1 or 2 other samples of deep reflection prompts?**

Some other deep reflection questions we've used:

- Share a story about a time in your life when you wanted/needed to feel seen, heard, or understood—and you were. What did this allow you to do and/or be?
- Share a story about a moment when you felt affirmed in your culture. How did that moment make you feel and what impact did this have on you or others?
- Think back to a specific time, either professionally or personally, when you felt more alive, most connected to your heart or your values. What was powerful about the experience? What was the outcome or impact of this experience for you personally?
- Share a personal story about a time when you overcame, challenged, changed and/or stood up to what you felt was a false narrative about yourself or your identity group. How did that moment influence or change your life and/or the lives of others?
- Share a personal story about a healing experience, what was powerful about it and what did this enable you to do or to be?
- When people hear your name and see your face, what do they think/say about who you are? Give two very specific examples and talk about how is this different or the same from what you think about yourself.

**How do you keep your emotions in check (crying anger, etc.) when people share their stories so you can facilitate in an engaging way but keep the process going?**

- Emotional reactions are to be expected, and there is nothing wrong with tears. This is another reason why having co-facilitators is so important. If one co-facilitator is overcome with emotion, the other can gently step in to help. Also, having tissues on hand for the entire group is a good idea. If the emotion is negative, such as anger, you can remind the group of the Touchstones and of our common humanity.

**In your opinion, do dyads yield a better result than triads in the relationship building process of a group of people?**

- The circle process, especially the deep heart story sharing with the prompt or reflection question, is designed for a dyad and it works best as a dyad. The objective is to have a deep and focused bi-lateral exchange of heart stories. From time to time, we've had to permit a set of triads when a dyad partner does not come. Triads in those circumstances work but are not ideal. A three-way conversation disrupts the intimacy and one-on-one flow, and it is susceptible to a "group" discussion as opposed to one speaker and one deep listener. We have used triads in the deeper, 2-minute re-introductory exercises and this seems to work better, especially if you have enough questions for every person to get their own question and you have a mechanism to move people around the room without losing time in transitioning people.

**Do you have suggestions about how to help participants sustain the experience when they leave the circles? In the course of busy schedules, we do not want this to become "just another experience". Are there tangible take-aways that you suggest, i.e. keepsakes, bookmarks with some centering phrase etc. I am wondering if we need to employ ways to remind participants of the experience.**

- This is an excellent idea. We will explore the possibility of something like bookmarks, wallet cards, key chain items, or other items with a centering phrase or some other reminder of our common humanity. The circle opening and the closing are also excellent opportunities to do this. Some examples we've seen:
- Ask participants to write a reflection capturing their experience (on a post card or index card) and address it to themselves- one week later, the facilitator or event organizers will mail it to the participants.
- Ask the participants to tie blessing strings on each other's wrists, instruct them to wear it home and when they take it off, to place it somewhere that they will see every day and be reminded of the experience.
- Ask participants to take their Touchstones home and to spend one week reading them every day— perhaps choosing a different Touchstone to focus on each day (we've used for workplace groups)
- Ask participants to commit to start their day-to-day meetings by using/reading the Touchstones
- Ask participants to commit to regular racial healing circles, whether that is monthly, quarterly, etc.

**The issue I see in higher education is not typically the hierarchy of human values myth. It is more focused on people not understanding people who are different. Generally people would want to get to know others better if they had the right venue for doing so--and that is the strength I see in healing circles. Am I being too Pollyanna?**

- Actually, not understanding people who are different—and assuming they are different because they look different—may be evidence of unconscious acceptance of the myth of a hierarchy of human value. We all have our stories that reflect our common humanity, and racial healing circles help people to understand that. It is not at all being a Pollyanna to expect that racial healing circles can be a valuable tool for bridging divisions, helping people to overcome their fear of the so-called other, and enabling people to see themselves in one another.

**Are there specific challenges about which we should be aware when curating racial healing circles for children and youth?**

- The racial healing circle process was designed for engagement with adults and so it is very important to approach the work with children and youth with care and much preparation. For one thing, the prompt/reflection questions should be carefully crafted to tap into the experiences of young people. The prompt or reflection questions we use for adults will not work on young people. It is also very important to make the intentions and objectives relevant to the young people or else they will not engage in the process. It is a tall order to expect young people, especially young people of color, to sit around in a circle and to “spill” unless the purpose is relevant to them—so context or contextualizing the reason for the need for a racial

healing circle experience will be very important. Equally as important, if and when young people share, co-facilitators and event organizers need to be prepared and be comfortable with some form of intervention if the sharing reveals a need for service. Children, once you touch them, don't have the kinds of filters that adults may have. Co-facilitators need to be aware of these dynamics.

**Do you typically include a privacy or confidentiality note in your healing circles?**

- We state upfront that participation is by invitation. We use the Touchstones as a group agreement and we emphasize the confidential nature of the sharing. The Touchstones represent the floor and not the ceiling so if people feel like they need more in terms of privacy or confidentiality, we encourage and invite folks to add to the group agreement. Finally, we like to emphasize that we encourage people to bend but not break, and to share only what they feel they can carry. We also remind participants at the start of the group sharing time that your story is your story and no matter how insignificant you think your story may be, there is someone in the circle waiting to hear and to connect to your story, so don't pre-judge the weight or depth of people's life experiences.