**Circle Preparation Meeting Guidelines**

**General Guidelines**

* Most preparation meetings should take about 10-15 minutes. You do not need to understand every detail of the situation. Keep the conversation focused.
* Be clear with potential participants that participation is voluntary, and that if they do not think they can participate in a positive way, they will be asked not to participate.

**Initial meeting with referrer:**

* Learn about the issue and determine if RJ is a good fit.
* Explain that RJ does not offer a quick fix; it may take multiple meetings. Are you willing to commit to this in an ongoing way?
* **Provide an overview of what to expect:**
  + We will spend time building trust at the beginning before getting into the issue and problem solving.
  + We will use a talking piece to support us in listening and sharing. At no point in time will there be a “back-and-forth” where people are interrupting each other or shutting each other down.
  + We will create shared agreements and a plan of support and expectations for follow-up. Most people wind up with some role in the follow up that goes beyond just the circle.
  + If necessary, review the basic structure of a circle. This helps people feel comfortable walking into the process for the first time (talking piece, rounds, agreements, peer leader role etc.).

**General guiding questions:**

1. Please share as much as possible about the issue.
   1. What happened?
   2. What were you thinking at the time?
   3. What can you own as your part in the problem or issue? This is critical in order for a the circle to be effective. If you can’t think of anything to take responsibility for, we may not be able to do the circle.
   4. Can you think of anything you could have done differently? This doesn’t mean it’s all your fault, but usually when we look back there are things we could improve on.
2. What is your biggest hope or the best possible outcome for this process?
3. Who else would you like to be in the circle with you? Think about someone who brings out the best in you, rather than a friend who takes your side even when you’re off base.
   1. Encourage a range of “types” of people: teachers, school admin, guidance counselor, family, friend, witness etc.
4. Can you listen to others who have a different perspective?
5. It is most helpful when we use “I” statements during the process and model vulnerability; Do you feel you can do this?

**Preparation for teachers:**

1. Are you willing to see the “good” in this student and support their efforts to change?
2. What are this student’s strengths? Are you willing to share this in the circle?
3. Are you willing to take responsibility for a piece of the issue in the circle? This is a key to success. We have found that when teachers model vulnerability and taking responsibility, students follow suit. It probably won’t go well if you are only able to focus on things the students has done wrong.

**Preparation when there is conflict:**

* What was your previous connection before the conflict began?
* Can you think of any positive qualities that you appreciate about the person?
* If the conflict is between friends: What are some positive qualities about this person that made you friends to begin with? Are you willing to share that in the circle?
* What is the best outcome you can imagine with this person? Are you open to being friends? Just being civil? What would you need in order to move on in a good way?
* What else do you need in order for this conflict to get resolved?
* What can you offer to help resolve the conflict? Usually it doesn’t get resolve just by one person, both people need to offer something. Is there anything you could take responsibility for or apologize for?

**For reluctant participants**

1. Try to assess whether the person is actually unable to participate in a good way, or whether they would benefit but have some concerns
2. Do not pressure anyone to participate.
3. If you believe they would benefit, ask permission to explore the issue further even though they are unsure. For example, “I hear you that you have some major concerns about participating. It’s definitely up to you to decide. Honestly, I still think it might be a good idea. I’m wondering if you’re willing to talk a little longer about the idea before you make up your mind.”
4. If you have permission, do share your perspective on why you think it is a good idea. Some reasons might include:
   1. This situation has been going on a long time and is impacting you in these ways \_\_\_\_\_. I just don’t see how else you are going to get the resolution you say you want. Do you see other paths to resolution?
   2. This is your opportunity to stick up for yourself with some support.
   3. If you stand up and say the truth to this teacher/person, it could make a difference to other students.