

STORY CIRCLES



Introduction:

To work together, we must first know that our lives are woven with similar threads. Telling our stories is a good way to open ourselves to seeing what we have in common with others. This activity asks group members to share stories around a similar topic. Story telling can be a powerful tool for learning how our lives are connected.

Materials Needed:

- Flipchart, whiteboard, or chalkboard
- Markers or chalk
- Facilitator Resource # 1: Story Circle Instructions and Ground Agreements
- Handout # 1: Story Circles Small Group Reflection

Time To Do This Activity: 55-60 minutes

- Introduction to Activity and Ground Rules - 5 minutes
- Small Group Storytelling – 20-25 minutes
- Small Group Reflection and Report Back - 30 minutes

Description of Activity:

Before the group comes together for this activity, you will want to prepare the space by writing the ground rules for this activity on a flipchart or the board. You can find suggested ground rules in **Facilitator Resource # 1: Story Circle Instructions and Ground Rules**. To make the list of ground rules more accessible, draw a symbol next to each ground rule. (e.g. the rule about keeping time might have a clock.)

After you have prepared the space, you will read or summarize **Facilitator Resource # 1: Story Circle Instructions and Ground Rules** to the group. It explains what the activity is and gives some rules for listening. Point to the ground rules on the board/flipchart as you explain what each one means.

After you review the ground rules, divide people into small groups of 3-4 people. It is best if the people in the small groups do not know each other well. (For example, if a parent and a young person come together, divide the room in a way that they are not in the same group.)

Ask each group to pick a timekeeper. Explain that each person will have 3 minutes to answer the prompt by telling a story to their group. The time keeper will make sure everyone keeps their story to 3 minutes.

The prompt for small group storytelling is:

WHEN IS A TIME YOU WERE HELD BACK FROM DOING SOMETHING YOU WANTED OR WERE TOLD YOU COULDN'T DO SOMETHING?

Each person will take turns telling a personal story to their small groups that relates to the prompt. Some people may not take the full 3 minutes to tell their story. If this happens, the group should sit quietly and reflect on what the person said until the 3 minutes is over and it is time for the next person to tell their story.

After everyone has had a chance to answer the prompt, pass out **Handout # 1: Story Circles Small Group Reflection**. Ask someone from each group to serve as a report back person to talk about what their group discussed for each discussion question. Each small group will answer the questions on the handout together. They should spend no more than 20 minutes doing this. After the small groups have told their stories and answered the questions together bring the whole group back to share responses.

Facilitation Notes:

As a tip, there are many ways to divide a room of people into small groups. One way is to count off. Another way may be divide them by fun, silly qualities (e.g. "if you were born in the Winter", "if you are wearing blue").

If there are non-disabled allies in the group, they should also tell about a personal experience of being held back. They may be surprised how their story could be similar to people who are held back because of their disability or it may be interesting to see how their stories differ from people who are disabled.

Quiet space to tell one's story is important. If the room is too small, consider letting a few groups go into the hallway or another room during their small group time.

Handout # 1

Story Circles Small Group Reflection

Facilitator Instructions: Cut these into slips of paper and hand out to each group.

- How did it feel to just listen without giving feedback?
 - How do your personal feelings of being held back relate to the stories of others?
 - What were some common themes in the stories of your group members?
 - How did it feel to share your stories with others?
-

- How did it feel to just listen without giving feedback?
 - How do your personal feelings of being held back relate to the stories of others?
 - What were some common themes in the stories of your group members?
 - How did it feel to share your stories with others?
-

- How did it feel to just listen without giving feedback?
- How do your personal feelings of being held back relate to the stories of others?
- What were some common themes in the stories of your group members?
- How did it feel to share your stories with others?

Facilitator Resource # 1

Story Circles Instructions

Read or summarize this page to the group:

For this next part, you are going to split up into groups and tell each other stories about a topic I will give you. Each person will have three minutes to tell their story to their group. Once the three minutes have passed, it is the next person's turn. A lot of us might tell stories that are painful or bring up triggering memories so it is important that we treat each other respectfully in these groups. Because storytelling can open up a lot of emotions for people, it is important that we have some ground agreements just for this activity.

Ground Agreements (write on board or flipchart)	Explanation (To Be Read or Summarized Aloud)
Time Keeper	Each group needs one person to keep time. It can be difficult to stay on time but we have to try so everyone has a chance to tell his or her story.
Do not think about answers while people speak	A lot of times, when someone is talking, we think about other things. We might think about what we'd do if we were in that situation. We might be thinking about what story we are going to tell. When we do this, we are not really completely listening to what the person is saying. For this rule, let's challenge ourselves to only think about what the person is saying. Nothing else. This also includes not talking while the person is talking.
Do not ask questions or offer advice	A lot of times listeners automatically hear a story and want to problem solve. This can be very frustrating for people. Sometimes people just want to tell a story and have people hear it. Do not try to give people advice during this story circle. If you have a resource you want to share

<p>Anything said in the circle stays in the circle</p>	<p>or something you absolutely must say, save it for later in the day. This circle is just for listening.</p> <p>Do not share other people's stories. If people decide to share a story with you, it is a gift and must be treated like one. If you want to ask a question about a story later after the activity, ask permission to bring up that person's story first.</p>
--	--