

CONCENTRIC CIRCLES



MAIN FEATURES

Reinforced skills (TASC Cluster)	SOLUTION
Suitable for	Teachers, Students
Difficulty level	Middle
Setting	Group
Number of participants	from 16 to 76
Average time length	40 minutes
Special Equipment	No
Online version	No

1. DESCRIPTION

Concentric circles is a speaking and listening activity that provides every participant an equal opportunity to speak. Participants stand in an inner and an outer circle facing each other. They ask and answer questions or discuss a topic. When the facilitator calls time, they move over and repeat the process with a new partner. This strategy invites every participant to participate as an active listener and speaker. Participants stand in two concentric circles facing one another and respond to a question in a paired discussion. When prompted by the facilitator, one of the circles moves to the left or right so each participant now faces a new partner, with whom they discuss a new question. This kinaesthetic activity works well to debrief a reading or video and mixes up participants so that they have the opportunity to share with a wide range of people. Furthermore, because they are speaking with just one other person at a time, reticent participants might feel more comfortable sharing their ideas than they would in a group or class discussion. This concentric circle technique can very well be adapted to talk about any given topic of discussion. The technique creates the physiological and psychological conditions for productive learning. Students' interpersonal skills, including their ability to interact positively with peers and to work in teams, all contribute to effective learning and lifelong behaviour. The skills, which build on the development of empathy, awareness of one's own and others' feelings, and learned skills for communication and problem solving, can be taught.

2. AIM / BENEFITS

The purpose of this activity is to provide a structure for participants to discuss issues concerning identity, personal bias, prejudice and discrimination. Responses are brief and partners keep changing, so at the end of the activity, each participant will have made a personal connection with a number of people.

3. COMPETENCIES CLUSTER(s) RELATED

CLUSTER: Focus on solution

Why

The exercise helps to highlight a bit more the change of paradigm from problem solving to solution building, because this activity is a solution focused and specific in structure which allows participants with different approaches to discuss the same topics.

4. HOW TO DO THE EXERCISE

Step 1 / Preparation

The facilitator (e.g., a teacher) instructs participants to count off in order, one, two, one, two, etc. Participants who are number ones will form an outside circle facing toward the centre of the room, while the number twos will form an inside circle facing out. If there is an even number, each person should be facing another person from the opposite circle. Then have all the 1s form their chairs into an inner circle, facing the 2s who were to their left. Or you can simply say that every other person should move to face the person to their left. If the group includes people from different subgroups (for example, teachers and students), tell one subgroup to form the inner circle, so they will be talking with people from the other subgroup rather than to each other. At the end of this step, learners stand or sit in two circles of even numbers with the inner circle facing out, and the outer circle facing in.

Step 2 / Warm up

1. Once the circles have been created, the facilitator tells the group that they will be having a series of short conversations with a series of partners. They should introduce themselves to each new partner, and they should share the time so that each person has a chance to speak.
2. The facilitator gives the group a question that each pair is to discuss.

Step 3 / Application

1. The facilitator tells participants in the inner/outer circle that they are the speakers/listeners.
2. The facilitator gives the participants a topic (favourite food, what they did over the weekend, advice, etc.)
3. The participants in the inner circle talk to their partners for 30 seconds about the topic.
4. When the facilitator says "Stop!" the talkers move one space clockwise.
5. The facilitator gives both circles a chance to be talkers. Participants can report back what they heard.

Step 4 / Evaluation

The facilitator should ask the participants to reflect on the results obtained. Participants share feelings about what it was like to participate in this activity.

5. DEBRIEF

The facilitator asks the participants to share their experience in plenary within a timeframe of about 15 minutes. Possible questions:

How did it feel to share this personal information about yourself with your different partners?

Has anything you heard surprising or new to you?

Which questions were particularly hard for you to respond to? Why do you think that was so?

Which questions did you particularly enjoy answering?

What, if anything, did you learn from this activity?

6. SPECIAL MATERIALS

There are no special materials needed, the facilitator just makes sure to have a list of questions/topics to offer to the participants and enough space for them to stand or sit comfortably and perhaps move around a little.

7. TIPS AND TRICKS

- Allow less time for younger people and more time for older people. (Keep the time short enough so that people still have more to say when they need to move on.) Tell the **inside circle** to move one seat to the left so that everyone is facing someone new.
- Remind people to be sure and introduce themselves to their new partners. Then give another question for the new pairs to discuss.
- In smaller groups, this continues until the inside circle has moved completely around to where they began.
- In larger groups, have people move 10 to 20 times, depending on how long you can dedicate to the exercise.
- Adjust the time you give each pair and the number of times you have people move according to the needs of the group and the constraints of the meeting.
- If the group has an uneven number of people, a facilitator should participate in the circles. If the number is uneven, a triad can be formed.
- However, if there is not a second facilitator to keep time, you can either arrange one set of chairs as a triad or have one chair outside the circle in which a different person will sit out each round.



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8. ONLINE VERSION

Given the nature of this practice, there is no online version foreseen for it.

9. SITOGRAPHY

1. [Facing History & Ourselves - Concentric Circles](#)
2. [Literacy Minnesota - Classroom Activity: Concentric Circles](#)
3. [NC State University - Concentric Circles](#)
4. [Icebreaker Activity - Concentric Circles - From The Book "Moving Beyond Icebreakers"](#)