



SEEDS OF
COMPASSION™

Compassion Circles Guide



COMPASSION CIRCLES

"I believe that at every level of society the key to a happier world is the growth of compassion. We do not need to become religious, nor do we need to believe in an ideology. All that is necessary is for each of us to develop our good human qualities."

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

The Compassion Circle is a hosted conversation model designed specifically for the Seeds of Compassion Initiative, whose primary objective is "to nurture kindness and compassion in the world starting with children and all those who touch their lives." What sets Compassion Circles apart is that the focus of the gathering is compassion – what it means, what it looks like, and how we can embody and encourage it in the world around us.

- WHY** There is a need for more compassion, particularly in the lives of children and families. Compassion Circles offer people of all ages a way to connect with others and deepen our understanding of this complex human quality.
- WHO** Anyone, of any age or background, interested in and willing to explore compassion.
- HOW** A host, such as you, plans and gathers a group of people together for one or more meetings to explore compassion in a kindhearted way. The format is simple and straightforward, allowing each group to meet in the way that best suits the participants.
- WHEN** The meeting time and place is determined by the host and participants.

Hosting a Compassion Circle is easy! The time commitment varies, and may be as minimal as the time it takes to bring your friends together for an hour of meaningful conversation. No experience is necessary – just an open mind and heart, and the willingness to explore the subject of compassion with a group of people.

- To HOST a Circle, read the following pages that apply directly to you.
- To SPONSOR but not lead a Circle, we can put you in touch with a volunteer facilitator.
- To PARTICIPATE in a Circle, contact us to connect you with a host in your area.

Questions? Contact Melanie Wroe at melaniewroe@comcast.net or (206) 232 1331.

PLANNING YOUR COMPASSION CIRCLE

Do some personal reflection

The overall goal is to bring people together and explore compassion ... but each group is unique. Tailor your Circle to you and the people you intend to invite by considering what you hope will occur during your time together.

Decide where and when to meet

Choose a place that can provide a comfortable and inviting environment for your Circle, and set a time that suits the needs of you and your guests. The length of the gathering depends on the participants, but usually two hours is about right, keeping in mind that children and teens have different needs.

Decide who to invite

We recommend 7-8 people, with a maximum of 10. If more people express interest, you might host a large group that breaks into smaller Circles for conversation and reconvenes at the end to share. In terms of who to invite, think about people and groups you know in various walks of your life. Or you may prefer to host a group of new people by advertising in a newspaper, library, local organization, community bulletin board. Include the following information in your invitation:

- Describe what Compassion Circles are and what you hope will occur, assuring your guests that they do not need to prepare nor will they leave with an assignment.
- Provide a date, place and time.
- Provide your contact information for confirmation/cancellation
- Invite participants to contact you with suggested questions or activities.

Plan the flow of activities

Review the materials provided and plan how you want the gathering to unfold, including which questions you want to pose and in what order. Facilitating group discussion is a skill that comes easier to some people than others. One factor that will help the process go smoothly is to be as prepared as possible, so jot down some notes to use during the Circle. Then gather supplies, like nametags, pens, notepads (of blank paper) and any inspirational material you'd like to share.

“Each of us has response-ability for our unique piece of Creation, but only from the deeper wisdom and compassion of our Greater Self can we truly care for the world that is entrusted to us.”

Rabbi Theodore Falcon

HOSTING YOUR COMPASSION CIRCLE

Physical set-up

Create an environment that feels welcoming and supports meaningful conversation.

- Establish an initial greeting area for nametags, coats, refreshments, etc
- Arrange seating in a circle with comfortable lighting and room temperature
- Take a moment to center yourself as the host – to be open, present, compassionate

Welcome and initial comments

Invite everyone to chat or snack and allow time for people to arrive. Once everyone is seated, bring focus to the Circle and provide a framework for the experience.

- Introduce yourself and thank everyone for coming to the Circle.
- Briefly state the purpose and ending time.
- Explain that you will be posing a series of questions for the group to explore, but you are not there as a teacher or expert.
- As an alternative to going around the circle with individual introductions which can be uncomfortable and time-consuming, we suggest you simply encourage guests to introduce themselves and share at their own pace.

Pause for reflection

Creating a silence of about one minute is an important part of opening space for meaningful inquiry. Share the purpose of the pause and, if desired, ring a chime at the start and end.

Conversation/exploration

Compassion is explored through open-ended questions that elicit personal stories, sharing, and discovery. A list of suggested questions has been provided in a supplement at the end of this guide. As the host, you may participate in the conversation but it is important for you to remain detached enough to monitor the process. Here are a few basic tips for facilitating the conversation:

- Begin by posing a question, making eye contact around the circle so everyone feels included. Thereafter, pose additional questions as needed for to promote conversation, or invite the group to reflect upon one of the quotes included in the supplement.
- Focus on personal storytelling rather than an intellectual discussion. Invite people to clarify, elaborate or share stories and experiences.
- Resist the temptation to become the “conversational center” of the Circle. Monitor your own involvement and contribute only as needed to foster an effective flow of conversation.
- Allow a comfortable amount of silence to weave in and out of the conversation. Silence permits space for reflection and encourages everyone to take responsibility for the process.
- If one person is dominating or going off topic, refocus the energy back to the group.

- If you anticipate challenges with interruption and want to use a Talking Piece to help the group speak one at a time, introduce it at the beginning. One helpful way to describe the Talking Piece is to suggest that when you hold it, speak with respect and when someone else holds it, listen with respect.
- Keep track of time as the conversation unfolds so you can bring things to a close and end at the designated time. Toward the end of the gathering, remind the group that closure is coming up and encourage concluding comments rather than expanding to new areas.

Pause for reflection

Again, take a few moments of silence so everyone can reflect upon what they have experienced in the Circle. Invite them to think of one specific way in which they intend to bring more compassion into their lives in the upcoming week. The chime or bell, used here as it was at the start, reminds us of the circular nature of this experience.

Closure

Encourage each participant to share what came to them during the silent reflection, providing a sense of closure and a direction for the future. Be sure to thank the group for participating in the Circle you hosted and for creating this unique experience together.

Feedback

After giving yourself many compassionate pats on the back, please send an email to Melanie Wroe at melaniewroe@comcast.net and let us know how your Circle went. Your feedback will enable us to hone the process and share your successes with others.

GOING BEYOND

The Compassion Circle Guidebook outlines a particular conversational experience process developed for Seeds of Compassion. For those who seek further information or alternative models, website links to other “hosted conversation” processes and their related organizations are provided.

- Conversation Cafe - www.conversationcafe.org/hosts_agree.html
- The World Cafe - <http://theworldcafe.com/articles/cafetogo.pdf>
- Luminologue - <http://lumina.typepad.com>
- Compassionate Listening Project – www.compassionatelisting.org
- Study Circle – www.studycircles.org/en/Resource.106.aspx
- National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation - www.thataway.org
- Open Space - www.openspaceworld.org/tmnfiles/2pageos.htm
- Turning To One Another - www.turningtooneanother.net/world.html

Thank you for contributing to the compassion movement in this very personal and meaningful way!



COMPASSION CIRCLE QUESTIONS

Storytelling

- Share a personal experience of compassion. How did it affect you?
- Tell a story of an experience where someone showed compassion. What did you learn?
- What is your most recent memory of compassion?

Describing

- If compassion is a gesture (animal) (color), what might it be?
- How do you experience compassion within your mind ... body...heart?
- What does "compassion" mean? What does it look like?
- How do you feel when you have been compassionate? And when you have not?

Developing

- What are some ways in which you learned to be compassionate? What inspired you?
- Who is the most compassionate person you know ... and why?
- Is it easier to be compassionate with someone similar or different from you? Why?
- When is it most difficult to be compassionate? How can we get around that?

Acting

- How can we help children learn about compassion?
- How can we act more compassionately? What would we do differently?
- What gets in the way of moving our compassion into action?
- What do you believe will help the world become a more compassionate place?
- Imagine you were asleep for 20 years and woke to find the world a compassionate place. What are people doing and saying? What began in 2008 to create this?



COMPASSION QUOTES

"I believe that at every level of society the key to a happier world is the growth of compassion. We do not need to become religious, nor do we need to believe in an ideology. All that is necessary is for each of us to develop our good human qualities."

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

"Compassion is not just being sentimental and feeling with someone, but seeking to change the situation. If you are going to be compassionate, be prepared for action!"

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

"Compassion begins at home, and it is not how much we do but how much love we put in that action. Do not think that love has to be extraordinary. What we need is to love without getting tired."

Mother Teresa

"Each of us has response-ability for our unique piece of Creation, but only from the deeper wisdom and compassion of our Greater Self can we truly care for the world entrusted to us."

Rabbi Theodore Falcon

"The whole idea of compassion is based on a keen awareness of the interdependence of all these living beings, which are all part of one another, and all involved in one another."

Thomas Merton

"Compassion is not sentiment but is making justice and doing works of mercy. Compassion is not a moral commandment but a flow and overflow of the fullest human and divine energies."

Matthew Fox

"Compassion alone stands apart from the continuous traffic between good and evil proceeding within us."

Eric Hoffer

"A human being is part of the whole called by us 'universe' – a part limited in time and space. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty."

Albert Einstein

"How far you go in life depends on your being compassionate with the young, the aged, the striving and the weak. Because, someday in your life, you will have been all of these things."

George Washington Carver

"Compassion is the capacity for feeling what it is like to live inside somebody else's skin...the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy for you."

Frederick Beuchner