

Dialogue Circles

CASEL Alignment:

MTSS Alignment:

Shared By:

Social Awareness, Responsible Decision-Making

Tier 1 or Tier 2

Aldine Independent School District (TX)

Practice Overview:

Dialogue Circles provide a safe and supportive space for students and caring adults to discuss sensitive topics, work through differences, and build consensus.

Dialogue Circles are a great way to cultivate an emotionally safe learning environment that values respect, openness, inclusivity, and direct communication. They can also be altered to serve as **Community-Building Circles**, in which students share mutual values with one another to strengthen relationships.



Implementation Instructions:

Kick-off the **Dialogue Circle** process by asking students to sit in a circle. As facilitator, your role is to create a safe space for dialogue. This may be accomplished by starting with a moment of silence, an affirmation, or a quote.

Share a set of guidelines for the Dialogue Circle with students. Typically, these include:

- All participants are equal
- The facilitator serves as a neutral guide who does not hold a primary decision-making role
- An instrument (such as a bell or chime) is passed around the circle. Only the person with the item may speak
- Everyone in the circle will have a chance to speak and everyone is required to listen attentively
- Show care, understanding, and respect

Next, offer a question or issue for exploration (see next page for example prompts). This will be the central theme of the dialogue. Instruct students to pass the instrument around as they share stories and perspectives related to the question or issue.

Model active listening as participants speak.

Once all participants have spoken, explicitly mark the close of the dialogue session, and shift to discussion mode. Debrief key learnings and outline next steps as a community.

Virtual Adaptation Guidelines:

To adapt **Dialogue Circles** for use in hybrid or distance learning environments, consider the following options:

- (1) Use a live (online) class session to host an online Dialogue Circle.
- (2) At the beginning of any virtual Dialogue Circle, share any community agreements you and your students have created. Use these agreements (along with the guidelines from a physical Dialogue Circle) to set the norms for discussion.
- (3) As facilitator, instruct students to mute themselves when they are not speaking. Instead of a physical object to pass around, ask students to indicate that they would like to speak by making a silent gesture (e.g., raise their hand or give a thumbs-up).

Sample Circle Guidelines:

The following is a list of prompts (broken down by category) provided by Aldine Independent School District for use in Community-Building and Dialogue Circles. Please note that it is important to select questions or topics in service of your group's needs. Consider the health of each member of the circle, and know that some prompts may bring up emotions for circle members.

- **Getting Acquainted**
 - Share a happy childhood memory.
 - If you could be a superhero, what powers would you choose to have (and why)?
 - How would your best friend describe you?
- **Exploring Values**
 - What gives you hope?
 - What touches your heart?
 - What demonstrates respect for you?
- **Storytelling From Our Lives / What Has Shaped Us**
 - When was a time when you were able to let go of anger or resentment?
 - Describe an experience that pushed you outside of your comfort zone.
 - Share an experience of causing harm to someone and then rectifying the situation.

About Aldine Independent School District. Aldine Independent School District, located in Harris County (TX), strives to provide students with choices and opportunities to succeed today and in the future.