

June 2023

What is a Talking Circle?

“Yes there is a need for talking circles on the SSC campus. The stress of trying to find a harmonic way in which we can balance the emotional, physical, and mental and spiritual sides of our existence pleads with us to call upon one another to share our experiences with each other to strengthen the natural bonds of human connection.” -SSC Student, Seminole Nation Tribal Member

Talking circles, peacemaking circles, or healing circles, as they are variously called, are deeply rooted in the traditional practices of indigenous people. In North America, they are widely used among the First Nations people of Canada and among the many tribes of Native Americans in the US. Healing circles take a variety of forms, but most basically, members sit in a circle to consider a problem or a question (Madrona, et. al, 2014).

The circle starts with a prayer, usually by the person convening the circle, or by an elder, when an elder is involved. A talking stick is held by the person who speaks (other sacred objects may also be used, including eagle feathers and fans). When that person is finished speaking, the talking stick is passed to the left (clockwise around the circle). Only the person holding the stick may speak. All others remain quiet. The circle is complete when the stick passes around the circle one complete time without anyone speaking out of turn. The talking circle prevents reactive communication and directly responsive communication, and it fosters deeper listening and reflection in conversation. The talking circle process is a unique instructional approach that can be used to stimulate multicultural awareness while fostering respect for individual differences and facilitating group cohesion (Madrona, et. al, 2014).

Madrona, L. Mainguy, B. (2014). Introducing Healing Circles and Talking Circles into Primary Care. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4022550/>

To learn more about talking circles, visit the SSC NASNTI Website. Talking circle expert, Susan Stacy, from MSW, with the Kickapoo Tribal Behavioral Health Center, created a video explaining the objectives and the purpose of a Talking Circle. Ms. Stacy is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma with a Master of Social Work in Direct Practice. She is from the Kickapoo, Absentee Shawnee, Mvskoke Creek, and Seminole Tribes. She is a Certified Peer Recovery Support Specialist (C-PRSS) through the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse. She has several years of experience in the fields of child welfare, mental health, addictive disorders, and facilitating Talking Circles. Ms. Stacy works at the Kickapoo Tribal Behavioral Health and works with children, youth, young adults, and their families. She also participates on the KTHS Parenting and Policy Committee board for the Kickapoo Head Start. Ms. Stacy facilitates talking circle groups monthly which are open to the community where she uses her positive attitude and energy to help caregivers care for their children/grandchildren or help families to come together through a family support network.

NASNTI is 100% federally funded in the amount of \$450,000 annually.