

GROUND RULES

Ground rules, also called guidelines, are sometimes introduced just after explaining the role of the talking piece. This allows participants to suggest additions to the guidelines, and it fosters a sense of participation, responsibility and community.

Ground rules are fundamentally derived from principles of mediation, peacemaking and consensus building. Each keeper emphasizes different guidelines; however, those listed below are most common.

Speak from the heart: asking everyone to speak from the heart calls for honesty and for compassion for others.

Say it in a good way: everybody is asked to respect the feelings, inputs and concerns of others in the circle. They are also asked to share in a kind, open way.

Speak succinctly and to the point: this gives everybody a chance to speak.

Respect others when they speak: interruptions, body language and gestures that show disinterest or disapproval are inappropriate.

Respect the talking piece: note that people may pass the talking piece without speaking if they choose.

Remain in the circle: if your circle is to deal with an intense emotional issue, it is important that someone does not leave the circle in anger. This severely reduces the ability of the circle to work through the issue.

Often the circle keeper will suggest several of these groundrules and will ask the group for additions and clarifications.