

The MICRO-CIRCLE Process*

If you find yourself in the presence of a conflict, there is a way to engage the conflict so that the parties involved may come to mutual understanding and agreed action, instead of seeking to get even or to win by making the other lose.

Step 1. CREATE A SPACE

Take a deep calming breath and interrupt the dispute as early as possible in its cycle, especially if you believe it is escalating. If needed, create a physical or emotional space between the parties to the conflict.

Step 2. MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Invite each party to the conflict to take turns sharing something they want the other party to know about what has happened while the other REFLECTS their understanding of the message. Your tools for this step are this series of simple questions:

Ask, "What do you want X to know?" Then ask the one spoken to, "What do you hear Y saying?" Then ask the first speaker, "Is that it?"

Then, the same questions are asked with the previous speaker listening and the previous listener speaking. If the first invited listener says they don't want to reflect, no problem. Ask them to speak and the other to reflect. After they feel heard, they are likely to be more able to listen. If necessary, repeat the questions a few times until they are understanding each another.

Step 3. AGREED ACTION

Once both parties to the conflict have indicated that they feel understood, you invite THEM to problem solve while you sit back and enjoy.

Your tools for this step are simply to ask:

"Does anyone have any ideas for how to solve this issue?" When a suggestion is made, ask the other, "Does that work for you?"

△△△ This process may often take only 6 to 10 minutes. It is empowering for those involved in the conflict, and does not require the facilitator to solve their problem. It requires no judge or jury, just hearing one another and agreeing to solve the problem in a way that is mutually beneficial. It is a simple way to restore harmony. It is another way to be in relationship with others.

* Thanks to Elaine Shpungin who created this technique based on the Restorative Circle work of Dominic Barter.