

# Circle Questions

## Overview

Research has shown that learning and teaching are *highly social experiences*. Building classroom communities that are safe and trusting environments for learning is essential for student learning. With **Community Circles**, educators can build trust, deepen relationships, and help people express feelings, needs and wants. The “circle” format enables equity, focus, connection, and inclusion between all participants. Circles are used for teaching social emotional skills, academics, conflict resolution, and more.

The questions included here are separated into low-risk, medium-risk, and high-risk questions designed to increase emotional awareness, deepen relationships, and build connections. *Start with the low-risk questions*. These contain less emotional risk for students and are great for initial community building. As the group develops trust, you can use the higher risk questions to “go deeper” and really get to know each other.

## Tips to Get Started

- Explain what Circles are for, why you are doing them, and the goals for each Circle.
- Develop and teach behavioral expectations and norms (rules) for Circles to students.
- Reinforce expectations/group norms for behavior every time.
- Use a talking piece to help facilitate the Circle.
- Answer the Circle questions along with the students.

## Tips for On-Going Success

- Be positive and energetic.
- Provide regular, on-going feedback – both nonverbal (smiles) and verbal (Thank you for sharing. Thank you for meeting our norms).
- Pre-correct and remind students of behavioral expectations and consequences.
- Seat students who are struggling next to you.
- Implement consequences for misbehavior. Have alternative activities available for students who need to leave the Circle and go to their seats.

## GETTING ACQUAINTED: Low-Risk Community-Building Questions

The following questions are designed to have the lowest emotional risk for students. Use these questions exclusively in the beginning to build rapport and trust. As the group becomes experienced with Circles and trust is building, use the higher risk questions. Start each circle with low-risk questions to initiate Circles.

1. What is your favorite color?
2. What is your favorite flavor of ice cream?
3. What is your favorite game?
4. What is your favorite movie or TV show?
5. What do you want to be when you grow up?
6. If you could be any animal, what would you be?
7. What's your favorite subject in school?
8. What's your favorite season?
9. One thing I like to collect is . . .
10. My favorite weather is . . .
11. My favorite sport is . . .
12. When I am not at school, I like to . . .
13. Today I feel . . .
14. Sunshine makes me feel . . .
15. Rain and/or snow makes me feel . . .
16. Wind makes me feel . . .
17. What would you do if you had a million dollars?
18. If you were a superhero, who would you be and why?
19. If you could have one animal as a pet, what would it be?
20. If you could be any animal, what would you be?
21. What makes you smile?
22. What makes you cry?
23. What makes you scream?
24. What makes you laugh?
25. When I think of red, I think of . . .
26. When I think of blue, I think of . . .
27. When I think of yellow, I think of . . .
28. When I think of green, I think of . . .
29. If I were a famous actor/actress, I would . . .
30. If I were a famous athlete, I would . . .
31. If I were smarter, I would . . .
32. If I were older, I would . . .
33. When I am happy, I . . .
34. When I am sad, I . . .
35. When I am angry, I . . .
36. When I am scared, I . . .
37. When I am excited, I . . .
38. When I am stressed, I . . .



## SCRATCHING THE SURFACE: Medium-Risk Community-Building Questions

The following questions provide a more in-depth opportunity to get to know each student. There is more emotional risk with these questions, as students begin to share more personal information. Please note that some questions could trigger students. Read through the questions before you use them and also start with low-risk questions first.

39. What does "respect" mean to you?
40. What gives you hope?
41. What touches your heart?
42. What do you like most about your life?
43. How would your best friend describe you?
44. What is your greatest hope for the future?
45. What is your greatest fear about the future?
46. What is your best quality?
47. Describe a time when you "made lemonade out of lemons."
48. Describe a time when you were an "upstander."
49. Describe a time when you demonstrated "grit."
50. Describe a time when you had a "growth mindset."
51. Pick a word to describe your future.
52. Pick a word to describe this week.
53. Pick a word to describe your greatest hope.
54. Pick a word to describe your greatest fear.
55. What is the best advice you've ever gotten?
56. What is one thing you like about yourself?
57. What is something you do that bothers others?
58. What is your favorite memory?
59. What one thing would you not give up, even for a million dollars?
60. What quality do you look for in a good friend?
61. What would you change about today?
62. What are three things that you do every day?
63. If you had three wishes, what would you wish for?
64. What inspires you?
65. When was the last time you tried something new?
66. What is your first memory?
67. What motivates you?
68. What is your biggest regret in life?
69. What bad habits do you most want to change?
70. What do you want most?

## DIGGING DEEPER: High-Risk Community-Building Questions

The following questions contain the highest emotional risk to the student. These are great questions to get to know your students deeper. However, they should not be used until high levels of safety and trust have been established. As with all questions, these specific questions could trigger emotional trauma. Use only when you have deeper relationships with your students. Should a student talk about abuse, harming self or others or other reportable information, remember that educators are mandated reporters and will need to report that information.

71. What is one thing you would change in your life?
72. What is one thing you would like to change about the world?
73. What's the most important thing you can do in your personal life right now?
74. What are you most passionate about?
75. What "life lesson" have you learned the hard way?
76. What impact do you want to leave on the world?
77. When do you feel most lonely?
78. Do you think crying is a sign of weakness or a strength?
79. Describe a time when you lost control.
80. Describe a time when you were outside of your comfort zone.
81. Describe an experience of letting go of anger or resentment.
82. Describe an experience of feeling like you did not fit in.
83. Describe a time when you were in conflict with a family member.
84. Describe a time when a crisis or difficulty turned into something positive.
85. Describe a time when someone turned out to be very different from the negative opinion you had of them.
86. Describe your life 10 years from now.
87. If you could talk with anyone in the world, living or dead, who would you talk to?
88. What are your most important values?
89. If you gave a TED talk, what would your topic be?
90. If you could give a newborn one piece of advice, what would it be?
91. If you only had one year to live, what would you do?
92. What do you want to be remembered for at the end of your life?
93. If you looked into the heart of your enemy, what would you find?
94. Who would you most like to forgive?
95. What do you think stands between you and happiness?
96. What has life taught you recently?
97. What is your number 1 goal for the next 6 months?
98. What is your greatest fear?
99. What makes you, you?



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