

Circles of Support: A Restorative Approach to Staff Wellness

Jon Kidde 10/7/2021



“

IT IS POSSIBLE TO PREPARE
FOR THE FUTURE WITHOUT
KNOWING WHAT IT WILL BE.
THE PRIMARY WAY TO PREPARE
FOR THE UNKNOWN IS TO
ATTEND TO THE QUALITY OF
OUR RELATIONSHIPS, TO HOW
WELL WE KNOW AND TRUST
ONE ANOTHER.

”

MARGARET WHEATLEY | 2004



Check-in

Groups of 3 / 6 mins

- In a group of three, take 6 minutes to select and use 1-3 check-in questions from one of the links below:
 - <http://checkin.daresay.io>
 - <https://icebreaker.range.co>
 - <https://faculty.washington.edu/ejsluger/random-generator/index.html>
- If your stumped: If you were a fruit or vegetable today, what would you be and what condition would you be in?



Connection Activity Debrief

Pick one or more of the questions below and respond in the chat.

- What is one new or interesting thing you learned about someone else?
- What did you learn through this activity that relates to restorative practices?

Circles of Support: A Restorative Approach to Staff Wellness

Participate in a circle of support for educators

Identify key features/principles of restorative approaches

Develop action steps to bring a circle of support back to their school staff.

Restorative Approaches

Core take aways

- Restorative Approaches are based on values and principles—ever-present in humanity.
- Represented in many traditions and in indigenous communities all over the world.
- When we express these values and principles from the start in relationship and community building, we establish partnership rather than dominance.
- We can then apply them when there are unmet needs and people have been harmed.



A word cloud featuring various positive traits and virtues. The words are arranged in a dense, overlapping manner, with some words being significantly larger than others. The colors of the words vary, including shades of brown, blue, green, purple, and red. The traits include:

- empathy
- patience
- kindness
- love
- strength
- authenticity
- trustworthy
- respect
- flexibility
- compassion
- honesty
- not-frustrated
- perseverance
- open
- listen
- presence
- inclusivity
- humor
- non-judgemental
- kindness
- empathy
- love
- strength
- authenticity
- trustworthy
- gratitude
- leader
- accepting
- equality
- patience
- agape
- selfless
- honesty
- open-minded
- non-judgmental
- fairness
- determination
- connection
- energetic
- respectful
- integrity
- confident
- true
- bravery
- caring
- understanding
- dependable
- friendships
- listening
- calm
- accepting
- levity
- accountability

Restorative Principles



The diagram consists of four interlocking gears of different colors: purple, blue, olive green, and pink. Each gear has a white circular center containing text. The gears are arranged in a cluster, with the purple gear at the top left, the blue gear at the top right, the olive green gear at the bottom left, and the pink gear at the bottom right. The olive green gear is positioned between the purple and blue gears, and the pink gear is positioned between the blue and olive green gears.

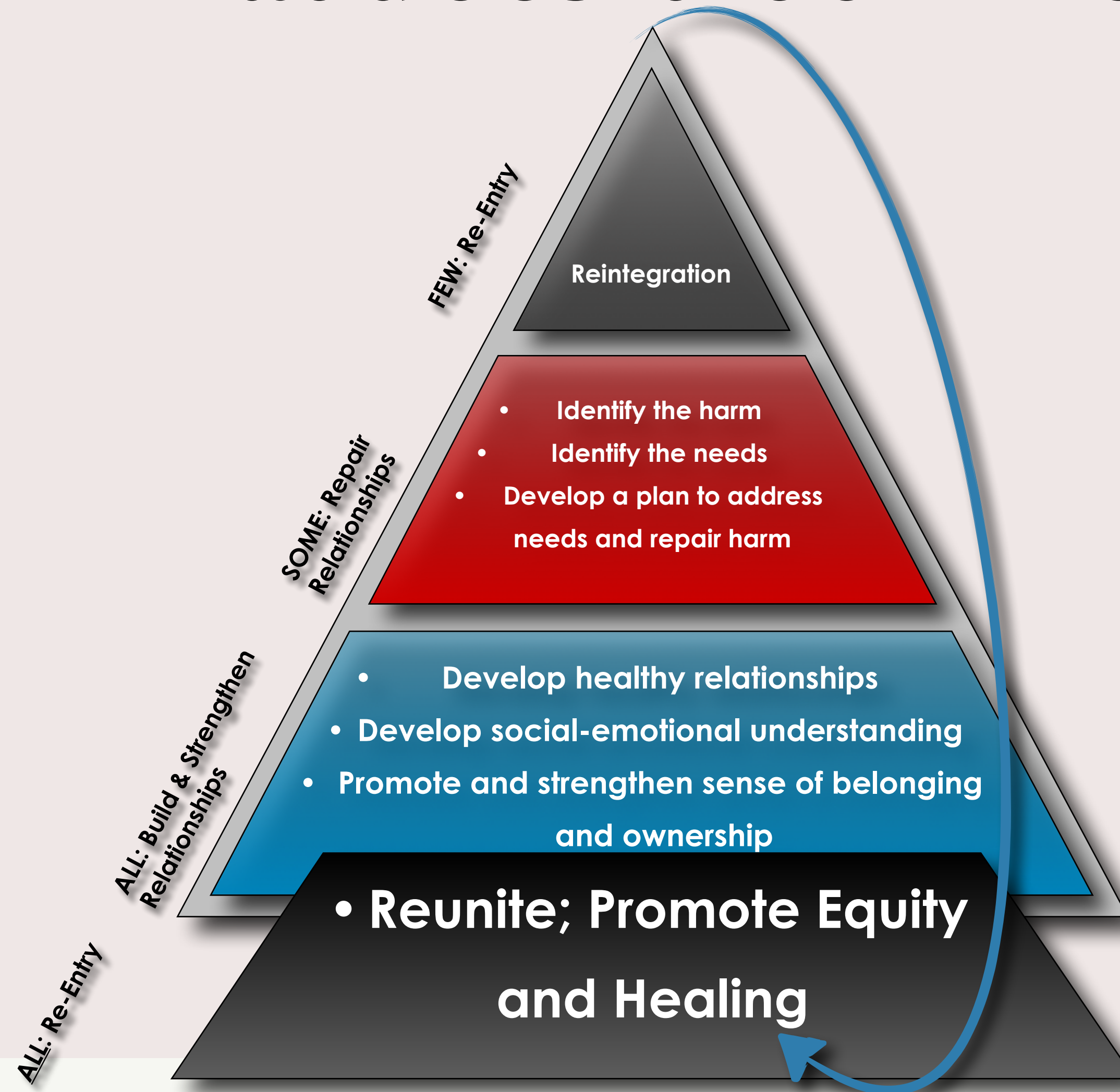
Exploring
Relationship

Agency
&
Choice

Meaningful
Engagement

Responsibility/
Accountability

What does it look like?



Balance in the Process

- Underlying all restorative approaches is the importance of relationship. This graphic shows the balance that exists in the restorative approach. The belief is that when we spend adequate time in each quadrant we are more effective in our learning, problem solving, and collaboration. This applies to meetings, circles, conversations and pedagogy.



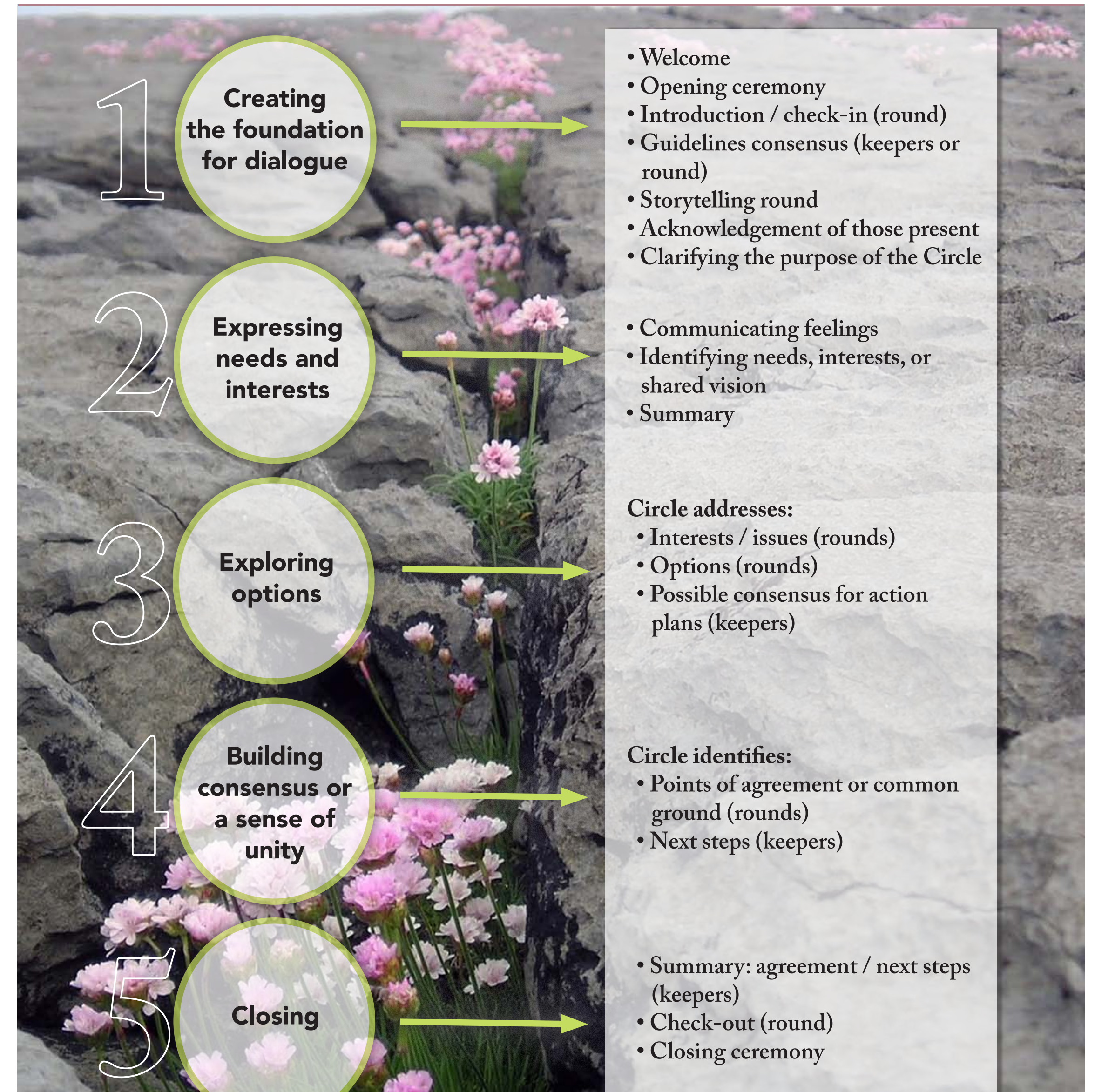
A high-angle photograph of a diverse group of people standing in a circle, holding hands. Their hands are clasped together in the center, forming a ring. The people are wearing various clothing, including black, teal, and purple. Some have visible tattoos and jewelry like bracelets and rings. On the floor in the center of the circle are several pieces of paper with handwritten text in various colors. The text includes words like 'LISTENING', 'COMPASSION', 'DILIGENCE', 'GIVE BACK', 'LOYALTY', 'HUMILITY', 'PATIENCE', 'JUSTICE', 'MERCY', 'ACTIVITY', 'WISDOM', 'MODERATION', 'SELF-CONTROL', 'FAITH', 'HOPE', 'CHARITY', 'GENTLENESS', 'KINDNESS', 'GOODNESS', 'PEACE', 'FORGIVENESS', 'GRACE', 'PATIENCE', 'GENTLENESS', 'KINDNESS', 'GOODNESS', 'PEACE', 'FORGIVENESS', 'GRACE'. The word 'Circle' is overlaid in large white font in the center of the image.

Circle

A practice that can be used and adapted for all tiers

Key Elements of Circles

- ***Ceremony Opening/Closing***: Used to indicate that this is different space.
- ***Centerpiece***: A focal point to promote speaking and listening.
- ***Values / Guidelines***: Defined by the group. Serve as a reminder of expectations.
- ***Talking Piece***/Order: Regulates dialogue, allows for focus, and limits interruption.
- ***Facilitation or Keeping***: Assists the group in creating and maintaining the space. (Time)



Common Agreements or Guidelines

In circle, the group generates the guideline or agreement for the process.

Common Agreements:

- Respect the talking piece/order
- Speak from the heart
- Listen from the heart
- Witness others' sharing without interjecting or responding.
- Personal information shared in the circle is confidential except where safety is at risk
- You may pass

Online norms

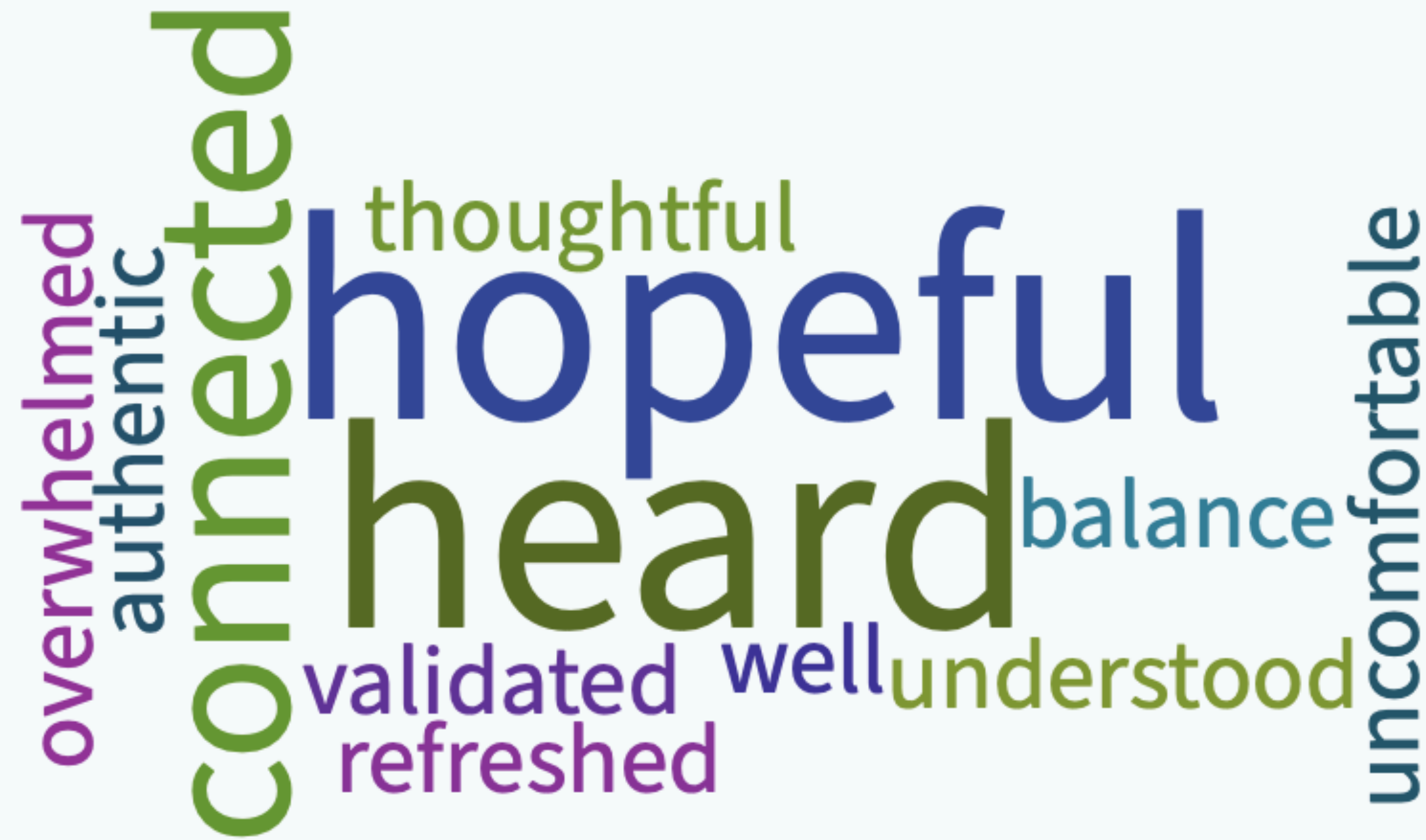
- Be fully present.
Please do not multitask (check email, text, Snapchat, web surf, etc.)
- Maintain confidentiality (i.e., screenshots, pictures, online posts about what was said)
- Find a private space
- Make sure you're ok with the background people will see
- It's ok to turn off your video function if you don't wish to be seen

Circle Activity

Breakout Groups of 6 - 8 / 35 minutes

- This activity is designed to give you an opportunity to experience an online circle.
- In breakout groups of about 6 to 8, one person will guide the process using the circle 'script' (link in the chat)
- You'll have 30 - 40 minutes

What is one word that describes how you feel after the circle?



A word cloud of various sizes and colors representing feelings. The words are arranged in a roughly rectangular shape. The largest words are 'hopeful' in blue and 'heard' in green. Other words include 'connected' (green, vertical), 'thoughtful' (green), 'balance' (blue), 'understood' (green), 'validated' (purple), 'well' (blue), 'refreshed' (purple), 'overwhelmed' (purple, vertical), 'authentic' (purple, vertical), and 'uncomfortable' (blue, vertical).

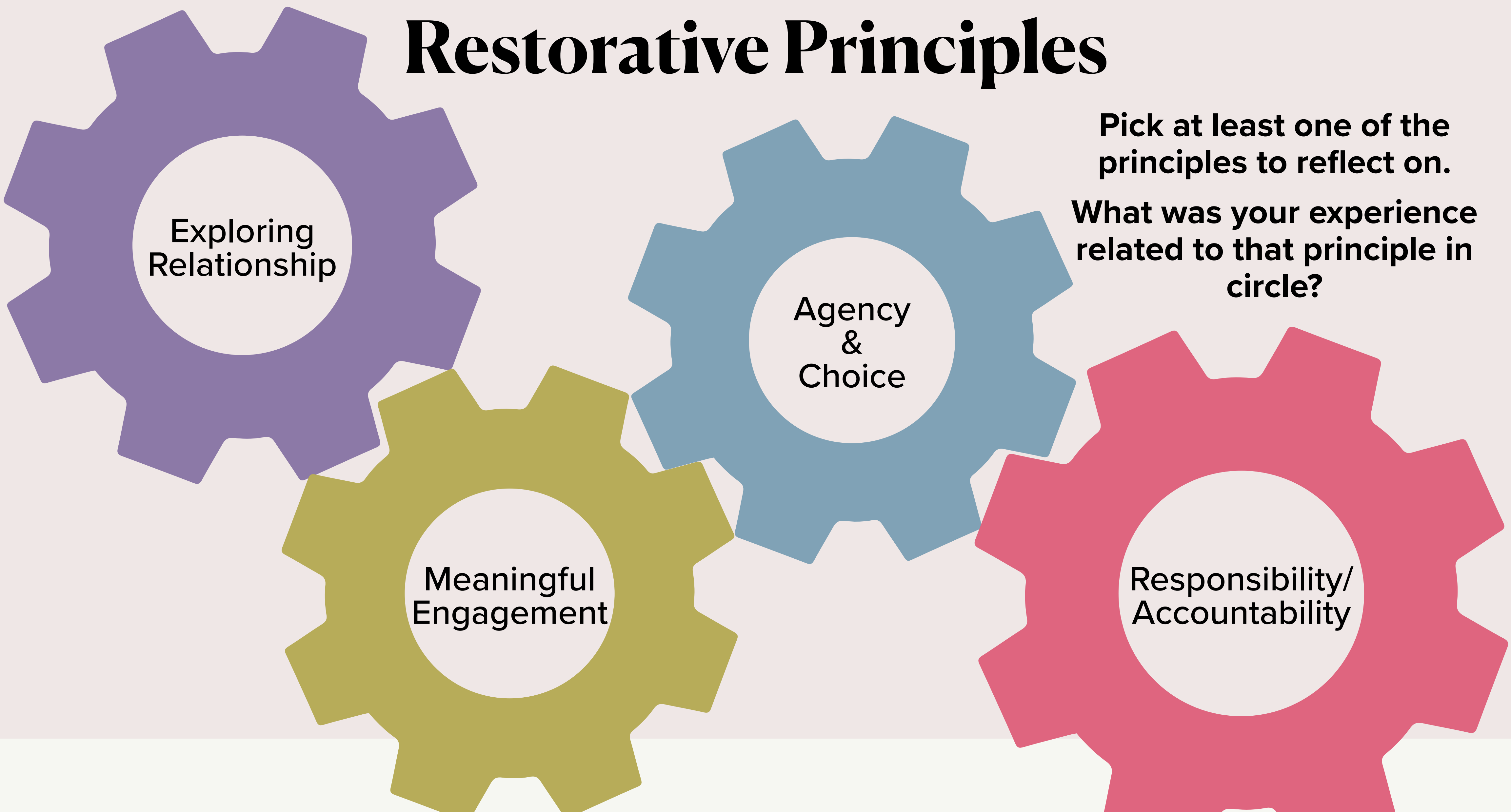
overwhelmed
authentic
connected
thoughtful
hopeful
heard
balance
validated
well
understood
refreshed
uncomfortable

What ideas from your circle emerged that you want to promote?

Participant Input

- wellness check-ins with teams (colleagues)
- Make sure to take the time to check in with staff. "Everyone is fighting a battle we know nothing about."
- Talk about the importance to admin and maybe we could break into groups at a staff meeting
- positive notecards
- Offer to support staff, too...not just those at Staff meeting would be important
- understanding others roles
- To have an anonymous stress survey to help admin know where their staff is at. Remembering that everyone is trying their best.
- establish boundaries
- ask for what you need
- assume good intentions
- Culture of rest. Searching for and addressing the root problems rather than bandaid approaches.
- Mugged on Mondays

Restorative Principles



Exploring
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&
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Engagement

Responsibility/
Accountability

**Pick at least one of the
principles to reflect on.**

**What was your experience
related to that principle in
circle?**

Take it Away & Bring it Back

Recommendations

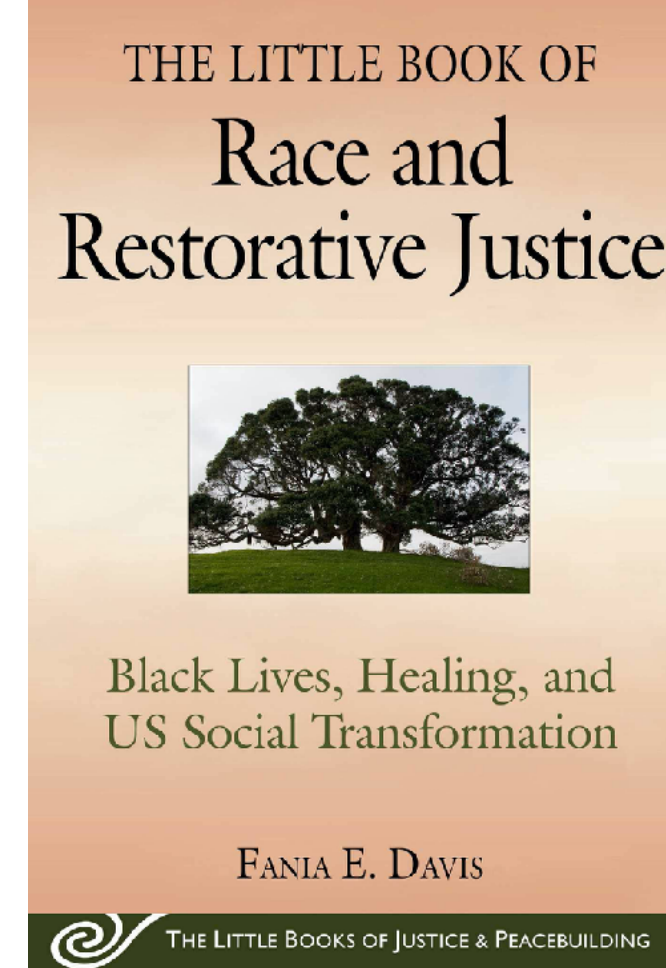
- Obtain support from administrators
- Create time and space for this to happen during contractual hours.
- It should be voluntary
- It should be done in relatively small groups 6 - 10; no more than 12

What is one action step you can take to bring a circle of support back to your school?

Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order, confusion into clarity.... It turns problems into gifts, failures into success, the unexpected into perfect timing, and mistakes into important events. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow.

– Melodie Beattie





Challenge yourself to be a healer and activist for justice. Don't feel you have to choose one or the other. Be both. See activism as a form of social healing and interpersonal healing as a form of social justice. Transform and heal yourself as you transform and heal the world.

~ Fania Davis, The Little Book of Race and Restorative Justice



Resources

- Reunite, Renew and Thrive: SEL Roadmap for Reopening School and Refocus on the SEL Roadmap from CASEL.org
- Staff Wellness Activities compiled by Natalie Braun
- A STRONG AND HEALTHY START, Social, Emotional and Mental Health Supports During COVID-19 from the Vermont AOE and DMH
- Online Support Circles in Response to Social Distancing from Living Justice Press
- Whole-School Restorative Approach Resource Guide from VT AOE
- The Little Book of Race and Restorative Justice by Fania E. Davis