

Common Challenges in Circle Or... When Good Circles Go Bad

<i>If this...</i>	<i>Then try this...</i>
It takes too long for students to get in a circle...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice getting in and out of circle before holding an actual talking circle • Figure out possible alternate furniture or room arrangements • Use a timer and build in an incentive for meeting the time expectation • Have students sit on top of desks in a circle • Consider holding the circle outside, or another location • Ask the students to come up with suggestions
The circle process takes too long...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can do a check in circle in a few minutes with 32 students. You could ask for a one or two word check in on how their weekend was or how they are feeling at the moment • Time spent up front building relationships and coming up with shared values and guidelines will save time in the long run dealing with problem behavior
No one is talking, or English may be a second language for my students, and they are hesitant to speak...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use alternative methods of expression such as drawing, freestyle poetry, journaling, movement, activities with no words, etc. • It is ok not to share as long as everyone participates by being present in circle • Use a partner-share icebreaker or concentric circles so every student can have a chance to talk without speaking to the whole class • Try to set a fun and community-building tone, gradually getting to more serious content over time • Build in incentives for participation • Ask students to brainstorm why they or others aren't talking (could be written, anonymous, etc.) and some suggestions to encourage it • Ask questions students are more likely to want to answer like "What is it you want adults to understand about youth?"
There are specific misbehaviors that de-rail the circle...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisit the shared guidelines and values you created together • Try to determine the possible <i>function of each misbehavior</i> and focus on that rather than the behavior itself • Engage the students that are misbehaving as circle keepers or ask them to think of questions for the circle

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have 1:1 restorative conversations at another time with the students that are misbehaving to get to the root of the issue. • Consult with colleagues for ideas
<p>One or a few students do all the talking...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have students make or bring their own talking pieces that are meaningful to them or their culture and ask them to speak about it in circle • Consider giving the “natural leaders” jobs circle such as being a circle keeper or making a centerpiece for the circle • In private conversations with more quiet students, ask if there is something they need in order to participate more fully
<p>Students make rude or mean facial expressions...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify unacceptable non-verbal behaviors as not following the shared guidelines • Acknowledge kind respectful non-verbal behaviors
<p>Students talk about private family issues, abuse, suicide, drugs or alcohol...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you start facilitating circle be very clear as to what types of issues you are mandated to report. Students will appreciate the clarity • Be sure to clearly explain the limit of confidentiality is anything related to danger to self or others • Consult with your Principal and mental health support staff about how to pre-plan for this possibility and discuss in an age-appropriate way • Follow-up with administration, school based mental health counselor or school nurse <i>immediately</i> and make a mandated report as necessary. You may even need to personally walk the student to a school mental health professional
<p>The circle just doesn't seem to go well overall...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult with colleagues for ideas, suggestions or coaching • Observe another colleague's circle, or ask them to observe yours • Have a colleague co-facilitate a class circle with you • Ask students what they thought about the circle, and how it could be made better