

Module 2

STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE LAB

Module 2

STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE LAB

© Copyright 2026 by Restorative Justice Lab.

This work is openly licensed under CC BY-NC-SA.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Why should we prioritize relationship-building in HEP classrooms? 2

What classroom exercises and activities can help students to strengthen their relationships with themselves and with others? 5

(Re)building a relationship with the self 6

Values 6

Feelings and Needs 7

Identity 8

Building relationships with others 11

Group Icebreakers 11

Theater Exercises 15

Pod Mapping 19

What is Circle, and how do its components contribute to community-building? 20

Preparing for Circles with the Peacebuilding Wheel 20

Circles 24

Circle Elements 24

Circle Structure 25

Recap 28

Endnotes 29

Appendix A: Feelings Inventory 32

Appendix B: Needs Inventory 34

Appendix C: Managing Anger 35

Appendix D: Wellness and Pod Mapping 38

Appendix E: Grounding and Centering Exercises 39

Module 2

STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS

At a Glance

This module provides an overview of the following topics:

- **The importance of relationships in restorative practices**
- **Strategies for strengthening relationships with ourselves and with others**
- **Circle processes that support community-building**

Guiding Questions

1. **Why should we prioritize relationship-building in HEP classrooms?**
2. **What classroom exercises and activities can help students to reconnect with themselves while also deepening their relationships with others?**
3. **What is Circle, and how do its components contribute to community-building?**

Why should we prioritize relationship-building in HEP classrooms?

Relationships are foundational for social health, which is defined as "a state in which an individual's social engagement is accompanied by the ability to respond to their circumstances proactively."[1] Recently, the medical field has pushed to emphasize the importance of social health in a person's holistic health outlook. In 2023, an advisory from the U.S. Surgeon General named loneliness and isolation as an "epidemic" that requires treatment through both micro-level (individual) and macro-level (structural) recommitments to social connection.[2]

Restorative justice conceptualizes harm as a breach or imbalance within community dynamics that requires active attention, engagement, and repair

work. With roots in global indigenous practices, this approach to preventing and healing harm has always been fundamentally relational. As Howard Zehr writes,

> *Many cultures have a word that represents this notion of the centrality of relationships. For the Maori, it is communicated by* whakapapa*; for the Navajo [Diné],* hozho*; for many Africans, the Bantu word* ubuntu*; for Tibetan Buddhists,* tendrel*. Although the specific meanings of these words vary, they communicate a similar message: all things are connected to each other in a web of relationships.*[3]

Relationships, however, are also deliberately disrupted and severed by incarceration. Many people in prison struggle to remain in contact with their family, friends, and communities on the outside. Nicole Fleetwood describes this socio-psychological landscape as part of the "penal space" which, by her definition, "extends beyond the built environment to encompass how carcerality structures relationships."[4] She continues,

> *"Penal space" is the prison itself, the architecture of confinement, but the concept also refers to the disruption of family relations and domestic space, the imposition on movement and mobility, the restrictive and highly monitored experience of the geographic, material, social, and psychic environments in which the incarcerated are warehoused, punished, and surveilled.*[5]

Likewise, John Braithwaite has discussed the damaging impacts of what he terms "stigmatizing shaming," which also severs social connections:

> *The distinction is between shaming that leads to stigmatization – to outcasting, to confirmation of a deviant master status – versus shaming that is reintegrative, that shames while maintaining bonds of respect or love, that sharply terminates disapproval with forgiveness, instead of amplifying deviance by progressively casting the deviant out.*[6]

Although the criminal legal system uses isolation and stigmatization to punish people in prison, research shows that "strong, durable connections to others – particularly those who have our short-term and long-term interest at heart – reduce the likelihood that we will commit violence."[7]

As a result of stigmatizing shaming and isolation, many students in higher education in prison (HEP) classrooms have become alienated from their communities, their own families, and even themselves. People in prison exhibit high rates of mental and substance use disorders and histories of

trauma.[8] Many are also themselves survivors of violence who continue to experience trauma in prison. Research suggests that "individuals with complex trauma histories often remain in a biological and psychological survival mode."[9] In turn, "survival can come to define a person's entire sense of self and his or her ability to self-regulate and to relate well and intimately with others."[10] Trauma makes relationship-building difficult, as survivors "often appear to be conflicted and 'disorganized' in their feelings about relationships — torn between avoiding the dangers of being close to others and their desire and underlying need and longing for connection."[11]

Although HEP programs are often studied through the lens of recidivism, they contribute to a number of other positive outcomes related to social health. There is evidence, for example, that they also help to restore students' sense of dignity and self-confidence and to alleviate loneliness.[12] However, research in trauma-informed approaches indicates that these outcomes are most pronounced when they are rooted in trusting relationships. In the therapeutic world, relationships founded on consistency and empathy create a "safe 'holding environment' that functions as a catalyst to the exploration of self."[13] In order to prepare for this exploration, students must feel "individually 'seen,' appreciated, and emotionally validated in ways that counter the invalidation typically associated with attachment trauma."[14] Frida Rundell calls this approach the "relational care ladder" whereby structure helps to establish a sense of safety and regulation before participants can feel empowered and ready to challenge themselves.[15]

> "The cohort model, I feel, has been instrumental in building the strong relational ties that we have experienced. This model has reshaped my understanding and appreciation of community. In my previous college experience I was able to develop a handful of lasting relationships that changed my life, but through the cohort model, in one short year, I have developed over thirty such bonds."
>
> *RJ Lab student*

Studies show that icebreaker exercises are effective in promoting student engagement and retention. While they are often framed as games, they are grounded in serious theories of social constructivism and self-determination, emphasizing learning as

a social process while also cultivating student autonomy and competency. By balancing social interaction and belonging with a sense of control, icebreakers contribute to stronger student participation and to a positive classroom environment.[16] The following exercises are designed to support students in reconnecting with themselves and in developing and deepening their connections with others in the HEP classroom. They create a foundation from which students can build confidence to push themselves academically while also creating the social conditions required for peer support and collaboration.

What classroom exercises and activities can help students to strengthen their relationships with themselves and with others?

Many people associate restorative justice with the formal conferences that occur after harm has been caused. However, the work of restorative practices exists on a broad continuum. The International Institute for Restorative Practices uses the following graphic to illustrate practices ranging from informal, proactive strategies (left) to formal, reactive strategies (right):



Although RJ Lab students study the structure of formal conferences, we rarely implement these formal encounters in our program. Rather, we focus on proactive strategies that can build and strengthen relationships to proactively prevent harm from occurring. Our classes are also conducted in **Circle**, a designated space in which participants are arranged in a circle and guided by a **facilitator** or co-faciliators who encourage participants to engage in storytelling. A description of the elements of Circle is provided below under "What is Circle?" Circles can be **sequential** or **nonsequential**. In sequential Circles, everyone participates in clockwise or counterclockwise order by passing a **talking piece**, which is described below. Nonsequential Circles invite participants to pass the talking piece to each other based on who is ready to share.

As we work to build a sense of classroom community in Circle, we also anchor the proactive strategies on the restorative continuum in the work that is most immediate, pressing, and often the most difficult: (re)building a relationship with the self.

(Re)building a relationship with the self

Values

Restorative justice is value-centric. Howard Zehr defines three core values that underpin restorative justice as the three **R**'s: **R**espect, **R**esponsibility, and **R**elationships.[17] The first step to reconnecting with the self is articulating our values and evaluating our alignment with them: who do we want to be, and are we living out our values on a daily basis?



Opening Round Exercise: Values Inventory

Overview: This icebreaker guides students through identifying and prioritizing the values that matter most to them and helps them to construct a set of community standards.

Step 1. Ask Circle participants to write down their top ten values.

Step 2. Ask them to narrow their list to five values, then three, then one.

Step 3. Ask them to write down their top value on a sheet of paper and place it at the center of the Circle.

Step 4. Debrief about the values that are in the Circle's center using the following guiding questions:

> *(a) Does anyone else's value appear on our own lists?*
>
> *(b) On what basis did we select our top value?*
>
> *(c) Do we understand each value in the same way? E.g., what do we mean by "respect," and what does that look like in our classroom?*

Step 5. Create and negotiate a class list of shared values. What are our top five values as a group?

Step 6. Use this list as a basis for creating a peacebuilding wheel (see below) and/or for constructing a community agreement, which we detail in Module 3: Navigating Conflict.

Feelings and Needs

An important part of social emotional learning is self-awareness. Students who are able to identify their feelings are also better able to regulate their emotions.[18] One study in a men's prison found that asking participants to identify and work through their emotions reduced feelings of anger, shame, and paranoia over time.[19]

In restorative justice work, feelings are connected to needs, particularly "the needs of those harmed, of those causing harm, and of the communities in which these situations arise."[20] Identifying and naming feelings and needs is an essential part of restorative conferencing, as negative feelings are often connected to needs that remain unfulfilled. Restorative processes also aim to transform negative emotions into positive feelings by meeting those needs and empowering participants through active engagement. In our program, we practice naming and connecting our feelings and needs using the inventories provided by the Center for Nonviolent Communication. These can be found in Appendix A and B.

Opening and Closing Round Exercise: Feeling and Needs Inventory



Overview: This exercise encourages students to identify their feelings and connect them to needs that are either fulfilled or unfulfilled.

- *Step 1. Distribute Appendix A: Feelings Inventory and Appendix B: Needs Inventory and ask students to review each list.*
- *Step 2. Use a sequential Circle to invite participants to describe, in one sentence, how they are currently feeling and to which need their feeling is connected: "I am feeling ____ because I need ____."*
- *Step 3. Debrief about the connections between feelings and needs.*
- *Step 4. Closing round: Ask participants the same question to gauge what has shifted for them during the Circle.*

Instructors might also develop this exercise further by focusing on a particular feeling. We use an exercise from an anger management workbook to help students to identify how intense emotions such as anger show up in the body.[21] You can find the full exercise in Appendix C: Managing Anger.

Identity

The RJ Lab also provides opportunities for students to explore the self through visual art. We facilitated a workshop series called "Who I Am/ Who I Am Not" that explored different aspects of our identity. This exercise came to us from art therapist Paula Gasparini-Santos[22] by way of Julie and Michael McBride, who cofacilitated this workshop for us with Kate and Andy Grosmaire. The Grosmaires and McBrides famously chose restorative justice in a murder case involving their children in Florida.[23] The McBrides' son, Conor, murdered his fiancée, Ann Grosmaire, during a heated argument. Both families recounted the difficulty of navigating a restorative process underneath the weight of the labels that were placed on them and their children by the criminal legal system – "victim," "offender," "grieving parent," "gun owner," and "murderer." They discussed how they used the restorative justice process to move away from these labels to embrace new identities - including "survivor" and "advocate."



Workshop Exercise: Who I Am/Who I Am Not

Overview: This exercise provides a scaffolded framework through which students can explore the duality that exists within all of us, shed the labels that have been placed on us by others, and construct new narratives about ourselves based on affirmations.

Session Flow (over three days, about 7.5 hours)

First Day (2.5 hours):

Step 1. Explore the power of **labels** *when they flatten our identities based on cultural assumptions. Sample texts include Eddie Ellis' "An Open Letter to Our Friends on the Question of Language."*[24] *Consider, too, the ways in which we internalize labels by adopting "masks" through texts such as Paul Laurence Dunbar's "We Wear the Mask."*[25]

Second Day (2.5 hours):

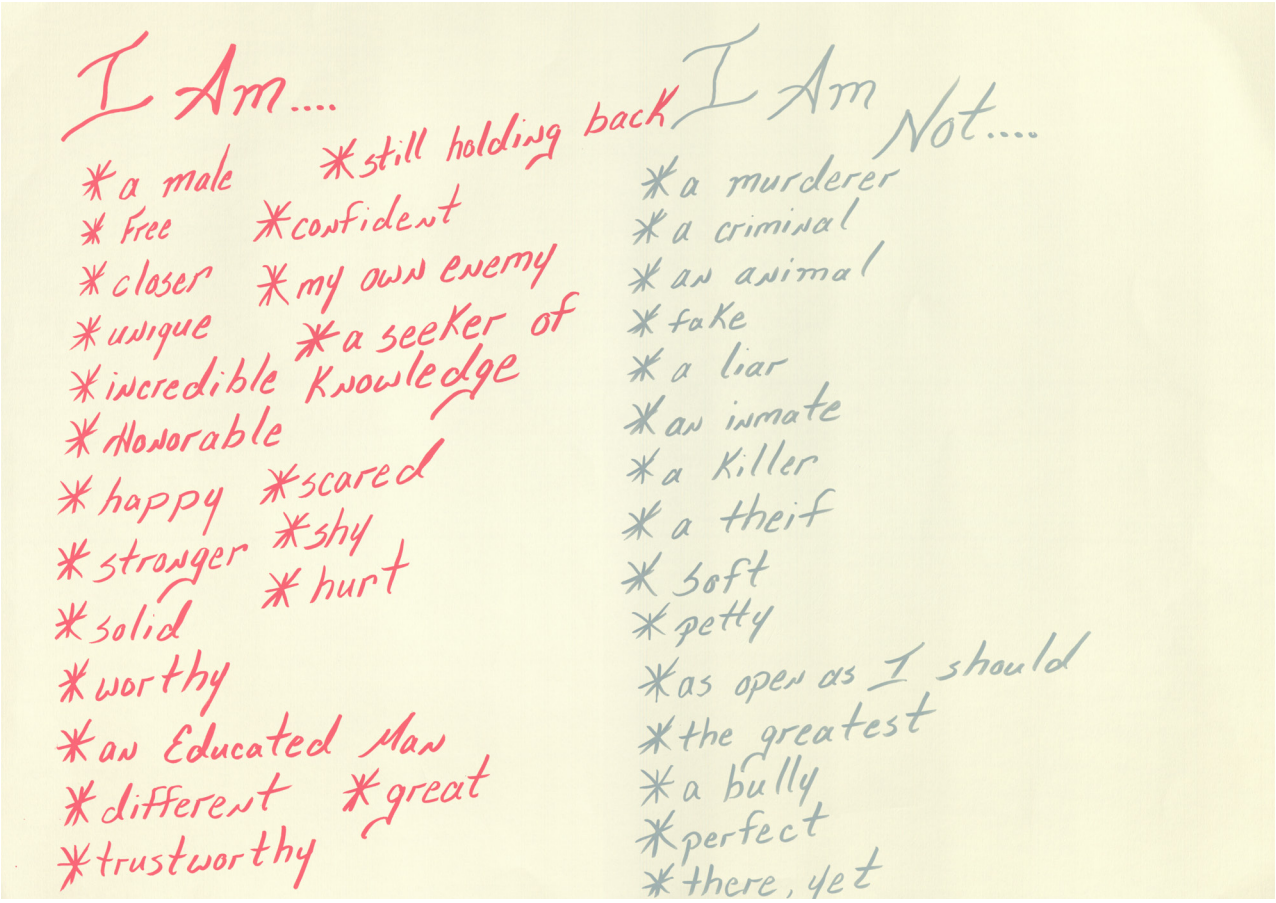
Step 2. Explore the power of **affirmations** *when we reframe ourselves away from the gaze of others. Sample texts include Langston Hughes' "I, Too"*[26] *and Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise."*[27]

Step 3. Practice with writing affirmations that begin with "I am ____." Examples of prompts for affirmations include:

- *I am proud when…*
- *I am thankful for…*
- *I am hopeful for…*
- *I am excited about…*
- *I am strong when…*
- *I am creative when…*
- *I am committed to…*
- *I am becoming…*

We place these prompts on a worksheet and ask students to complete each sentence. We then pair them up so that they can share their responses with a classmate.

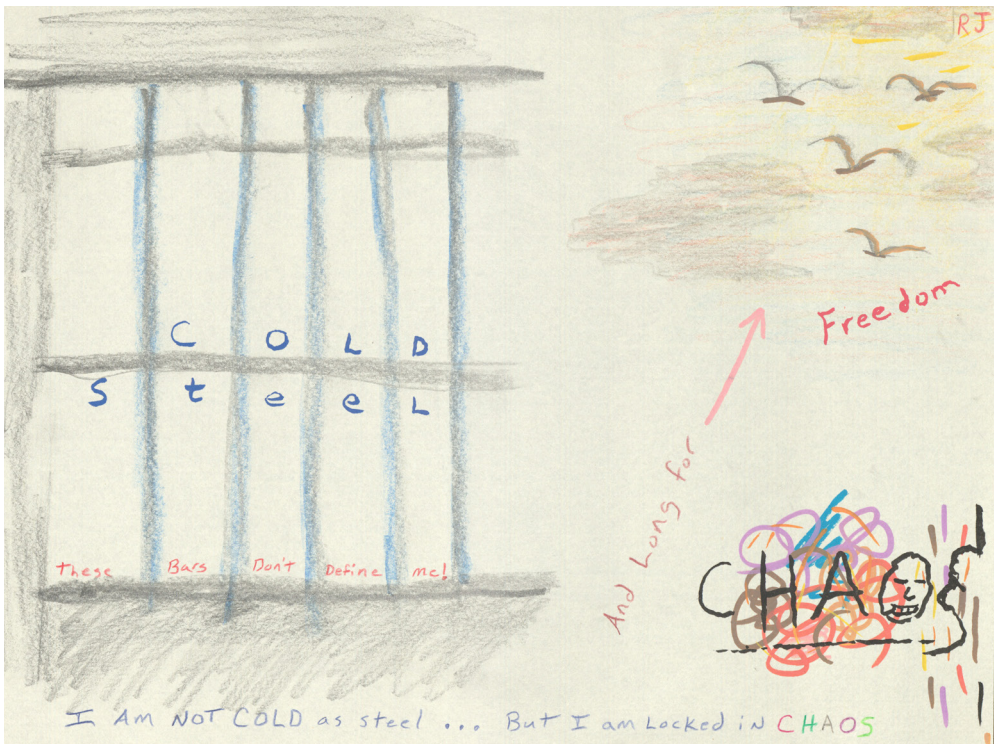
Step 4: Ask participants to clarify their sense of identity by dividing their paper into columns and making two lists: Who I Am and Who I Am Not.



Third Day (2.5 hours):

Step 5: Ask participants to generate art using this list. Their art can reflect the duality of, and tension within, the two lists. It can also shed an old label or embrace a new identity. Below are examples of the artwork students produced in our workshop.







Building relationships with others

Group Icebreakers

Camo and Osmic[28] identify trust as a form of social capital within the learning process and as one of the most central – and sensitive – aspects of a classroom experience. Students build trust with one another through group activities that are based on sharing and storytelling. It is important that the teacher or facilitator also participate in these activities so that trust can also be established between students and their teacher. We have implemented the following exercises to help lay the foundation for community building.

Common Ground

(Whole group)

Overview: The common ground exercise is designed to show Circle participants how they may share commonalities that they would not have a chance to recognize otherwise.

- *Step 1: Participants who are sitting in Circle will remove a chair so that the Circle is one chair short. Think: musical chairs.*

- *Step 2: One person will stand in the center and offer a response to a prompt that begins,*

- *"I stand on common ground with anyone who has…"*

Responses can range from biographical facts to likes and dislikes. They can also vary in intensity. Examples include:

- *"I stand on common ground with anyone who has traveled to another country."*
- *"I stand on common ground with anyone who likes scary movies."*
- *"I stand on common ground with anyone who has cried this week."*
- *"I stand on common ground with anyone who feels discarded."*

Step 3: Those who share common ground in the question must rise from their seat, cross the Circle, and sit down in another empty seat. The person in the center will try to find a seat, as well. Those who do not identify with the response will remain in their seats.

Step 4: When all of the seats have been taken, someone will be left in the center of the Circle. This person then addresses the same prompt with a new response.

Step 5: Debrief with students by asking the following questions:

- *What did you learn about your classmates?*
- *Did anything surprise you?*
- *Which responses resonated most with you?*
- *What does this exercise teach us about the common ground we share with others?*



Considerations: This exercise can be challenging for students with access needs, including limited mobility. Modifications can include asking students to raise their hands rather than rise from their seats. Students can also take turns finishing the prompt through a sequential Circle. This removes the light-hearted competitive element, but it still allows students to scan the room following each response to see who does, and does not, share that piece of common ground.

Buddy Bio

(Pairs, then whole group)

Overview: This poetry exercise allows students to get to know each other more personally while channeling their creative writing abilities. In this activity, students construct a short biographical poem about their partner.

Step 1. Ask students to interview their partner using the following questions (and remind them to take notes):

- *What are three character traits that describe you?*
- *What are you able to do well?*
- *What or who do you care about?*
- *What do you enjoy?*

Step 2: Challenge students to transform their interview notes into a poem by inserting line breaks, using flourishes such as rhyming language, and teasing out metaphors while still honoring their buddy's voice. The poems can be written in either third person or in first person (by adopting the buddy's perspective).

Step 3: Invite students to return to the Circle and introduce their buddies by sharing their poems with the rest of the class.

Sample Buddy Bio Poems from RJ Lab Students:



1

My friend is:
Steadfast in his personal beliefs,
Yet being strong willed brings no relief.
Spiritually minded keeps him centered,
As his artistic talents are beautifully rendered.
His love for family is quite contagious,
While his musical favorites border on outrageous.

2

Loyal, truthful, and honest:
These describe my shell.
My faith is something I care about;
drawing is what I do well.
Although I love to draw a lot,
and it's really, really exciting,
I love working out; it's not a game,
I love extreme exercising.

3

I weave words like
a careful garden spider
spinning the most illustrious
literary reflections,
braiding thoughts into
successions
that follow both mind and matter.
I matter, and so do you.



Forced Choices

(Whole group)

Overview: This exercise encourages students to move around the room. The facilitator provides the instruction that students must physically polarize themselves based on their response to two "choices." They are discouraged from occupying a middle ground. Once students organize themselves based on their responses, the facilitator moves around the room to "interview" students about why they are on a specific side of the "forced choice." Each prompt leads to a reorganization.

The prompts should lead into a debriefing discussion or assignment. They can vary in terms of light and heavy questions. The following prompts were used as an icebreaker to introduce a unit called "What is the South?" in an English class called "Reading and Writing through Harm." It also encourages students to think through regional identity in terms of metaphor.

Step 1. Read a prompt and ask students to organize themselves on one side of the room or the other according to their choice.

Example: Consider the following options. With which do you identify? Think of these options as a metaphor for your personality.

Are you more like…

- *Banana pudding or pecan pie?*
- *Ford or Chevrolet?*
- *Creek or lake?*
- *Tornado or hurricane?*
- *Waffle House or IHOP?*
- *Sweet tea or lemonade?*
- *City or country?*
- *Splash pad or lazy river?*
- *Cornbread or fried green tomatoes?*

Step 2. Interview students on each side of the room to learn more about their choice.

Step 3. Repeat for all prompts.

Step 4. Debrief to find points of overlap and difference. Sample questions include:

- *What did you learn about one another?*
- *What did you learn about yourself?*
- *How did answering in terms of metaphor stretch your thinking?*
- *What pair of items would you like to see added to the list?*

> "Over time, through the community-building and healthy relationships that are such a big part of this program, I learned to cherish my cohort. This model promotes other-centered behavior and it fits well within this empathetic work."
>
> *RJ Lab student*

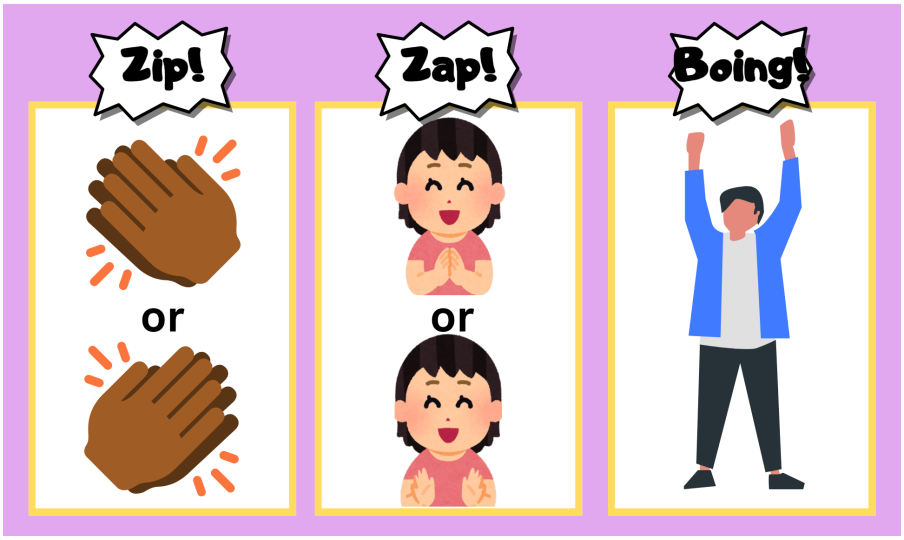
Theater Exercises

We use theater exercises to get students out of their seats, out of their heads, and into their bodies. These exercises have resulted in some of our silliest and most joyful classroom moments. We have used all of these exercises in our program and they work beautifully to build community through moments of imagination, cooperation, and creativity.

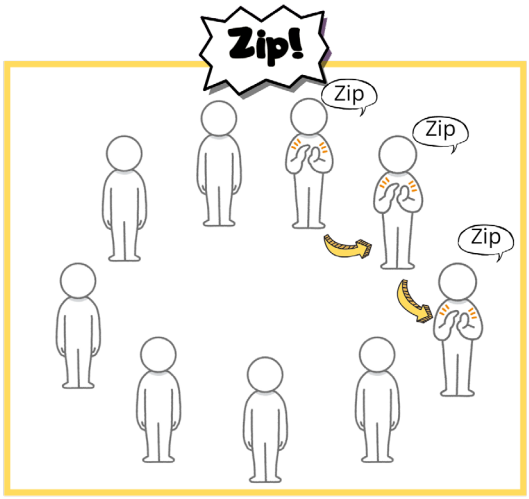
Zip Zap Boing

(Whole group)

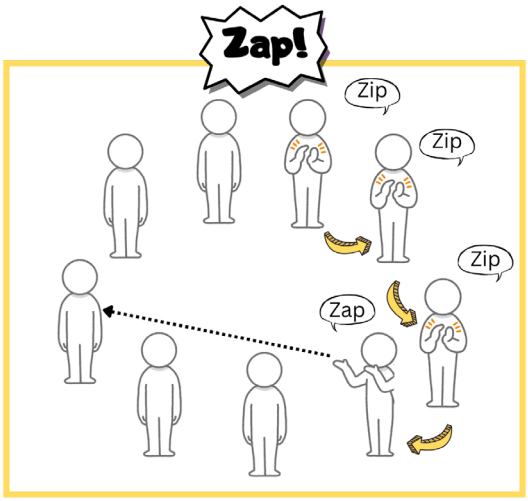
This game is a fun and challenging icebreaker for the Circle that encourages patience, focus, and connection through hand or arm movements. Participants direct the "energy" of the Circle through one of three chosen directions. The instructions are as follows:



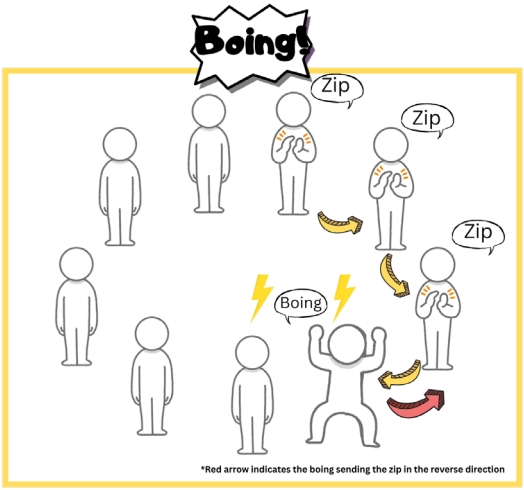
Step 1. Model a "zip," which is when a person clasps their hands together and directs the Circle's energy toward either the person on their immediate left or right.



Step 2. Model a "zap," which is when a person sends energy across the circle to anyone not directly next to them.



Step 3. Model a "boing," which is where a person bends their elbows and holds up their fists to deflect a "zip" back to its sender. They may also choose to bounce their fists off their chest.



Step 4: Begin. Each time someone performs an action, they must also say aloud which movement they are performing- "zip," "zap," or "boing."

Step 5: Challenge the group by repeating the exercise if participants become flustered and the energy flags. The goal is to send the energy around the Circle through communication that is as seamless as possible.

Note: The following theater exercises are drawn verbatim from Zoomy Zoomy: Improv Games and Exercises for Groups by Hannah Fox.



Endowment Circle[29]

(Whole group)

This exercise teaches about endowment. The facilitator "brings out" (in pantomime) various objects to pass around the circle: a cup of hot chocolate, a very sharp sword, a snowball, a small kitten, etc. As students pass the objects around they need to make holding and passing the objects believable to the others watching by paying close attention to weight, temperature, size, dimension, and texture. They should remain consistent with their choices.



Commonalities[30]

(Partners, then groups of four)

With a partner, try to think of something you have in common that is not visible and possibly even obscure. The facilitator can invite partners to share with the whole group. Then each dyad connects with another dyad, and the group of four have to think of something else the four of you have in common (again, not visible and maybe even obscure or not obvious; in other words, dig a little). Groups can be invited to share. The facilitator can then bring groups of four together to make eight-person groups (or ask the groups to separate and make new groups of six and repeat the exercise). The task can be challenging with a larger group and can take a while to complete.



What are you doing?[31]

(Whole group)

Someone in the circle begins with a pantomime of some activity, such as riding a bike, writing a letter, or brushing their teeth. The person on their right says, "Lauren, what are you doing?!" Lauren continues to mime riding a bike but says something totally different (without missing a beat): "I'm digging a ditch." Therefore, her physicalization does not match her dialogue. The questioner responds by taking on the physical activity of what

Lauren described and begins to mime digging a ditch. When the person to their right asks what they are doing, they continue to dig a ditch but say, "I'm flossing my teeth" (or something else equally unrelated to his physical action). Continue around the circle.



Circle Story[32]

(Whole group or small groups)

Either seated or standing up, the group creates a collective story by having one person speak at a time. There are several prompts you can offer. First is that each person contributes one word at a time (including "a" and "the"), together making complete sentences. Ideally, the story has a beginning, a middle, and goes somewhere. Next, after you've done it one word at a time, you can suggest that people contribute cliff-hanger paragraphs – so each person tells a little piece of the story, perhaps ending their turn in the middle of the sentence – For example: "They came to the bottom of a very large mountain and all of a sudden heard…"– which the next person has to pick up from. Finally, you can use the 1-2-3-4-5 formula. So, the first person says one word, the next person adds the next two words, the third person adds three words, etc. After the fifth person contributes five words to the story, the next person either goes back to one word or down to four words. These stories can be theme-based or wide open.



Burning Question[33]

(Whole group)

This is a nice game with which to start a session or to use with a new group to break the ice and build trust. Each person simply asks the person to their left (or right) a burning question (anything they want to know about this person) so the whole group can hear the answer. The questions might be anything from "What is your favorite thing to eat for dinner?" to "What is your deepest fear?" depending on how well the group members know each other. If a question

"The exercises presented in this RJ program have been an exceptional opportunity for me to be outside of my box and learn from others' experiences, grow into relationships that I would have otherwise avoided, and be part of a new and progressive community that has the potential to erase the lines drawn in the sand that others impose on us."

RJ Lab student

feels too personal, the recipient always has the prerogative to say, "Too personal; another question, please."

Yes[34]



(Whole group)

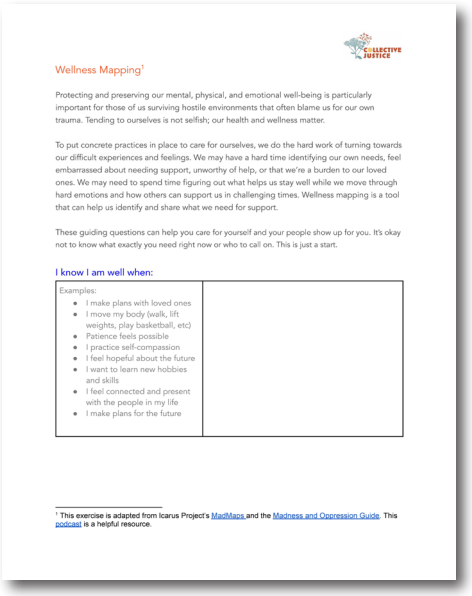
This game is challenging and requires practice and patience. (You don't bring this one out right away.) To be successful at this game, it is important to concentrate and stay calm. One person begins by making eye contact with someone across the circle (not someone next to them). Once the recipient notices that they are being "chosen" they say to the first person, "yes." Once the person who initiated the eye contact receives a "yes" (and only then) they begin to take the recipient's spot. During this time the recipient makes eye contact with someone new across the circle, and only when they receive a "yes" from that person do they begin to take that third person's place – they should find a place to go to before the first person gets to their spot. It often takes a group a few tries to understand the sequence of things, but once it does, the group can find a wonderful rhythm that is almost like a dance.

Variation (for a useful name game): Say "yes" and the person's name– "Yes, Jo."

Pod Mapping

Pod mapping was developed by Mia Mingus at the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective. It asks participants to map their social relationships using circles as visual representations of people and organizations. It also asks participants to write down the name of a person in the center of each circle to whom they can reach out for support.

When people – especially people in prison – first begin this exercise, they may feel discouraged because they do not know which names to write down. In the RJ Lab, we create learning pods during our study hall sessions so that students know they can rely on each other for academic support. We divide our cohort into groups of four students who sit at tables together during study hall and are encouraged to work collaboratively on their assignments. We consider the student demographics and living arrangements from *Module 1: Building the Cohort* when assigning students to cohorts, aiming to place students together who may not otherwise interact with one another. We change the learning pods every semester to prevent cliques from forming and to help students get to know and build trust with everyone in their cohort.



Wellness Mapping[1]

Protecting and preserving our mental, physical, and emotional well-being is particularly important for those of us surviving hostile environments that often blame us for our own trauma. Tending to ourselves is not selfish; our health and wellness matter.

To put concrete practices in place to care for ourselves, we do the hard work of turning towards our difficult experiences and feelings. We may have a hard time identifying our own needs, feel embarrassed about needing support, unworthy of help, or that we're a burden to our loved ones. We may need to spend time figuring out what helps us stay well while we move through hard emotions and how others can support us in challenging times. Wellness mapping is a tool that can help us identify and share what we need for support.

These guiding questions can help you care for yourself and your people show up for you. It's okay not to know what exactly you need right now or who to call on. This is just a start.

I know I am well when:

Examples:
- I make plans with loved ones
- I move my body (walk, lift weights, play basketball, etc)
- Patience feels possible
- I practice self-compassion
- I feel hopeful about the future
- I want to learn new hobbies and skills
- I feel connected and present with the people in my life
- I make plans for the future

[1] This exercise is adapted from Icarus Project's MadMaps and the Madness and Oppression Guide. This podcast is a helpful resource.

Our friends at Collective Justice have adapted pod mapping into a broader wellness mapping exercise. The following worksheets guide participants through identifying their wellness needs and use pod mapping as a way to encourage them to meet these needs through community support. Here, the circles from Mia Mingus' worksheet[35] are transformed into stars (representing people), moons (representing networks or groups), and planets (representing people or groups with whom we want to develop stronger relationships). See Appendix D for the full exercise.

> "I remember when I first started I would pass the mic every time I got it. I wouldn't hardly say two words, but my cohort stayed on me about it. Cohort 1 is my family. When we would wait in the gym for class, we would come together, circle up and prepare for class. The community-building exercises/practices helped me find the words so I could speak instead of passing the talking piece."
>
> *RJ Lab student*

What is Circle, and how do its components contribute to community-building?

Preparing for Circles with the Peacebuilding Wheel

One of the metaphors Howard Zehr uses to help us to conceptualize restorative practices is a wheel: "The principles of restorative justice – the hub and the spokes – must be surrounded by a rim of values in order to

function properly."[36] The **peacebuilding wheel** is a reminder that our collective values are what reinforce and hold these practices together. Many indigenous communities have used restorative peacemaking processes by relying on values that run counter to what Chief Justice Emeritus Robert Yazzie refers to as "Anglo Law." Peacemaking processes in indigenous cultures value dialogue, community engagement, ceremonial practices, and the holding of multiple truths; Anglo law, in contrast, values state authority, procedure and precedent, state actors (lawyers and judges), and a single truth or verdict.[37] For this reason, restorative justice is often situated as incompatible with, and subsequently as an alternative to, Western criminal legal systems.

Zehr also distinguishes between peacemaking and peacebuilding in the same way that we distinguish between restorative justice and restorative practices. He writes,

> *We use the term "peacebuilding" instead of "peacemaking" because conflicts arise from specific contexts. To address conflicts and build peaceful communities, we have to understand the contexts that lead to conflict and create contexts that promote peace. As John Paul Lederach, our founding director, says, it takes as long to end a conflict as it does to create it. True peace requires us not to just make peace by ending conflicts but to build an infrastructure for peace.*[38]

Values appear in the outer rim of the peacebuilding wheel. Peacebuilding remains the hub in the middle of the wheel. The spokes that hold the wheel together divide the wheel into elements of peacemaking. The spokes are evenly distributed and the elements are equally divided to illustrate the importance of balance and proportion within a system of values.

Exercise: Constructing a Peacebuilding Wheel



Overview: The act of constructing a peacebuilding wheel for the classroom draws students' attention to how we identify and balance our values as a community.

Step 1. Students first read an article from Howard Zehr on the peacebuilding wheel: https://zehr-institute.org/resources/restorative-justice-and-peacebuilding.html[39]

Step 2. Invite students to discuss the different segments of the wheel and how they all work and relate to one another. The goal is for all the parts of the wheel to work together to support a stable community using

evenly spaced spokes with "peacemaking" as the hub. Discuss how our shared values within peacebuilding help to move us toward this goal. If one spoke is larger than the other or smaller, the support is thrown off balance and the community can't adequately move forward.

Step 3. The facilitator draws a blank wheel on the board, dividing the wheel using spokes, and helps students to label the parts of the wheel with different values. Using a nonsequential Circle, the class dialogues about how the program contributes or builds toward each value of the wheel. The facilitator writes their contributions within the appropriate segment.

Step 4. Once all segments have been completed, the facilitator asks the class if anything is missing or needs to be amended on the peacebuilding wheel. The class continues to negotiate and adjust the wheel until it feels complete.

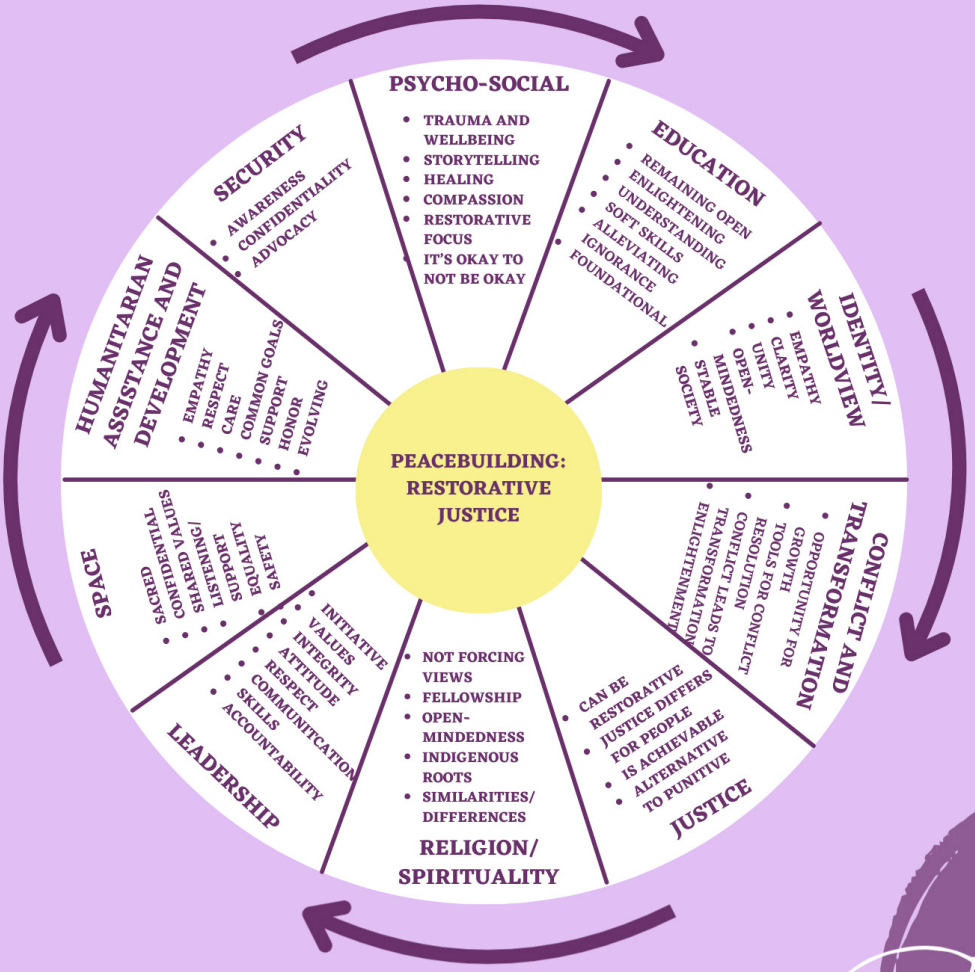
On the following page is an example of a peacebuilding wheel developed by RJ Lab students.

The peacebuilding wheel creates an opportunity for students to learn to articulate, negotiate, and balance their collective values. It also creates a foundation for Circle by establishing and documenting group norms and expectations and by introducing the primary shape for restorative practice work.

PEACEBUILDING WHEEL

Cohort 2

This wheel is composed of the peacebuilding elements of Restorative Justice that Cohort 2 found the most impactful to them.



Circles

"The underlying philosophy of Circles," Kay Pranis writes, "acknowledges that we are all in need of help and that helping others helps us at the same time. The participants of the Circle benefit from the collective wisdom of everyone in the Circle."[40] Circles can be held for many purposes, from problem solving to listening to restorative conferencing. Class sessions can also be held in Circle. The following components help to establish a clear structure that offer a sense of movement and closure with a beginning, middle, and ending. This structure contributes to community-building by providing a sense of safety, consistency, and familiarity while also allowing space for variation, improvisation, and growth. Circles allow us to climb multiple rungs of Rundell's relational ladder at once, providing an opportunity for us to challenge ourselves within a secure setting and structure.[41]

Circle Elements

Talking Piece

The purpose of this element is to prevent cross-talk and promote listening. It can also carry special symbolic meaning. The talking piece is a physical object that is passed from participant to participant within the Circle to distinguish who is speaking. When someone is holding the talking piece, they speak while others listen. Participants may opt to pass the talking piece when they receive it.

Case studies:

- In the RJ Lab, we use a microphone as our talking piece. It is connected to a loudspeaker that helps circle participants to better hear each other so that everyone's access needs can be met.
- In the restorative justice conference involving the Grosmaires and McBrides, the Grosmaires selected a talking piece that reflected the absence of their daughter, Ann: a popular rubber giraffe teether ("Sophie") from the baby store where she had worked.

Centerpiece

A **centerpiece** is a visual point of focus around which the Circle is arranged. It can contain multiple items that reflect the group's values and the Circle's purpose.

Case studies:

- In the RJ Lab, our centerpiece has included spiritual objects – Odinist charms, Christian scripture – that students have lain on top of another student's Muslim prayer rug. The layering and juxtaposition of these objects reminds us that, although we are motivated by different belief systems, we arrive in the Circle together with shared restorative values.
- In the restorative justice conference involving the Grosmaires and McBrides, Ann's belongings made up the centerpiece, establishing her presence and ensuring that the Circle remained focused on her. A purple cloth was laid down to represent her favorite color. Several items were placed on the cloth: a photo of her, a cast of her hand, an award she had earned as a stage manager in her drama club, a scarf that had been made for her by one of her dearest friends, and the giraffe that became the talking piece.

Community Agreement

A **community agreement** is a living document that establishes Circle participants' desires, boundaries, and expectations through consensus decision-making. It can be amended as needed at any time. We describe the process of crafting a community agreement in *Module 3: Navigating Conflict*.

Keeper/Facilitator

Every Circle should have at least one keeper or facilitator who guides and participates in each component of the Circle structure. As Kay Pranis writes, "The keeper in a Circle is not responsible for finding solutions or for controlling the group."[42] Rather, the keeper engages participants, monitors group dynamics, and, when needed, reminds the group of its community agreement. The keeper also initiates and closes the Circle.

Circle Structure

Opening Ceremony

Description: The facilitator conducts an **opening ceremony** to ground participants in a common point of focus.

Purpose: To set the stage and tone for Circle; to delineate the time and space of Circle from the rest of the environment; to focus everyone's

attention on a single common object, reading, or exercise; to invite participants to remain present.



Considerations: Opening ceremony rituals may include preparing the centerpiece, offering a brief reading, or playing a musical instrument. They can also include guided meditations or breathing exercises. Our friends at Collective Justice have created a worksheet on Groundings that work well for opening ceremonies. You can locate this worksheet in Appendix E.

Opening Round

Description: Often called a "check-in," the **opening round** begins when the facilitator offers a prompt that asks each participant to contribute a brief response. Participants also have an opportunity to introduce themselves to the larger group. The movement in an opening round is typically sequential: everyone participates as the talking piece moves around the Circle clockwise or counterclockwise. In the RJ Lab, we often use the feelings and needs inventories for our check-in question.

Purpose: To actively engage all participants; to gain a sense of how participants are feeling; to invite reflection; to encourage listening.

Storytelling Round

Description: The **storytelling round** allows space for Circle's purpose to unfold. Participants are invited to explore a topic in greater depth. In a listening circle, this might include several rounds of sequential shares based on a series of prompts. In the RJ Lab, this is where our class discussions take place. In a formal restorative justice conference, this is where the person harmed and the person who caused harm explore the restorative questions together.

Purpose: To provide room for flexibility and open expression within the structured format of Circle; to invite participants to explore topics together with depth and nuance.

Closing Round

Description: Often called a "check-out," the **closing round** begins when the facilitator again offers a prompt that asks each participant to contribute a brief response. The check-out should offer some form of

closure. In the RJ Lab, we may ask students to reiterate their feelings and needs at the end of Circle and invite them to reflect on how the process has shifted their feelings and allowed them to meet some of their needs.

Purpose: To actively engage all participants; to gain a sense of how participants are feeling; to invite reflection; to encourage listening.

Closing Ceremony

Description:
The facilitator conducts a **closing ceremony** to complete the Circle.

Purpose: To provide a sense of closure; to prepare participants to exit Circle and step back into their environments; to focus everyone's attention on a single common object, reading, or exercise; to invite participants to remain present.

> "I've found that I live not far from others in this Circle. I have a lot in common with these guys. We've gotten closer, not only as RJ classmates, but as true friends. I like being alone and to myself. But through RJ and this Circle, I've allowed some of my walls to be torn down. I look at this Circle as family."
>
> *RJ Lab student*

Recap

Key takeaways:

- **Relationships are key to social health and classroom engagement.**
- **Relationships with the self and others are strengthened through reflective and trust-building exercises.**
- **Icebreaker exercises that incorporate visual arts, theater, and mapping strategies open up new pathways for engaging with the self and others.**
- **Peacebuilding exercises help Circle participants to articulate, balance, and negotiate their shared values.**
- **Circles support relationships and promote expression by balancing structure, safety, and engagement.**

In the next module, we will explore how we can manage and repair relationships by addressing conflict.

Endnotes

1. Sun Mi Cho, Chan ung Park, and Min Song, "The Evolution of Social Health Research Topics: A Data-driven Analysis" *Social Science & Medicine* 265 (2020), 3.

2. Office of the Surgeon General, *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023).

3. Howard Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2002), 29.

4. Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration* (Harvard University Press, 2020), 38.

5. Fleetwood, *Marking Time*, 38.

6. John Braithwaite, *Crime, Shame and Reintegration* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 12-13.

7. Danielle Sered, *Until We Reckon: Violence, Mass Incarceration, and a Road to Repair* (New York: The New Press, 2019), 69.

8. Christopher Menscher and Alexandra Maul, "Key Ingredients for Successful Trauma-Informed Care Implementation," (Hamilton, NJ: Center for Healthcare Strategies, 2016).

9. Christine A. Courtois and Julian D. Ford, *Treatment of Complex Trauma: A Sequenced, Relationship-Based Approach* (New York: Guilford Press, 2012), 3.

10. Courtois and Ford, *Treatment of Complex Trauma*, 4.

11. Courtois and Ford, *Treatment of Complex Trauma*, 38-39.

12. Joel Berglund, C. Bjursell, and M. Hugo, "Research on Education in Prisons: A Scoping Review" *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 44, no. 4 (2025): 436–49.

13. Courtois and Ford, *Treatment of Complex Trauma*, 60.

14. Courtois and Ford, *Treatment of Complex Trauma*, 64.

15. Frida Rundell, *Processing Trauma Using the Relational Care Ladder* (Bethlehem, PA: IIRP Graduate School, 2021).

16. John Michael Sasan, Gica Tugbong, and Kent Alistre, "An Exploration of Icebreakers and Their Impact On Student Engagement in the Classroom," *International Journal of Social Service & Research (IJSSR)* 3, no. 11 (2023): 2921-2930.

17. Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, 46-47; 79; 91.

18. "What is the CASEL Framework?" CASEL.org, accessed October 21, 2025. https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/what-is-the-casel-framework/#self-awareness

19. Nelio Brazao, Daniel Rijo, Maria do Céu Salvador, and José Pinto-Gouveia "Promoting Emotion and Behavior Regulation in Male Prison Inmates: A Secondary Data Analysis from a Randomized Controlled Trial Testing the Efficacy of the Growing Pro-Social Program," *Law and Human Behavior* 42, no. 1 (2018), 57-70.

20. Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, 27.

21. Raychelle Cassada Lohmann, *The Anger Workbook for Teens: Activities to Help You Deal with Anger and Frustration* (Oakland, CA: Harbinger, 2019).

22. "Paula Gasparini-Santos,"Accessed October 21, 2025, https://paulagasparini-santos.com/.

23. Paul Tullis, "Can Forgiveness Play a Role in Criminal Justice?" *New York Times*, January 4, 2013. https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/06/magazine/can-forgiveness-play-a-role-in-criminal-justice.html.

24. Eddie Ellis, "An Open Letter to Our Friends on the Question of Language," (New York: Center for NuLeadership on Human Justice and Healing, 2023).

25. Paul Laurence Dunbar, "We Wear the Mask," Poetry Foundation, 1895, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44203/we-wear-the-mask, accessed 5 December 2025.

26. Langston Hughes, "I, Too," Poetry Foundation, 2002, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47558/i-too, accessed 5 December 2025.

27. Maya Angelou, "Still I Rise," Poetry Foundation, 1994, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46446/still-i-rise, accessed 5 December 2025.

28. Merima Camo and Amer Osmić, "The Concept and Importance of Trust in the Student-Teacher Relationship: Sociological Discourse," *Sociological Discourse / Sociološki Diskurs* 10, no. 19 (2020): 67–80.

29. Hannah Fox, *Zoomy Zoomy: Improv Games and Exercises for Groups*, (New Paltz, NY: Tusitala Publishing, 2010): 60.

30. Fox, *Zoomy Zoomy*, 58.

31. Fox, *Zoomy Zoomy*, 46.

32. Fox, *Zoomy Zoomy*, 109.

33. Fox, *Zoomy Zoomy*, 64.

34. Fox, *Zoomy Zoomy*, 62.

35. Mia Mingus, "Pods and Pod Mapping Worksheet," Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective (2016) https://batjc.org/files/Pods-Pod-Mapping-Worksheet.pdf

36. Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, 46.

37. Robert Yazzie, "Life Comes From It: Navajo Justice Concepts," *New Mexico Law Review* 24, no. 175 (1994).

38. Howard Zehr, "Restorative Justice and Peacebuilding," Zehr Institute Blog, April 20, 2009, https://zehr-institute.org/resources/restorative-justice-and-peacebuilding.html.

39. Zehr, "Restorative Justice and Peacebuilding."

40. Kay Pranis, *The Little Book of Circle Processes* (New York: Good Books, 2005), 6.

41. Rundell, *Processing Trauma Using the Relational Care Ladder*.

42. Pranis, *The Little Book of Circle Processes*, 36.

Appendix A: Feelings Inventory

Feelings Inventory

The following are words we use when we want to express a combination of emotional states and physical sensations. This list is neither exhaustive nor definitive. It is meant as a starting place to support anyone who wishes to engage in a process of deepening self-discovery and to facilitate greater understanding and connection between people.

There are two parts to this list: feelings we may have when our needs are being met and feelings we may have when our needs are not being met.

Feelings when your needs are satisfied

AFFECTIONATE
compassionate
friendly
loving
open hearted
sympathetic
tender
warm

ENGAGED
absorbed
alert
curious
engrossed
enchanted
entranced
fascinated
interested
intrigued
involved
spellbound
stimulated

HOPEFUL
expectant
encouraged
optimistic

CONFIDENT
empowered
open
proud
safe
secure

EXCITED
amazed
animated
ardent
aroused
astonished
dazzled
eager
energetic
enthusiastic
giddy
invigorated
lively
passionate
surprised
vibrant

GRATEFUL
appreciative
moved
thankful
touched

INSPIRED
amazed
awed
wonder

JOYFUL
amused
delighted
glad
happy
jubilant
pleased
tickled

EXHILARATED
blissful
ecstatic
elated
enthralled
exuberant
radiant
rapturous
thrilled

PEACEFUL
calm
clear headed
comfortable
centered
content
equanimous
fulfilled
mellow
quiet
relaxed
relieved
satisfied
serene
still
tranquil
trusting

REFRESHED
enlivened
rejuvenated
renewed
rested
restored
revived

© 2005 by Center for Nonviolent Communication | Website: www.cnvc.org | Email: cnvc@cnvc.org | Phone: +1.505.244.4041

Feelings when your needs are not satisfied

AFRAID
apprehensive
dread
foreboding
frightened
mistrustful
panicked
petrified
scared
suspicious
terrified
wary
worried

ANNOYED
aggravated
dismayed
disgruntled
displeased
exasperated
frustrated
impatient
irritated
irked

ANGRY
enraged
furious
incensed
indignant
irate
livid
outraged
resentful

AVERSION
animosity
appalled
contempt
disgusted
dislike
hate
horrified
hostile
repulsed

CONFUSED
ambivalent
baffled
bewildered
dazed
hesitant
lost
mystified
perplexed
puzzled
torn

DISCONNECTED
alienated
aloof
apathetic
bored
cold
detached
distant
distracted
indifferent
numb
removed
uninterested
withdrawn

DISQUIET
agitated
alarmed
discombobulated
disconcerted
disturbed
perturbed
rattled
restless
shocked
startled
surprised
troubled
turbulent
turmoil
uncomfortable
uneasy
unnerved
unsettled
upset

EMBARRASSED
ashamed
chagrined
flustered
guilty
mortified
self-conscious

FATIGUE
beat
burnt out
depleted
exhausted
lethargic
listless
sleepy
tired
weary
worn out

PAIN
agony
anguished
bereaved
devastated
grief
heartbroken
hurt
lonely
miserable
regretful
remorseful

SAD
depressed
dejected
despair
despondent
disappointed
discouraged
disheartened
forlorn
gloomy
heavy hearted
hopeless
melancholy
unhappy
wretched

TENSE
anxious
cranky
distressed
distraught
edgy
fidgety
frazzled
irritable
jittery
nervous
overwhelmed
restless
stressed out

VULNERABLE
fragile
guarded
helpless
insecure
leery
reserved
sensitive
shaky

YEARNING
envious
jealous
longing
nostalgic
pining
wistful

© 2005 by Center for Nonviolent Communication | Website: www.cnvc.org | Email: cnvc@cnvc.org | Phone: +1.505.244.4041

Appendix B: Needs Inventory

Needs Inventory

The following list of needs is neither exhaustive nor definitive. It is meant as a starting place to support anyone who wishes to engage in a process of deepening self-discovery and to facilitate greater understanding and connection between people. Adapted from the CVNC Needs Inventory.

CONNECTION	**PHYSICAL WELLBEING**	**PEACE**
acceptance	air	beauty
affection	food	communion
appreciation	movement/exercise	ease
belonging	rest/sleep	equality
cooperation	safety	harmony
communication	shelter	inspiration
closeness	water	order
community		
companionship	**MEANING**	**AUTONOMY**
compassion	awareness	choice
consideration	celebration of life	freedom
consistency	challenge	independence
empathy	clarity	space
inclusion	competence	spontaneity
love	consciousness	
mutuality	contribution	**HONESTY**
nurturing	creativity	authenticity
respect/self-respect	discovery	integrity
safety	efficacy	presence
security	effectiveness	
stability	growth	**PLAY**
support	hope	joy
to know and be known	learning	humor
to see and be seen	mourning	
to understand and be understood	participation	
	purpose	
trust	self-expression	
warmth	understanding	

© 2005 by Center for Nonviolent Communication Website: www.cnvc.org Email: cnvc@cnvc.org Phone: +1.505-244-4041

Appendix C: Managing Anger

Your body's response to anger

For you to know: Problematic anger can take a toll on your body. Anger causes a lot of stress, which can lead to health problems such as high blood pressure, headaches, and stomachaches, among others. Did you know that your body gives off signs to let you know that you're getting angry? Learning to recognize and respond to these signs can help you stay physically and mentally fit.

Look at some of the physical ways anger manifests itself. Some of your body's anger warning signs may include:

- Crying
- Feeling flushed and hot
- Grinding teeth
- Rolling your eyes or squinting
- Feeling dizzy
- Breathing heavily
- Feeling your heart beat fast
- Blushing or face turning red
- Getting a stomachache
- Sweating
- Feeling muscles tighten
- Shaking or trembling
- Getting a headache

Knowing your physical response to anger can help you become aware of when you need to cool your jets and calm down. Those tips can help when you reach that point.

- Take slow, deep, and relaxing breaths and concentrate on exhaling slowly
- Zone into your environment by listening to a ticking clock, a dripping faucet, or a bird chirping outside your window. You can also focus on studying each detail in a drawing, watching the sunlight flicker on the floor through a window, or examining all the details on the cover of a book.
- Go for a walk and get some fresh air, or find a quiet space away from people.

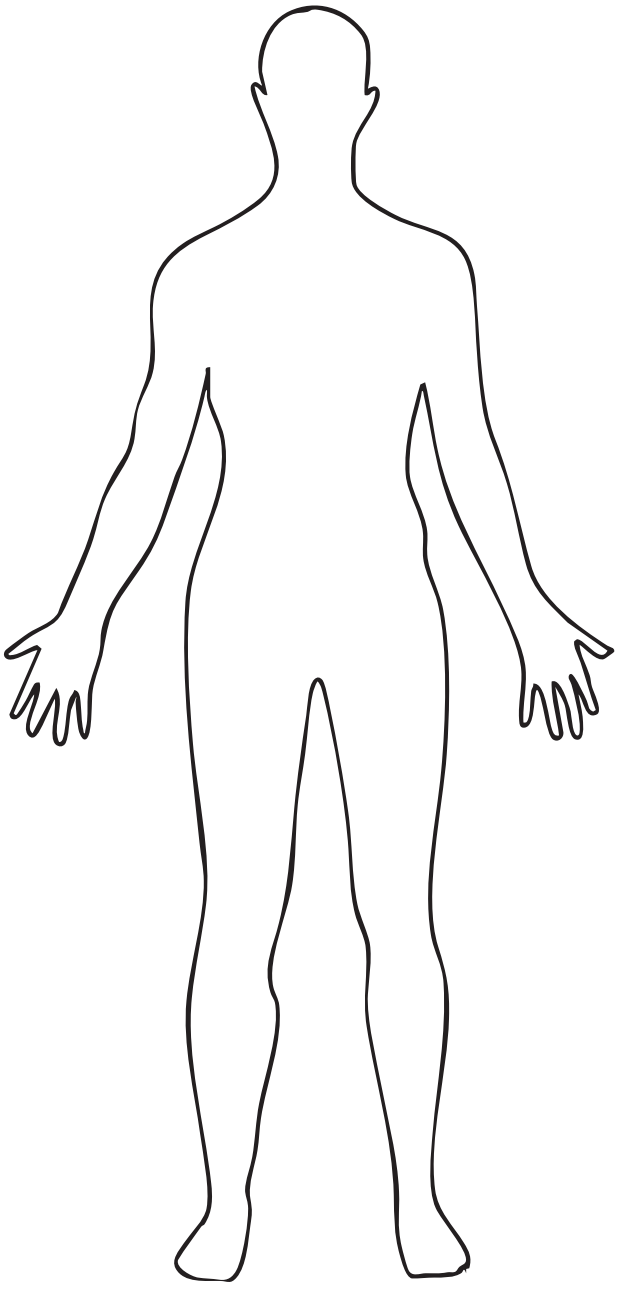
If you can't get away from the frustrating situation, there are other ways you can relax, such as:

- Talking yourself down from anger by telling yourself everything will be okay and it's not worth getting so upset;

- Pretending that you are at a relaxing place (perhaps the beach or your grandmother's house). As you bring this place to mind, focus on letting the anger drain from your body like water draining from a bathtub;
- Sticking in your earbuds and focusing on each word of your favorite song.

For you to do

In the body silhouette below, draw in all the parts of your body that are affected when you feel anger. For example, if you cry when you get angry, you might draw eyes with tears or if your muscles get tight, you might draw flexed biceps.



And more to do

Describe how your body responds to anger.

_____

_____

_____

List the parts of your body that are most affected by anger.

_____

_____

_____

In addition to the earlier suggestions, list some other things you can do to calm down when you feel your body responding to anger.

_____

_____

_____

Source: *The Anger Workbook for Teens: Activities to Help You Deal with Anger and Frustration* by Raychelle Cassada Lohmann (Oakland, CA: Harbinger, 2019).

Appendix D: Wellness and Pod Mapping

Wellness Mapping[1]

Protecting and preserving our mental, physical, and emotional well-being is particularly important for those of us surviving hostile environments that often blame us for our own trauma. Tending to ourselves is not selfish; our health and wellness matter.

To put concrete practices in place to care for ourselves, we do the hard work of turning towards our difficult experiences and feelings. We may have a hard time identifying our own needs, feel embarrassed about needing support, unworthy of help, or that we're a burden to our loved ones. We may need to spend time figuring out what helps us stay well while we move through hard emotions and how others can support us in challenging times. Wellness mapping is a tool that can help us identify and share what we need for support.

These guiding questions can help you care for yourself and your people show up for you. It's okay not to know what exactly you need right now or who to call on. This is just a start.

I know I am well when:

Examples: • I make plans with loved ones • I move my body (walk, lift weights, play basketball, etc) • Patience feels possible • I practice self-compassion • I feel hopeful about the future • I want to learn new hobbies and skills • I feel connected and present with the people in my life • I make plans for the future	

[1] This exercise is adapted from Icarus Project's MadMaps and the Madness and Oppression Guide. This podcast is a helpful resource.

When I'm having a really hard time, some things that can happen for me include:

Examples: • It's hard to breathe • Start/stop sleeping all the time • Eat way more/way less • Am more impatient or irritable • Feel anxious/jittery/ restless/panicky • Isolate myself • Get jealous of other people • Pick fights • Get violent • Taking my prescribed medications irregularly or not at all • Feel bad about my body • Behave in ways that I don't feel good about • Do things for hours without pleasure, like watching TV • Use substances more • Exercise way more or way less than usual	

When I notice myself starting to struggle, some positive things that I can do for myself include:

Examples: • Listen/play/write music • Read/re-read my favorite book • Move my body • Make a list of things I'm grateful for or that I like about myself • Journal • Creative expression • Activism • Seek out laughter/humor • Spiritual or religious practice • Study/learn	

• Spend time outside • Help others • Therapy • Talk openly about what I'm going through • Attend a support group • Practice setting boundaries • Affirmations • Cry • Sleep • Contextualize my behavior within systemic violence so it feels less shameful • Vent • Meditation, deep breaths • Eat well	

When other people in my life notice that I'm starting to struggle, some things that I don't want them to do include:

Examples: • Asking me if I've been taking my meds • Give me unsolicited advice • Tell me to get over it • Blame me for my problems • Tell me what they would do if they were in my position • Tell me "it will be alright" • Ignore me • Try to fix me • Say "I know how you feel" • Tell other people about what I'm going through	

When other people in my life notice me starting to struggle, some positive things that they can do to support me include:

Examples: • Ask me if I'm having a hard time • Ask me what I need • Invite me for a walk • Offer to work out together • Bring me food • Pray with me • Ask me if I'm eating/sleeping/taking my meds • Get me to socialize with other people • Make connections with others who have similar experiences • Bring over art supplies • Name the oppression I'm experiencing • Normalize my feelings • Validate me • Listen to me • Distract me	

Pod Maps & Practice

"If we are truly committed to ending oppression and violence, then we must be committed to each other, we must live out of the simple truth that we need each other. We need each other." - Mia Mingus

"Pods" are the people we would turn to for support when experiencing tough times. We want to build pods with people we trust and have relationship with. Our pods may include people who we call to support us when we have been harmed, have caused harm, are processing heavy emotions, or are just feeling down. We may call on different people for support based on the skills they have or the relationship we have with them.

When things get really hard, caring for ourselves can feel out of reach. In those moments, we need community/collective care. Community care means seeing every person's well-being as

the responsibility of the whole group; holding one another when we can't hold ourselves, checking in on each other, and actively tending to one another's needs. When our loved ones are going through hard things, we can offer tangible suggestions instead of vague offers of support to help them think about what types of support might feel good. We might not be able to fix the underlying issue, but we might be able to bring them a meal or go for a walk together.

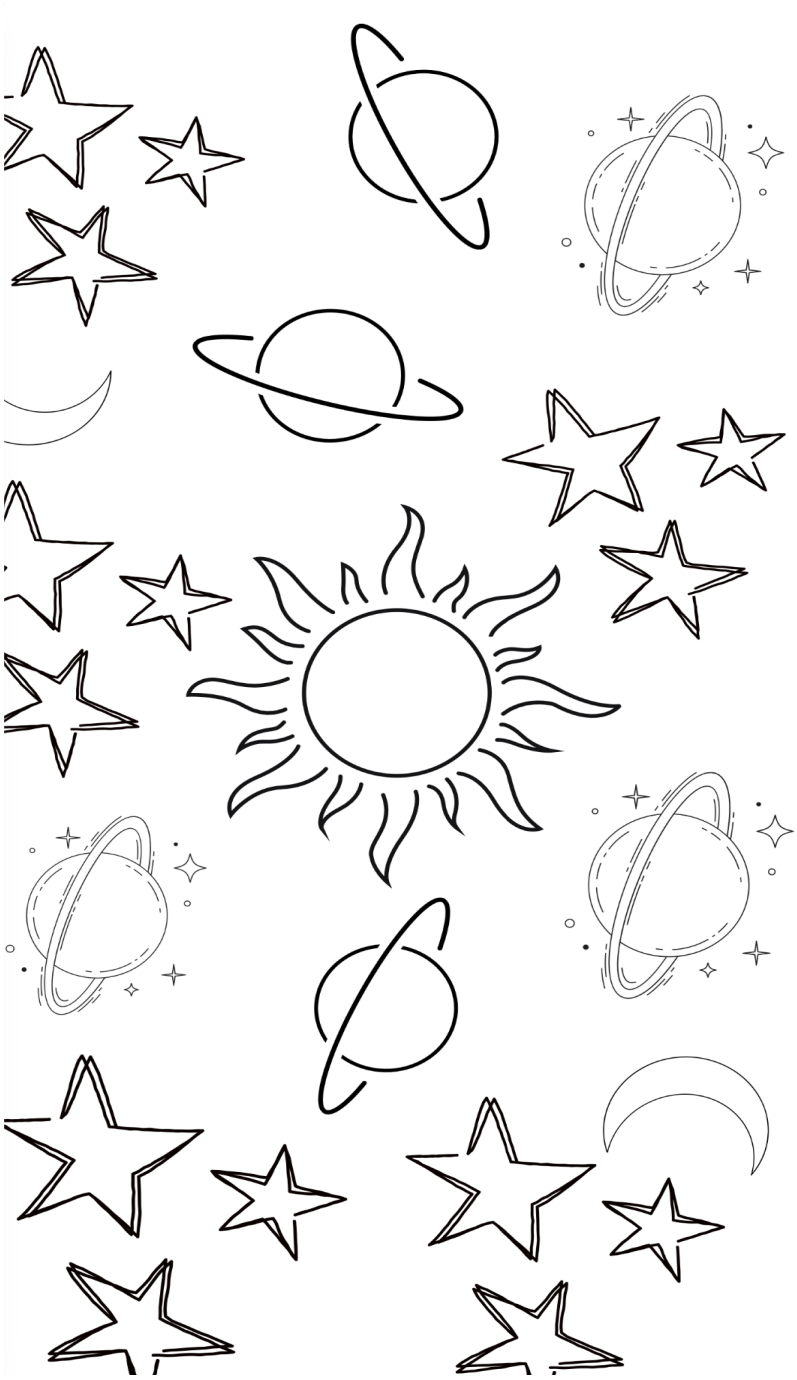
Part 1. Making your Pod Map[2]

1. Write your name in the middle of the sun.
2. The surrounding planets, stars and moons are your pod. Write the names of the people, groups, and networks who are in your pod. Try to write the names of actual individuals, instead of broad descriptions like "my church group," "my friends" or "my cellmate."
    - *Stars* - People you have supportive, trusting relationships with.
    - *Planets* - Networks, communities or groups that could be resources. This could be your facilitators, people in your youth group, coaches, or domestic violence service organizations.
    - *Moons* - People who could move into your pod if more relationship and trust is built.

Tip: It can be helpful to think about the three P's of podmapping when you're brainstorming your pod people. The three P's inform who might be solid people to call on based on the specific needs you have.[3]

- Proximity - How far or close in distance is the person to you geographically? How might the distance impact how they are able to show up for you?
- Politicization - Do you and the person share the same political beliefs and how might that impact what you can reveal to them about what is going on or what they will do in response? For example, will they automatically call the police if they think you are in distress without fully appreciating the impacts of involving the police or will they hold judgment if you share parts of you that they don't understand such as your sexual orientation, family model, etc?
- Positionality - Do you share the same identities and lived experience? Does the power and identity differences or similarities between you and this support person impact what you might ask of them?

[2] Podmapping was developed by Mia Mingus and the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective. More information about the concept and activity can be found on their website (https://batjc.wordpress.com/resources/pods-and-pod-mapping-worksheet/).
[3] Three P's of Podmapping was conceptualized by Teddy McGlynn-Wright.



Pod Map

Part 2. Feeling the depth of my pod

1) Using your Pod Map, write out the names of your pod people, groups, and networks in their respective columns.
2) Write what you might go to the different people and groups for and what you might ask them to do to support you:
    - Who would you call to support you when you are being harmed?
    - Who would you call to support you when you have done harm?
    - Who can offer emotional support?
    - Who do you like to do fun activities with?
    - Who lives nearby?

Stars (People)	Planets (Networks)	Moons (People/Groups I Want to Call in)

Part 3: Inviting my pod people into practice

Building from the work you did to see the supportive roles different people and groups play in your life, pick 2-3 people in your pod to have a conversation with about your HEAL circle and what you'll be doing over the next two years. This is a good time to share the ways you see this person/group supporting you and check-in around their capacity to support you during circle.

Tips for sharing the work you'll be doing:

- What conversations might you need to have with a support person before sharing with them?
    - This could be asking them to not share what you talk about or asking them to not call the police.
- Have this conversation while doing an activity you identified as positive and resourcing.
- Think about where you might want to meet with your pod person? What public space in your neighborhood or city do you feel most at ease? What makes an environment feel

comfortable for you?

Your pod(s) may shift over time, as your needs or relationships shift, or as you move to new neighborhoods or cities. A lot of us might have a hard time thinking about who we would want to be in our pods or might notice we don't have as many people as we wish we did. You're not alone - this is a common experience. We can use this practice to bring attention to the types of relationships we want to build in our lives and the people we want to know more deeply. It is not easy to grow a pod that is committed to holding the needs and lives of everyone in it. In building a pod, we focus on the quality of our relationships with one another and invest time to build trust, respect, vulnerability, accountability, care and love. Building our pods is a concrete way to prepare and build resources for accountability in our communities.[4]

Invitation to Practice

> *"To be 'well' is not to live in a state of perpetual safety and calm, but to move fluidly from a state of adversity, risk adventure, or excitement, back to calm and out again." Emily Nagoski*

Reverend Angel Kyodo Williams describes centering skillfully as the ability to recognize when we're off center and shorten the time it takes to come back after getting knocked off. We practice grounding (or centering) in our circles as a way to build our presence and awareness. Research shows that 300 repetitions produces muscle memory (our bodies' ability to remember practices), and that 3,000 repetitions creates embodiment (being able to take this new action automatically, even under pressure).[5] We practice grounding so we have resources for coming back to our center; creating spaciousness in our own bodies to respond, rather than react, even during moments of distress.

Practice: This week, practice grounding each day. You may use your own practices that support you in being present and returning to center, or draw from the handouts provided.

[4] Pod Mapping was developed by Mia Mingus and the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective.
[5] Generative Somatics Website (https://generativesomatics.org/courses/daily-practice-space/)

Appendix E: Grounding and Centering Exercises

Grounding + Centering Exercises:

Each circle will begin with a grounding practice. Grounding is an essential piece of building a container for deeper collective work. Participants come to circle from their busy, often stressful, days. Groundings offer a ritual to mark a shift in what is demanded of our hearts and minds to transition from the hustle and bustle to the circle. Groundings are also an important practice for cultivating an open presence. Slowing down to engage our breath, set personal intentions and recommit to our time together helps participants access spaciousness, purpose and presence. It is important to practice the exercises again and again until the skills become automatic and can be called on even during moments of distress or conflict.

Participants are often not familiar with grounding exercises. Sometimes we are very practiced at cutting ourselves off from our bodily sensations or feelings because what we find there is painful, overwhelming or unpleasant. So tuning in through grounding should be a gradual process that centers the agency and pace of participants. You can start with more simple exercises such as a few breaths or body scans and remind participants why we ground. It is also useful to remind folks to find a position that is comfortable for them with their eyes open or shut - whatever feels good for them.

After some time of offering very simple, short and accessible groundings, you may practice with some longer ones or ones that allow for deepening into our bodies. When the group is ready, participants should be invited to lead groundings - either ones from this list below or ones they bring.

Progressive Release of Muscular Tension

When we feel anxious, our body tenses. This can generate pain or tightness in the shoulders, neck or back, jaw, arms or legs. To help release this tension, we start by intentionally tensing specific groups of muscles, and relaxing them. Focus on the difference of feeling between the tense and relaxed state of the muscles. Practice on different parts of the body: the head, face, neck, shoulder, back, stomach, arms, hands, legs or feet. Increase tension and hold it for 5 seconds; then release and hold for 10 seconds. Find the tempo that suits you. Increase the tension and release the tension ten times in each muscle group, with a short pause in between.

Start by focusing on your hands. Make a fist, hold it for 5 seconds, release for 10. Notice the difference between the tense and released states. Do it once more. Move the focus to your arms. Pull your forearms towards your shoulder. Feel the tension in your upper arms. Hold for 5 seconds, release for 10. Notice the difference, Do it once more. Stretch your arm out, and lock the elbow. Feel the tension in the triceps. Hold for 5 seconds, release for 10. Notice the difference. Repeat. When your arms are relaxed, let them rest in your lap. Focus on your face. Increase the tension in your forehead, lift your eyebrows. Notice the tension. Hold for 5 seconds, release for 10. Notice the difference. Repeat. Increase the tension in your jaw. Hold. Release. Repeat. Focus on the muscles in your neck. Bend your neck so that your chin touches your chest, turn your head slowly to the left, bring it back to the centre, bend it back, bring it back to the centre, turn it to the right, bring it back to the centre. Repeat slowly since there is often a lot of tension in this area.
Focus on your shoulders. Lift them. Hold and notice the tension. Release. Notice the difference. Repeat. Focus on the shoulder blades. Pull them back. Increase the tension. Relax.

Notice the difference and repeat. Stretch your back by sitting in a very upright position. Hold the tension and relax, notice the difference and repeat. Hold your breath. Pull your stomach in, tighten it, and relax. Notice the difference, repeat. Focus on your legs. Stretch them out, feel the tension in your thighs, hold and relax. Straighten your legs again; this time make your toes point towards you. Notice the tension in the back of your legs, and the feeling of relaxation when you release. Repeat. Focus on your toes, make them point downwards as far as you can. Feel the tension and release. Scan your whole body. Does any part still feel tense? Repeat the exercise for this part. Imagine that a relaxed feeling is spreading through your whole body. Your body feels warm, perhaps a little heavier, relaxed.

Creating a Safe Place

Make yourself comfortable, with your feet on the ground. Feel and relax your body, your head, your face, your arms, spine, stomach, buttocks, thighs, legs. Choose whether you want to close your eyes or keep them open during this exercise. Listen carefully to the Trainer's voice.
Think of a place in your past where you felt calm, confident, and safe. It may be outdoors, at home, or somewhere else. It can be a place where you have been once or many times, a place you saw in a film or heard about, or a place you imagine. You can be there by yourself or with someone you know. It can be private, unknown to others, or somewhere that no one can find without your permission. Or you can decide to share it with others. This place must suit you and meet your needs. You can constantly recreate or adapt it. It is comfortable and richly equipped for all your wants. Everything you need to be comfortable is there. It is somewhere that fits you. It shuts out every stimulus that might be overwhelming. Imagine this place. Imagine you are there. Take time to absorb it in detail: its colours, shapes, smells and sounds. Imagine the sunshine, feel the wind and the temperature. Notice how it feels to stand, sit or lie there, how your skin and your body feel in contact with it.

How does your body feel when everyone is safe, and everything is fine? In your safe place you can see, hear, smell and feel exactly what you need to feel safe. Perhaps you take off your shoes and feel what it is like to walk barefoot in the grass or in the sand. You can go to this place whenever you want and as often as you want. Just thinking about it will cause you to feel calmer and more confident. Remain there for five more seconds. Then prepare to return to this room, open your eyes, stretch yourself, do what you need to return to the present.

Shape Breathing

Sit comfortably. Lower your shoulders.
Look at a square form, or visualize one with your eyes closed. Breathe in while counting to 4.
Hold your breath while counting to 4. Let your eyes run across the top of the square.
Breathe out while counting to 4. Let your eyes run down the right side of the square.
Hold your breath while counting to 4. Let your eyes run along the bottom of the square.
Repeat 4 times.

Body Scan

Begin by making yourself comfortable. Sit in a chair and allow your back to be straight, but not stiff, with your feet on the ground. You could also do this practice standing or if you prefer, you can lie down and have your head supported. Your hands could be resting gently in your lap or at your side. Allow your eyes to close, or to remain open with a soft gaze.

Take several long, slow, deep breaths. Breathing in fully and exhaling slowly. Breathe in through your nose and out through your nose or mouth. Feel your stomach expand on an inhale and relax and let go as you exhale.

Begin to let go of noises around you. Begin to shift your attention from outside to inside yourself. If you are distracted by sounds in the room, simply notice this and bring your focus back to your breathing.

Now slowly bring your attention down to your feet. Begin observing sensations in your feet. You might want to wiggle your toes a little, feeling your toes against your socks or shoes. Just notice, without judgment. You might imagine sending your breath down to your feet as if the breath is traveling through the nose to the lungs and through the abdomen all the way down to your feet. And then back up again out through your nose and lungs. Perhaps you don't feel anything at all. That is fine, too. Just allow yourself to feel the sensation of not feeling anything.

When you are ready, allow your feet to dissolve in your mind's eye and move your attention up to your ankles, calves, knees, and thighs. Observe the sensations you are experiencing throughout your legs. Breathe into and breathe out of the legs. If your mind begins to wander during this exercise, gently notice this without judgment and bring your mind back to noticing the sensations in your legs.

If you notice any discomfort, pain or stiffness, don't judge this. Just simply notice it. Observe how all sensations rise and fall, shift and change moment to moment. Notice how no sensation is permanent. Just observe and allow the sensations to be in the moment, just as they are. Breathe into and out from the legs.

Then on the next out-breath, allow the legs to dissolve in your mind. And move to the sensations in your lower back and pelvis. Softening and releasing as you breathe in and out. Slowly move your attention up to your mid-back and upper back. Become curious about the sensations here. You may become aware of sensations in the muscle, temperature or points of contact with furniture or the bed.

With each out-breath, you may let go of the tension you are carrying. And then very gently shift your focus to your stomach and all the internal organs here. Perhaps you notice the feeling of clothing, the process of digestion or the belly rising or falling with each breath. If you notice opinions arising about these areas, gently let these go and return to noticing sensations.

As you continue to breathe, bring your awareness to the chest and heart region and just notice your heartbeat. Observe how the chest rises during the inhale and how the chest falls during the exhale. Let go of any judgments that may arise. On the next out-breath, shift the focus to your hands and fingertips. See if you can channel your breathing into and out of this area as if you are breathing into and out from your hands. If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to the sensations in your hands.

And then, on the next out-breath, shift the focus and bring your awareness up into your arms. Observe the sensations or lack of sensations that may be occurring there. You might notice some difference between the left arm and the right arm – no need to judge this. As you exhale, you may experience the arm soften and release tensions.

Continue to breathe and shift focus to the neck, shoulder and throat region. This is an area where we often have tension. Be with the sensations here. It could be tightness, rigidity or holding. You may notice the shoulders moving along with the breath. Let go of any thoughts or stories you are telling about this area. As you breathe, you may feel the tension rolling off your shoulders.

On the next out-breath, shift your focus and direct your attention to the scalp, head, and face. Observe all of the sensations occurring there. Notice the movement of the air as you breathe into or out of the nostrils or mouth. As you exhale, you might notice the softening of any tension you may be holding.

And now, let your attention to expand out to include the entire body as a whole. Bring into your awareness the top of your head down to the bottom of your toes. Feel the gentle rhythm of the breath as it moves through the body.

As you come to the end of this practice, take a full, deep breath, taking in all the energy of this practice. Exhale fully. And when you are ready, open your eyes and return your attention to the present moment. As you become fully alert and awake, consider setting the intention that this practice of building awareness will benefit everyone you come in contact with today.

Noticing Sight or Sound

Begin this meditation by noticing the posture that you're in
You may be standing or sitting or lying down
Notice your body exactly as it is
And see if you can tune into any sensations that are present to you in your body in this moment
There might be heaviness or lightness
Pressure, weight
There might be vibration, pulsating, movement, warmth, coolness,
These sensations can be anywhere in your body
And all you have to do is notice them
Notice what's happening with curiosity and interest
Take a breath
As you breathe, relax
Not much to do except be fully present and aware
Now let go of the body's sensations
And turn your attention to the sounds Inside or outside the room
There may be all sorts of sounds happening Loud sounds, quiet sounds You can also notice the silence between the sounds
But the sounds are coming and going
Notice them coming and going
One tendency of our mind is to want to think about the sounds
To start to make up a story about the sound
Or we have a reaction to it: I like it, I don't like it
See if instead, you can simply listen to the sound
Notice it with curiosity and interest
The sounds are coming and going
Now once again, notice your body standing, present
Or seated or lying down
Notice any body sensations that are obvious to you
Take another breath Soften And when you're ready
You can open your eyes

Heart Spell

Return to yourself
Inhale the air that surrounds you,
from the soles of the Earth to the crown of the galaxies
Open your heart with breath, with life force
Feel your heart expand with the rhythms moving through you

Exhale
Inhale
See light fill all empty spaces
Awaken the tree within
Breathe your limbs tall
Your roots deep
Exhale
Inhale
Expand heart muscle even wider
Push past boundaries
Break through chains
Reach for your power
Digest its dimensions
Fill through cracks
Pulse with life
Exhale
Inhale
Deep
Deeper
Anchor yourself to the love that is you
to the love that is your ancestors
to the love that is life
to the love that can never be stolen
Radiate this truth
Strong enough to break restrictions
Exhale
Inhale
Increase the flow of love
Let each breath be a magic spell you cast upon yourself


UNA RESTORATIVE
UNIVERSITY OF
18
30
NORTH ALABAMA
JUSTICE