

PRESENTING MORAL DILEMMAS
IN A CIRCLE

The objective of presenting a moral dilemma in a circle is to stretch the values and the social/moral thinking of the participants. Usually, the circle keeper presents one side of a dilemma and then passes the talking piece around the circle and notes the moral positions of the participants. The circle keeper presents countering (contradicting) information to try and change the moral positions of the members. In other words, s/he tries to hang them on the horns of a dilemma. Consider the following dilemma:

THE SECLUDED COUNTRY ROAD

Three children are walking along a country road.
Two armed thugs on motorcycles pull up.
They say to the oldest: give me the youngest girl.
Leave right now and nothing will happen to you.
If you refuse, we will kill all of you.

After you present the dilemma, ask: “would you leave or stay?” Pass the talking piece and note people’s positions. Ask them why they took those positions.

Then, try to get people to change their minds by changing the premises in the story. If they said abandon the girl, ask: “what if the girl was your sister?” If the group wants to stand and die, ask: “what if the girl is mean spirited and nobody likes her?”

There are other moral dilemmas (and a fable) on the pages that follow. In every dilemma, the circle keeper has to shift the premises of the dilemma, cause people to change positions, and ask them to explain why they changed.