



AUTHENTIC CONNECTION

# Sharing Circle 101

## Module Summary

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- Opening and Closing a Circle

## What is a Sharing Circle?

A sharing circle is when a group of people come together to speak honestly and openly about a particular subject. It could simply be sharing how you feel in the moment, or it might be around a specific theme, such as; relationships, sex, a political event, shame, jealousy, menstruation, whatever.

There are basic rules and guidelines to a sharing circle, which enable the participants of the group to feel safe and relaxed enough to really open up and be vulnerable.

We want to get to this point, because this is where the magic is, and where healing can occur.

It's really important to go through the rules and guidelines of a sharing circle at the beginning of any sharing with a new group of people. You might want to have these to hand when you begin holding space, so that you don't need to stress about forgetting one.

Here goes.

## Basic Rules and Guidelines

1. **Confidentiality:** Whatever is shared in this circle, stays in this circle. You are welcome to speak to people outside of this space about your own experiences, or something that you shared, but not to share any details from anybody else's sharing, even if you think those people will never meet. This rule is of utmost importance, and gives people the freedom to say what is really alive for them.
2. **No interrupting:** When one person is sharing, everyone else just listens. At this point you should emphasise just how powerful the simple action of witnessing is. There's no need to say anything, your presence is enough.
3. **We don't give advice:** After someone has finished sharing we don't give advice or offer reflections, unless that person has specifically asked for it. We also don't start talking about how we had a similar experience, and oh my god I know exactly what that's like.
4. **Speak from I statements:** Try not to use the phrase 'you know when you....' instead be courageous and say, 'when I do such and such, I feel this way'. Never assume that you know someone else's experience, or that they have the same experience as you. Using the word 'you' can also be a way of deflecting attention away from owning the truth of your experience.
5. **Everything is welcome:** Whatever emotions are present are welcome, and whatever you feel is real. Your experience is valid, and if that comes out in tears, or you feel rage bubbling up, that's ok. This is a container to hold all of that.
6. **No phones!**
7. **Nobody has to share:** If you don't feel like talking in the moment you can pass onto the next person, and we can always come back to you at the end if you change your mind.

## Top Tips for Sharing Circles

1. **Timing:** Think about how long the sharing circle will be and how many people there are. If you have 10 people in your circle, and you want to do first a round of check ins, and then another round of deeper shares, you might want to time people's shares so that they don't overrun. Letting everyone know at the beginning how long they have is important so people have a sense of how long they should talk for.
2. **Get yourself a bell:** I like to use a singing bell to signify when someone's share time is up. Let them know they can finish their sentence. Obviously if someone is right in the middle of something super deep, you may wish to let them overrun a little bit. Use your own judgement.
3. **Breathing:** It can be lush to start a sharing circle with 3 breaths together to tune in. I will often invite everyone to take a breath together if something particularly heavy has been shared. I'll also encourage people to acknowledge how that feels in their body.

4. **Talking stick:** It can be handy in some contexts, particular if it's a group totally new to the concept of a sharing circle, to have a stick or other object that signifies who the speaker is. Only the person holding the stick is allowed to speak.
5. **Rounds or popcorn:** Decide if you'll go round in a circle or 'popcorn style'.

## Vulnerability

1. It can be super vulnerable speaking into a group of people who solely have their attention on you. Most people aren't used to the format of a sharing circle, and are usually struggling to get their voices heard over the ruckus at the dinner table
2. Sharing first is usually a good way to model the level of vulnerability that you want to bring to the space. Remember that the group is constantly looking to you for their cues. When I'm having a terrible day, or struggling with something big, are often the times when the sharing circles are most profound, because I'm showing up, and not hiding any of it. That gives others permission to do the same.

## Check Ins

Check ins are the sharing circle staple in almost every workshop that I run. They are super powerful for a number of reasons.

1. Most people don't have the opportunity to be actually honest about how they're feeling on a day to day basis, and instead dismiss the question with 'I'm fine'.
2. It gives people the chance to actually acknowledge to themselves how they're feeling, and usually brings people more into their body.
3. It gives each person the opportunity to be seen and heard by the group, and this is a very helpful tool in enabling people to feel safe and relaxed. Even just 3 word check ins can be enough.
4. It gives you a lot of information about how the group is feeling, and you can implement a number of different exercises after the check in that can help people land more, or may shape the way you choose to guide your session.  
For example if a lot of people in the group are feeling tired, you may choose to do a mini energiser like breathwork, or standing up and shaking. If people are feeling tense, you might want to let people have a little tantrum to let it out.  
Or if it seems the energy is really low, you might decide the high energy dance you had planned isn't really appropriate.

## Choosing Themes

1. How do I choose my themes? I usually just feel into what is alive for me, and pick a theme that would really help me get through what I'm struggling with. In the past I've chosen themes such as: Shame, Honouring darkness, Anger, Owning your Power, Self Love, Surrender.
2. Think of questions related to that theme that would be a useful line of enquiry. It's usually much easier to speak on a subject when there is an open ended question. Such as: for 'Owning Your Power' a few questions might be: When do you feel most powerful? What are the circumstances, activities or people that support that? In what situations do you feel disempowered? What does your inner critic say to you?

We'll go more deeply into different methods of enquiry in our live session.

## Opening and Closing a Sharing Circle

This can be done in a number of ways, and this will be covered in more detail in the next module as we get into the nitty gritty of ritual. However any good workshop, sharing circle, or process has a clear beginning and end.

Here are a few ideas

### For Opening

1. Simple meditation
2. 3 breaths together
3. 3 'oms' or a song
4. Read a poem

### For Closing

1. 3 breaths or 'oms'
2. One big clap all together
3. Poem or piece of music
4. Something more dynamic and improvised

So there it is Sharing Circle 101.

Have fun! It's a simple yet profound experience.