

CIRCLES: USE OF THE TALKING STICK, FEATHER, ROCK

Generally, a piece which has particular meaning to the community is used as the talking piece passed to facilitate and share speaking time in the circle.

General Guidelines:

- The talking piece always moves clockwise around the circle.
- One cannot speak unless holding the talking piece, except with permission of the circle Keeper.
- When the talking piece comes to a person s/he can pass it without speaking.
- One cannot "dump and run": speak and then leave the circle before it is done.
- The talking piece gets passed around and around until everyone has had their say, and no decision is made until then.

When holding the talking piece one must honor the purpose of the circle and those in it by speaking:

- from the heart, honestly and openly.
- with respect for others.
- briefly enough that everyone will have time to speak.
- to the issues in the circle.

The advantages of using a talking piece include:

- greater opportunity for listening and reflection: since a person has to wait for the talking piece to come around before speaking there is more focus on what people are saying than on preparing an immediate response.
- prevention of one on one debates since people cannot respond out of turn.
- shared responsibility -- for the discussion and for the peacemaking -- among all the circle members. Use of a talking piece reinforces the principle of equality in the circle: equal opportunity for all to participate and equal capacity of all to contribute.
- more opportunity for quiet people to be heard in the discussion; the talking piece, gives them time to speak without having to compete with the more verbal people.
- promotion of consensus: all people are heard from and all issues are aired before any decision is made by the circle.

Once the talking piece goes around the circle and comes back to the Keeper of the Circle, the Keeper may: summarize what people have been saying and raise potential questions to address before passing the talking piece around again; summarize what people have been saying and hold the talking piece to open up the circle for anyone to speak; hold the talking piece and call on specific people to clarify certain issues; or pass the talking piece to someone else to facilitate an open circle discussion on a key issue.

Minnesota Department of Corrections Restorative Justice Initiative - 9/98. Excerpted in part, with permission, from Building Community Justice Partnerships: -Community Peacemaking Circles, by Barry Stuart (1997: Aboriginal Justice Learning Network, Department of Justice, Canada.)