



# Circles for Reconciliation Gathering Theme

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## FIRST GATHERING Getting to Know You (In-Person Circles)

### Documents and Materials to Bring (Facilitator's checklist)

- Opening protocol
- Seven Sacred Teachings of the Anishinaabe
- 6 copies of the closing protocol
- Talking stick
- Smudging tobacco, etc., or invocation (If desired)
- Refreshments
- Kleenex
- Small pads of paper and pencils for participants (if necessary)
- Other items unique to your group
- Materials on the Theme of the meeting

### 1. Opening Guideline (*Any Facilitator*)

#### Introducing the Circle Format

##### ***Indigenous Facilitator:***

Welcome! Our meetings are usually an hour and thirty minutes, unless we agree to extend them. In that way those who wish to leave can do so without feeling they are disrupting anything. If others want to stay and discuss a bit longer, that is possible (*as long as the facility does not have to be locked up*). We ask you to be very conscious of your sharing time. We will be meeting many times, you will have many opportunities to share your thoughts and feelings.

There are five parts to a circle:

- Opening statement (Facilitator reads)
- The Seven Sacred Teachings (To be read aloud by one of the participants)
- Presentation of a theme (12 to 15 minutes)
- Passing the talking stick (45 to 50 minutes)
- Closing protocol (To be read aloud by participants)

## 2. Setting the Tone for Our Circle

### *Non-Indigenous Facilitator:*

In this first gathering we want to establish a climate of “mutual recognition and mutual respect” to use the words of the Truth and Reconciliation Report. No matter what your background and life experiences we want to respect you, by listening to you and by recognizing the value of you as a person and what you have to bring to our gathering. So it is important that we agree on this **respect for one another at the outset**.

When a participant has the talking stick, it is important that we all listen and not interrupt.

Over the course of our gatherings we will tackle a number of issues. There are 27 themes we have addressed so far.

The first four weeks we will address the following themes:

- Week 1) Today, getting to know you
- Week 2) Misconceptions about Indigenous People
- Week 3) What is Reconciliation
- Week 4) Intergenerational Trauma

For the following weeks, as a group we will then choose the themes we want to address. For example:

- The history and impact of residential schools.
- The meaning of land for Indigenous people.
- The sixties scoop and its ongoing reality.
- The justice system and Indigenous people.
- Métis Identity and Nationhood.
- The Pass System
- Etc.

### *Indigenous Facilitator:*

We urge you to plan to **attend all meetings**. The rhythm of the circle is disrupted if people come and go. Sometimes it is unavoidable but we ask you to recognize the value of coming regularly.

- We encourage you to go on the website. It changes virtually every week.
- When we decide the theme for the following week, you can read it on the website before coming to the meeting if you wish. Also there are all kinds of resources on our website, including short and long videos.
- Does **anyone need transportation** either to come or to get home?

We have already held over 1200 individual circle meetings. As we begin our circle, we would like to share with you some of the feedback we have received from our participants. While most of the feedback has been very positive, there have been several concerns raised.

### ***Non-Indigenous Facilitator:***

Non-Indigenous participants have expressed frustration when some Indigenous participants have not continued in the group after the first few meetings. We believe that we have all agreed to be part of this circle for ten weeks unless an important family, health or work situation arises, so we are hoping that our circle will remain full.

### ***Indigenous Facilitator:***

Indigenous participants also have some concerns. Some feel that too much burden has been placed upon them to share difficult moments of their past, while the non-Indigenous participants have not felt that same obligation. Some Indigenous people have not even shared some of their past with members of their own family, so why should they share them with strangers. Obviously there is absolutely no obligation to share, but when people do, we need to respect each other's stories. Also, we cannot expect Indigenous participants to share if the non-Indigenous partners are not also willing to share.

Another concern Indigenous people have expressed is in the form of a question: "Why should we have to educate settlers about things they should have learnt in school or elsewhere? It is not our job to educate them". The answer to that question is both simple and complicated. The simple answer is that settlers did not learn it in school due to the legacy of colonization. But now there are plenty of books, TV programs and media reports that are telling the stories. Non-Indigenous participants cannot be blamed if they did not learn it in school, but there is no longer an excuse to be ignorant.

Furthermore, a circle is not only about hearing the tragedies of the past, a circle is an opportunity to hear the wisdom, the resilience, the creativity of Indigenous people and cultures.

***Non-Indigenous Facilitator:***

In brief, Indigenous participants do not have all the responsibility to inform our circle group. While the personal stories of the Indigenous participants can be a very important part of this education of everyone in the circle, all of us in the circle have some responsibility to educate ourselves, to learn more, even beyond our circle. Participating in a ten-week circle does not make us experts in Indigenous cultures. The resource section of our website has excellent information which would be a good starting point to educate ourselves beyond participating in this circle.

There is another dimension, however: How are we able to respond and share when other participants have shared a very difficult experience? Obviously there is no simple answer. We need to be honest with ourselves and empathetic with others. We all have some personal history that we could share each week. How does my history relate (or not) to Indigenous people in Canada? Have I or my ancestors directly or indirectly benefited from the oppression of Indigenous people? As much as possible, it is important that we have sharing from all members of our circle.

***Indigenous Facilitator:***

There is another reason we encourage Indigenous participants to be partners in our circles. This is the most important reason. We do not want Indigenous children and grandchildren to experience the racism, the ignorance of their culture that has been part of our Canadian history. We all have a responsibility to help end that with our participation. We hope you will grace us with your presence and participation. We need you!

***Non-Indigenous Facilitator:***

Our circles give us a wonderful opportunity to meet one another, to get to know one another, to hear the stories of one another and to “build and maintain that mutual respect” that the TRC states is the foundation of reconciliation. When we “honour the truth,” that is, know our past history, understand that many challenges remain today, and care about one another we can and must bring about change.

Our sharing can lead us to honour and to live by the treaties that our ancestors signed on our behalf.

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Is there anything any of you wish to add that will help us create a very healthy sharing time? We don't have to have rules as such, but it would be helpful if we agreed on how we will conduct ourselves.

For example:

1. It is very important that we all recognize that the feelings of an individual are neither right nor wrong. They are real and need to be respected.
2. We ask you to be conscious of your sharing time so that everyone has a chance to participate. Because we have a number of gatherings you will have ample opportunity to share your ideas and feelings.
3. Turn off cell phones.
4. Be on time for meetings.

Are there any other suggestions about setting the tone for our meetings?

### **3. Today's Theme: Getting to Know You**

***Facilitator:***

We are calling this first session, a “getting to know you” session, where each of us can tell a bit about ourselves.

*(Facilitators can google “Icebreakers for groups” and be free to choose the one best suited for their group. There are many choices. Here is the most common icebreaker for Getting to Know You:*

### **4. Sharing**

***Facilitator:***

I suggest that we go around the group and in about 3-4 minutes each, share the following: a) Our name, b) where are you from, c) our cultural identity/background, d) why we decided to take part in these gatherings, e) what we hope to bring to our life from these gatherings. Let me begin...

*(One facilitator begins by taking about 3 minutes to share so that participants have a sense of the expectations. The facilitator then passes the talking stick, adding:)*

At this point we are going to pass the talking stick around the circle. You are free to pass if you wish. Think about 3 to 4 minutes for sharing. Remember that you have a number of meetings upcoming when you will also have time to share.

## 5. Closing Protocol

***Facilitator:***

Each of our meetings ends with a closing protocol.

Five of the participants will now read one sentence from the Closing and all will join the 6<sup>th</sup> person in reading the last sentence of the closing.