Group Application: Conflict Resolution

**Learning Objectives:**

* Understand the principles of restorative justice and peace building circles
* Learn to create safe spaces for dialogue between conflicting parties
* Practice the circle process for two-person conflict resolution
* Apply the "PEACE" method within a circle framework

**Materials Needed**

* Two chairs arranged facing each other
* A small table or space for the center of the circle
* A talking piece (stone, feather, or meaningful object)
* Candle or centerpiece (optional)
* Paper and pens for each participant
* Timer
* Tissues available
* Flip chart paper and markers

**Part 1: Opening Circle - Creating Sacred Space (10 minutes)**

Circle Setup: Arrange chairs in a circle with all participants. Place a meaningful object in the center.

Opening Ritual: "We gather in circle to practice healing dialogue. In this space, we believe that everyone has inherent worth and that through honest conversation, we can repair harm and strengthen relationships."

Establishing Circle Agreements: Post and review community agreements:

* Speak your truth with respect
* Listen with your whole heart
* Honor confidentiality
* Step up, step back (participate fully without dominating)
* Assume positive intent
* Focus on impact, not just intent
* What's shared here stays here; what's learned here leaves here

Opening Check-in (using talking piece): "Share your name and one word describing your intention for our time together."

**Part 2: Understanding Conflict Through Circle Wisdom (20 minutes)**

Teaching Moment: "In many indigenous traditions, conflict is seen not as something to avoid, but as an opportunity for growth and deeper understanding. Peace building circles help us move from punishment thinking to healing thinking."

The Conflict Cycle in Community Context: Draw on flip chart:

1. Trigger (What happened?)
2. Impact (How were people affected?)
3. Responsibility (What role did each person play?)
4. Repair (How can we heal and move forward?)

Circle Sharing Round: Using the talking piece, participants share:

* "Think of a time when you experienced conflict. Without naming specific people, what was the impact on you?"
* "What did you need most in that moment that you didn't receive?"
* How does it feel different to talk about conflict in a circle versus one-on-one?
* What did you notice about listening when you weren't preparing to respond?

**Part 3: The PEACE Method in Circle Process (20 minutes)**

Teaching the Framework: "Peace building circles follow a specific four-step process that helps us move from conflict to healing. Let's explore each step."

The PEACE Method:

P: Pause & Prepare the Sacred Space

* Create the physical space with two chairs
* Place talking piece in center
* Take three deep breaths together
* Set intention: "We gather to heal, not to harm"

E: Express and Empathize (What happened?)

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| Notes for Facilitator:* Those directly involved share their accounts
* Each person gets full opportunity to speak
	+ It’s nearly impossible to come to understanding if we don’t give each other the mutual respect of having a space to be heard.
* No back-and-forth or responses during this phase
* Focus on both facts and feelings
* Conflict resolution gets overwhelming when focusing on multiple things at once. Stay on the topic at hand.
* Facilitator ensures circle norms are maintained
* Use phrases like: "Thank you, [Name]. [Other person], it's your turn to share your full account."
* If someone tries to respond: "I'll ask you to hold that thought until it's your turn."
* Prompt for feelings: "Can you share more about how this made you feel?"
* Stay with the issue at hand, attacking someone’s character doesn’t move towards resolution.
* Nothing is “always” or “never”, this is a thought distortion and will make it more difficult to move forward.
 | Running the Process:* Person A holds talking piece, shares using "I" statements:
	+ "I felt \_\_\_ when \_\_\_ because \_\_\_"
* Person B listens without interrupting
* Person B reflects back: "I heard you say you felt..."
* Switch talking piece
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A: Acknowledge Different Truths (Clarifying the Impact)

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| * Circle members ask clarifying questions.
* Questions should focus on what happened first, then feelings.
* All participants share how the situation affected them.
* Everyone gets to name the impact on themselves and the community
* Identify which community agreements may have been violated
 | Prompt: Listen, without being defensive. You may not agree with what the other person is saying, and defensiveness escalates the conflict. An assumption is not a fact, it’s a thought distortion. You might not have the correct information.* Both parties acknowledge: "Your truth is valid even if it's different from mine"
* Name the impact: "The way this affected you was..."
* Recognize multiple perspectives can coexist

Move to the circle:* "Circle, what clarifying questions do you have?"
* "How has this situation affected each of you?"
* "What community agreements feel relevant here?"
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C: Collaborate on Healing Solutions (How Can We Create Healing?)

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| * Focus on actionable requests for repair
* Victim-led if harm was one-directional
* Mutual requests if conflict was bidirectional
* Everyone can make requests of everyone else
* Requests should be specific and achievable
 | Prompt: If you want to stay in relationship with the other person in the conflict, you may have to compromise. You don’t have to land on an agreement, and you don’t have to walk away liking the other person. You do need to respect each other. * Center the person most harmed: "What do you need to heal from this?" (ensure requests are specific: "Can you make that more concrete?")
* Brainstorm together: "What would repair look like?" ("What would make this right between you two?")
* "How can we prevent this harm in the future?"
* "What do you each need to commit to?"
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E: Engage in Commitments & Closing

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| * If no agreement, discussion continues or circle reconvenes later
* Exchange talking piece with commitments
* Close with gratitude or meaningful words
* Plan follow-up circle if needed
 | * Each person restates their specific commitments (seek clear commitments to fulfill requests, be specific: "So you're committing to...")
* Check understanding: "What did you hear [Name] commit to?"
* If resistance: "Help us understand what makes that request difficult."
* Honor autonomy: "You have the right to decline requests, and we need to discuss what that means for healing."
* Circle decides if agreements are sufficient for healing
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Follow up is an important final step. At the next meeting, participants should come together to discuss their agreements and if they were upheld, and how they feel since the agreements were made. This may also uncover the need to make new or additional agreements.

**Part 3: Facilitator Practice - Demonstration (20 minutes)**

Scenario Setup: Two participants will role-play a conflict while others observe the facilitation process.

Sample Conflict: Person A shared something Person B told them in confidence, and it got back to Person B, causing hurt and broken trust.

Guided Facilitation Demonstration:

Step 1: What Happened? (5 minutes) Facilitator: "We'll begin by hearing from both of you about what happened. [Person A], please take the talking piece and share your account of the situation and how it made you feel. [Person B], you'll have your turn next, and we ask everyone to listen without response right now."

Person A speaks fully, then passes talking piece Person B shares their account completely

Facilitator: "Thank you both for sharing your truth. Before we move forward, is there anything else either of you needs to add about what happened or how you felt?"

Step 2: Clarifying the Impact (8 minutes) Facilitator: "Now our circle has the opportunity to ask clarifying questions and share how this situation has affected you. Let's start with questions about what happened, then we can explore feelings."

Circle members ask questions like:

* "Can you help me understand the timeline?"
* "What did you expect would happen when you shared that information?"
* "How did you learn that the information had been shared?"

Facilitator: "[Person A] and [Person B], how would you now describe how this situation has affected you? And circle, how has this conflict impacted our community? What agreements do you feel were affected?"

Step 3: How Can We Create Healing? (5 minutes) Facilitator: "Now we focus on healing. [Person B], since you experienced the harm of broken confidentiality, what do you need from [Person A] to begin healing? [Person A], what do you need to move forward? Circle, what do you need from both parties to feel trust is restored in our community?"

Sample requests might include:

* "I need an acknowledgment that sharing my private information was harmful"
* "I need a commitment that you'll ask permission before sharing personal things I tell you"
* "I need to rebuild trust slowly through consistent actions"

Step 4: Have We Reached Agreement? (2 minutes) Facilitator: "[Person A], are you willing to commit to [specific requests]? [Person B], are you willing to [any mutual commitments]? Let's hear each person restate their specific commitments."

If agreement reached: "Thank you for your courage in this process. We'll check in [timeframe] to see how these commitments are going."

If no agreement: "It sounds like we need more conversation about what healing looks like. Shall we continue discussing these requests or plan another circle?"

**Part 4: Debrief and Integration Circle (10 minutes)**

Reflection Questions (using talking piece):

* "How did it feel different to address conflict with community support versus privately?"
* "When might you use this process in your real life?"
* Share one insight you're taking from this experience."
* "How will you contribute to creating healing in conflicts you encounter?"

Closing Ritual: "We close this circle with gratitude for practicing courage, compassion, and accountability. May we carry these skills into our relationships and communities, choosing healing over harm."

Facilitator Notes:

Signs of Successful Process:

* Both parties feel fully heard
* Impact is acknowledged without defensiveness
* Requests are reasonable and specific
* Commitments are made voluntarily
* Follow-up plans are clear

When to Pause or Stop:

* Safety concerns arise
* Community agreements are repeatedly violated
* Someone becomes too dysregulated to continue
* Power dynamics make fair participation impossible
* New information suggests need for different intervention

Follow-up Considerations:

* Schedule check-in circles as committed
* Document agreements (with permission)
* Connect participants to ongoing support if needed
* Celebrate successful relationship repair when it occurs