

BEST PRACTICES  
FOR VIRTUAL CIRCLES



## To All Our One Circle Facilitators

With these difficult times, One Circle Foundation wants to acknowledge you for the great work you continue to do with youth.

In an effort to make that a little easier for you, we are beginning to add resources to assist you in preparing to deliver circles to youth online.

We will post these resources – activities, best practices for virtual circles, instructional videos, and more - on the One Circle Foundation website “Virtual Solutions” section, for your easy access.

In this document, **Best Practices for Virtual Circles**, please find tips as follows:

- Part 1 – Facilitator Technical Preparation
  - Part 2 – Working with Youth Online
  - Part 3 – General Virtual Housekeeping Tips
- and
- FOR YOUTH – Online Recommendations

Feel free to download and copy or share these tips, and to provide the youth with the recommendations on the final page.

This document is a work in progress. We welcome your suggestions and feedback as well as learning of any recommendations or tips you have found helpful with the Girls Circle and Boys Council programs, as well any adapted or original activities you are using online with the youth you serve. We invite everyone to share best practices and activities with us to share here in this forum as well.

We at One Circle Foundation are committed to supporting all of you as we find our new normal. Be safe and continue to reach out for support from One Circle Foundation.

## **PART 1 -FACILITATOR TECHNICAL PREPARATION:**

Download the Virtual Meeting Platform (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Duo, etc.) desktop app and encourage participants to do the same.

Decide whether you will use one monitor or two. If you use two monitors, remember to look at the camera as often as possible when speaking.

Test your audio and video. If using A/V materials, practice playing music/videos ahead of time.

Confirm the appropriateness of the lyrics and visual content.

Review how to share your screen, including sharing sound from your computer.

Close unnecessary tabs in your browser(s).  
Hide bookmarks.

Plug in your power source.

Put your devices (phone, tablet, computer) on “do not disturb mode” or silence to avoid interruptions from alerts.

If using polls, confirm they are loaded and working correctly.

If you plan to use a whiteboard, practice sharing, annotating, clearing and saving a whiteboard. It is best if lighting comes from in front of you or from the side in order to best light your face.

Practice looking at your webcam, not at the screen.

Use gestures and mannerisms that you would typically use in person.

If you aren't talking, mute your microphone. Avoid noisy activities like typing while your microphone is on.

To become more comfortable on camera, practice having zoom/face time calls with family and friends.

Choose a thumbnail photo for when your video is off.

## **PART 2 - For Facilitators: WORKING WITH YOUTH IN ONLINE PROGRAMS**

### **Setting up the safety and connection:**

Welcome attendees as they join the circle. Play music if possible. This requires you (host) to screen share with audio.

Start with an icebreaker question and ask attendees to send in their answers in the chat. “What’s one food to describe your day?” “What are you looking forward to hearing/learning about?” Call out some of the answers you hear and share your own response with the audience.

Normalize the discomfort of Virtual Circle.

Create and re-visit the group agreements (maybe on screen share or white board).

Emphasize the importance of communication and invite them to communicate privately if need be, via chat to you (only).

Let youth know how to communicate with you as many families have a great deal of change and stress or may be dealing with a COVID 19 or related loss.

Use breakout rooms and icebreaker activities to facilitate connections between participants.

While **CONFIDENTIALITY** is essential to the safety of the group, people cannot always control their home environments, particularly during the “stay at home” situation. Ask youth to find a private place in their home if possible.

If others must be in the room or coming and going, ask all participants to be sure to keep their ear buds in, and ask, “*Who’s in your space?*” so that everyone in the circle is informed about the situation.

Suggest they wear earbuds, so the group audio is not audible and reverberating out into an open room.

It may be helpful to develop hand signals or use finger scales (i.e., show a 1 if ....2 if...5 if....) and a STOP signal if their verbal responses are limited by their environment. Chat box may be useful too.

Ask attendees to have their video turned on so everyone can see each other.

Let participants know that if they wish to answer a question or participate but others are present in their environment, they can have the option to send their response by chat.

Model the participation you want to see. As in person, sharing your story is a great way to build connections in your virtual circle.

Model active listening in a virtual circle to reinforce connections and full participation.

Invite participants to join the call early or stay a little later online if they'd like connect further.

### **PART 3 - GENERAL VIRTUAL HOUSEKEEPING TIPS**

Let participants know that the Record function has been disabled and that no one can record the Circle or Council, and the facilitator will not record either.

Double check your audio/visual settings.

When sharing screen, share a specific window instead of your full desktop.

Let participants know when you are transitioning to play content.

Double check that any unnecessary browser tabs, folders, or programs are closed.

Confirm that everyone can see the screen/hear the audio that you want them to before starting a new function (i.e., screen share, white board, and so on).

After the presentation is over stop screen share.

When sharing whiteboard, manage settings to ensure that youth do not alter your screen share.

Normalize mistakes, even the best facilitators may experience technical difficulties.

## **For Youth - Online Recommendations**

**Please review in preparation for your circle or council program:**

Use a desktop, laptop, or i-pad and go to [www.zoom.us](http://www.zoom.us) or download the smartphone zoom app.

Use headphones or earbuds if possible to keep group conversations private and ensure clarity of voice.

Test your audio and video.

Plug in your device to a power source/ make sure it is fully charged.

Close out all other windows on your screens for privacy.

Dress in shirt and pants; be fully dressed.

Connect to WiFi. If possible, connect via ethernet cable directly to your router, or check that your wifi is strong enough for full participation. If WiFi is not available or is weak, search “where can I find WiFi at no cost near me?” Commonly at or next to a Starbucks, Whole Foods, or national chains, as well as at or next to local services such as libraries will have WiFi for free.

Remember to mute your mic when others are presenting or speaking.  
Leave your phone on silent.

Prepare to attend the full Circle or Council session.

Have water and a snack with you. Paper and pen, too.

As much as possible try to eliminate background noises by turning off TV, and muting cellphones, alerts etc.

Avoid typing and other noisy activities while your microphone is on.

Find a quiet space in your house, preferably a corner or a wall where others are unable to view your screen to protect the privacy of all participants and eliminate distractions.

During this time of the pandemic, we understand that people are dealing with many different concerns related to school, work, and family life. Please feel free to communicate with your facilitator when possible should you have any need or particular concern that may impact your experience with the circle or council.

While online, feel free to interact with the facilitator and participants as you would in an in-person program.

Chat to the facilitator, or to everyone. We encourage your full participation.