

Restorative Family Circles

Using Restorative Practices within Families

Goal: This activity is designed to help families use Restorative Practices to strengthen communication, resolve conflicts, and build emotional resilience through family circles. By engaging in regular family circles, parents and children can create a space for open dialogue, empathy, and problem-solving. This tool can be used with children of all ages.

Why Restorative Circles Work:

Restorative circles help build emotional health by fostering trust, understanding, and accountability. These practices support children in developing key skills like emotional regulation, empathy, and conflict resolution, which are essential for resilience and healthy relationships. By regularly using this tool, your family can strengthen bonds, navigate challenges, and cultivate a nurturing, connected environment.

Instructions for Parents/Caregivers:

- **Set Up a Regular Family Circle.** Choose a time when the family can sit together without distractions (e.g., after dinner or on a weekend morning). Make sure everyone understands that this is a safe space where everyone gets a turn to speak and be heard.
- **Use a Talking Piece.** Select an object that will serve as the talking piece (e.g., a small toy, a rock, or a family keepsake). Whoever holds the talking piece gets to speak, and others listen attentively.
- **Consistency is Key.** Try to hold family circles regularly (e.g., weekly) to create a routine of open communication.
- **Model Empathy and Patience.** Show your children how to listen actively and respond with understanding. This helps them develop the skills to navigate challenges with empathy.
- **Adapt as Needed.** Simplify questions or use visuals to support accessibility. Examples: draw how they feel or represent emotions with emojis or toys.

Restorative Family Circle Process and Prompts

1. Check-In

- Go around the circle and have each family member share how they are feeling using one word (e.g., "happy," "frustrated," "excited," "calm").
- Why it matters: This builds emotional awareness and helps everyone check in with each other before diving into deeper conversations.

2. Family Reflection

- Prompt: "What is something that went well for you this week, and why?"
- Why it matters: Sharing positive moments helps foster connection and allows family members to celebrate small successes together.

3. Conflict Resolution

- Prompt: "Is there something that's been bothering you or causing stress that we can work on together?"
- Encourage your child to use the talking piece to share their feelings. Guide them with restorative questions, such as:
 - "What happened?"
 - "How did that make you feel?"
 - "What do you think could make things better?"
- Once the issue is shared, work together to find possible solutions.
- Why it matters: This creates a space for addressing conflicts or stress without blame and teaches constructive problem-solving.

4. Repair and Restore

- Prompt: "Is there something you want to apologize for or something that we can work to fix?"
- Encourage family members to take responsibility for their actions if appropriate and talk about ways to make things right.
- Example Restorative Questions:
 - "What could we do to make it better?"
 - "How can we repair the situation so everyone feels good?"
- Why it matters: This builds empathy, accountability, and helps restore connections after misunderstandings or conflicts.



5. Gratitude Circle

- Prompt: "What is something you are thankful for about someone in the family today?" or "What is something you are grateful for today?"
- Each family member can share a moment of gratitude for another member, reinforcing positive connections.
- Why it matters: Gratitude helps focus on the strengths in the family, enhancing emotional resilience and fostering stronger bonds. Sharing gratitude helps cultivate a positive mindset and encourages family members to appreciate the good things in their lives, no matter how small. It can foster an atmosphere of positivity and recognition, reinforcing connections and helping everyone focus on the strengths and support within the family.

6. Future Hopes Circle

- Prompt: "What is something you're looking forward to or excited about in the coming week?"
- Why it matters: This encourages optimism and forward-thinking, helping family members focus on positive future moments. It also gives everyone a chance to express excitement and anticipation, building a sense of shared joy and support for each other's goals or upcoming events.

Restorative Circle Closing

At the end of each family circle, thank everyone for participating and remind them that this space is always available when someone needs to talk, share, or work through a problem.

Closing Prompt:

- "What's one small goal we can work on as a family this week to support each other?"
- Why it matters: This gives families a concrete way to apply what they've talked about and helps build a sense of teamwork.

By incorporating restorative practices through family circles, families will enhance communication, support one another emotionally, and build resilience in the face of stress and challenges.

