

A Learning Circle: A New Way to Communicate

Learning Circles are often described as being key to success for nursing homes involved with Culture Change. (Link to What is Culutre Change)

Visualize a group of people, a staff team often, talking while seated in a circle. There is no central table, no manager standing as the lead, every voice is equal. A learning circle can open communication, solve problems, level the playing field, and emphasize the importance of listening over talking.



Guidelines for a successful learning circle:

1. One person is chosen to be the facilitator. The facilitator gets the discussion rolling but does not respond with words or conversation to each person.
2. The facilitator poses a question – It can be a good idea to pose a simple question for the first round.
3. The person sitting to the right or left of the facilitator, (or whoever is first ready) does so. A symbolic object to hold and pass can help emphasize that one person has the floor at a given moment.
4. The first person is followed one by one around the circle until everyone has spoken on the subject without interruption.
5. Participants may choose to pass rather than speak.
6. A very important guideline, and one that often needs facilitator's interventions or reminders, is that there should be no cross talk. Even if a listener is excited about or agrees with someone else's comments, they must keep their lips sealed until it is their turn.
7. After everyone in the circle has had a chance to speak, the facilitator goes back to those people who have passed and gives them an opportunity to speak if they want to.

After everyone has had an opportunity to speak, the floor is opened up for general discussion or another question is presented. A learning circle does not necessarily have a resulting conclusion or decision. It is sometimes necessary to define at the beginning how long the discussion might last.