

Coaching for Character, October 24, 2019

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Focus Area 3: A Climate of Growth

### Sharing Circles

Many of you will be familiar with some form of “circle time” or “class meeting.” We’ll use the term “Sharing Circle” in our discussion, while recognizing that this goes by many names

**Structure.** Sharing Circles can take many forms, physically. As the name suggests, a circle is the preferred format, allowing learners to speak to the group and not to the back of the head of the person in front of them.

- Think of the Sharing Circle as a ritual. It is something that is done regularly, not only “as needed.” Some teachers use it as a transition ritual, marking the beginning and/or end of the day, or a return from lunch or recess.
- A “Speaker Power” object (a wand or stuffed animal) can be a helpful tool in concretizing the notion that one person (the holder of the Speaker Power) speaks at a time.
- It can also be helpful to establish non-verbal signals for used in Sharing Circles (and throughout the day!). For example, patting one’s chest as a sign of agreement.

**Function.** What is shared in a sharing circle? What is this venue used for?

As a transition ritual, the “content” can be something as basic as asking learners to greet a fellow learner by name. Some educators ask learners to share news about themselves or check in about how they are feeling. We’ve seen educators start each session by asking each learner to dedicate their learning for the day to someone or something.

The Sharing Circle can also be a space to discuss group norms and expectations, and to reflect on how the group is doing in upholding these and what changes may be needed. It can be a venue for introducing and practicing skills. As the Sharing Circle becomes a part of the routine, it can be called on as a format for difficult conversations.

Sharing Circles are also opportunities for community building, for learners to get to know one another. This can be done through posing questions that allow for learners to use their imaginations while also sharing an element of themselves:

- If you could have any superpower, what would you pick and why?
- If you could be any animal for one day, what would you pick and why?

Getting to know one another can also take place in a way that is linked to content:

- If you could spend the day with one of the Avot or Imahot, who would you pick. Why?
- If you could write an “11<sup>th</sup> commandment” what would it be?
- What are some feelings that you have when you hear a shofar blowing?
- Which part of building the sukkah did you find most exciting and why?