

Starting a Circle

Circles bring positive change locally and globally. It is the oldest form of social interaction. For a long time hierarchal structures replaced circular structures as the dominant leadership model for groups, as they were seen as the most efficient. However in today's world, circles are being re-discovered as the model that provides full participation and shared leadership, encourages creativity, demonstrates cooperation instead of competition and dominance, implements power-with instead of power-over, and reveals new solutions to old problems.

To start a circle find someone with a similar desire to help get it going. Unite your energy and have others join you so that collectively you have the skills, woman-power and courage to go forward. When two or more gather together you are a circle.

1. **Dream the circle into reality.**

Believing that being in a circle will make a difference is the first step to starting a circle.

- Write down your dream to start a circle and post it somewhere you will see it often such as on your bathroom mirror or at your computer.
- Share your dream with others and invite them to join you in starting a circle.
- Post a friendly announcement in local gathering places such as churches, synagogues, libraries, or internet cafés. The message could read simply: "Looking for women who are interested in starting a women's action circle where together we can make a positive difference."

2. **Set a date, time and place for the first circle gathering.**

Do it sooner rather than later. That very first meeting can be the most challenging to arrange. There may well be "conflicts" in your schedules, but find the time. Whenever you struggle to set a date, return to the note that you created in Step 1 to remind you of your dream.

3. **Create a plan for calling the circle.** *Calling The Circle: The First and Future Culture*, by Christina Baldwin, and *The Millionth Circle: How to Change Ourselves and The World*, by Jean Shinoda Bolen, are two resource books. However you don't need these to get started. You just need to follow your passion, trust your intuition, apply basic Circle Principles and it will happen. Ann Smith and others can help with mentoring/coaching.

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Discuss among your supporters who will help facilitate your first meeting. Shared leadership leads to a self-facilitating circle where every person is part of making the circle a safe and supportive environment where everyone has a voice.

Greet each person, open and close the meeting, and guide the conversations so that all members are heard and are able to contribute fully. Every member becomes a leader and together they are all responsible for making the circle time meaningful for all. Some key points to remember when getting started are:

- **Sit in circle.** Place chairs or other forms of comfortable seating in a circle, where each face is seen and everyone can be heard.
- **Devise your own rituals to open and close the circle.** A ritual can be as simple as each person introducing herself or himself and offering a short sentence of hopes for your circle. The closing ritual could be each person sharing how the circle experience was for them. Native American circles start with a ritual to honor their sacred space, Mother Earth. Lighting a candle, having several minutes of silence, reciting a prayer or poem, singing a song are just some of the ways. Using a “talking object” brings the conversation to a deeper level of sharing. Whoever holds the “talking object” speaks from the heart while the others listen from the heart. Develop your openings and closing, making it meaningful and fun.
- **Adopt Circle Principles.** Creating a circle, versus just a “gathering of women,” begins by having a shared vision and using Circle Principles. Introduce Circle Principles, asking for feedback and creating others as you go along. www.millionthcircle.org has more information.
The following are universal circle principles:
 - Create sacred space
 - Speak one at a time
 - Promote open and honest communication
 - Listen actively without judgment
 - Offer experience instead of advice
 - Invite silence when in doubt or need
 - Share leadership and resources
 - Decisions by consensus
 - Each one’s skills/gifts are a collective gift

4. Name your circle and its purpose.

Decide by consensus the name and purpose of your circle. Naming your circle brings it into reality not only for each member but to those outside the circle. Post your circle in the Global Women's Forum (www.globalwomensforum.com)

5. Decide who will call the next circle, when and where.

Shared leadership prevents burn-out, promotes active participation and leadership development of every member.

Creating a clear schedule of your next meetings will also help you to integrate your circle into your life. It allows you to make time for it, to plan around it, and to look forward to the nourishment and support of that next meeting. Meeting on a consistent basis builds a powerful bond. Celebrate all action successes. Make it fun.



Join Circle Connections so that your circle can interconnect and collaborate with other circles. Go to www.circleconnections.com for more information