

# Listening Circle Facilitator's Guide

(<http://americanvaluesare.wordpress.com/>)

As stated on our website listening circles are a highly structured form of dialogue. In order to use the structure that follows, you will need the following:

## People

1. **A facilitator** who will oversee the Listening Circle, provide the information sheet, give the prompt to the participants, and remind them of the process as needed.
2. **An assistant facilitator** who will draw names from the containers (see "Equipment" below) and keep time.
3. **6-10 participants** (not including the facilitator and assistant facilitator).

## Written Materials

1. **Two unison reading passages**, one for opening and one for closing. This can be any short quotation or passage that is somehow related to the topic of the Listening Circle.
2. **Two sets of the names** of the participants on individual pieces of paper.
3. **A prompt**. This consists of a question in one sentence that will begin the Listening Circle dialogue. An example related to one of our guides: "How have I seen accountability at work in our government?"

## Equipment

1. **A table (round, oval, or square work best) and pens**, so the participants can make notes easily. If there are no tables available, writing pads will work.
2. **Chairs for everyone.**
3. **Two containers**, one for each set of names (see information sheet, attached).

# Listening Circle Structure

Provided by Kakie Love of Columbia, MO.

**Welcome.**

**Unison Reading:** Put your prepared opening reading passage here.

**Check-In:** Facilitator opens the Listening Circle with the information sheet and then presents the prompt. (See attached.)

**Quiet Writing or Reflection on Personal Experience with the Topic:** This time is a listening time too. Before you write, listen to yourself and hear what you think and feel about the topic.

## ROUND ONE

**Sharing and Listening:**

1. The order of speaking will be determined by drawing names from the first container. Once names are drawn from the first container, they are not returned. The speaker shares his or her thoughts on the prompt to the rest of the Listening Circle. Approximately three minutes per person for speaking.
2. Before the next speaker's name is drawn from the first container, a name will be drawn from the second container of names to identify a person who will briefly reflect back to the speaker what he/she understood the speaker to be saying. This should take approximately one minute and when the reflector is finished, this name is returned to the second container. (The reflector's name is put back into the second container so that the reflector will continue to listen carefully as his/her name could be drawn again.) The speaker should then be able to comment briefly if they have something to add or correct.
3. Then another speaker's name is drawn from the first container. This procedure continues until all in the circle have been the speaker.

**\*Taking notes when a speaker is speaking is discouraged. If you are taking notes, you cannot watch body language and be aware of facial expressions that may tell a great deal about the speaker's feelings. Also, this is a skill that hopefully will be carried over into everyday life and note taking during a conversation is unlikely.**

## ROUND TWO

**Gift Sharing Time:** A time to share what insights you have gained from listening in round one (these insights are the "gifts"). There is no respondent in this round. Again, this is not a time to try to convince someone to believe differently, but to speak of thought-gifts you have received from someone in the group. Remember, no one can be speaker twice until everyone in the group has had an opportunity to speak. The facilitator and assistant facilitator may take part in the gift sharing time after allowing all participants who wish to speak to do so.

If there is time a more general discussion of some ideas can follow, as a dialogue, not debate. This is a time when you might ask for clarification concerning something you did not understand. Speak only if you want to.

**Unison Reading:** Put your prepared closing reading passage here.

# Listening Circle Information Sheet

Provided by Kakie Love of Columbia, MO

The goal of a listening circle is for participants to develop understanding and appreciation of one another's beliefs and perspectives by listening carefully to both the ideas and the feelings that each holds concerning a topic. It is a dialogue instead of a debate, with respect being shown for all points of view.

The First Universalist Church of Minneapolis calls the process "Sharing Circles" and hopes that the circle will:

- \* **deepen us individually**
- \* **connect us to one another in love**
- \* **strengthen our larger church community**
- \* **help us live out the values of our liberal religious heritage**
- \* **further equip us for service in the world.**

Further, Listening Circles aim at creating community and strengthening our humanity through simple acts of gathering, focusing, reflecting, speaking and listening to strengthen and deepen us, individually and collectively.

## Ground Rules For Listening Circles

(Or, how the group should behave...)

1. What is shared in the group will be held in confidence unless the entire group decides otherwise.
2. No one can be speaker twice until everyone in the group has been a speaker once.
3. Each person will take the responsibility for her/his own statements using "I" statements rather than "they say" or "everyone believes," etc.
4. Everyone will be mindful of time when it comes to sharing, knowing that each person needs equal time. The assistant facilitator will let you know when your time is almost up.
5. When speaking, each person will remember to be respectful of other individuals and groups.
6. Remain focused on the prompt question. If you begin to get off-topic, the facilitator will remind you.

## Listening Circles, What They Are Not and What They Are

- \*Listening Circles are not therapeutic support groups. Personal conflicts are not to be discussed.
- \*They are not study groups; their primary aim is not education.
- \*They are not debates or problem solving exercises.
- \*They are not action groups.
- \*They are not traditional prayer groups.
- \*They are not primarily social groups, although social ties will result.

Listening Circles are something else:

- \*They are an experiment aimed at creating community and sharing humanity through simple acts of gathering, focusing, reflecting, speaking, and listening.
- \*These simple acts can strengthen and deepen us, both individually and collectively.

## **Prompt for Listening Circle**

**Put your Prompt Here.**

**Example: How have I seen accountability at work in our government?**

Take about five minutes and listen to your own thoughts, make some notes on this sheet, and then the Listening Circle will begin.

Notes: