

Feeling Deadly, Working Deadly



NCETA
Australia's National Research Centre
on AOD Workforce Development

TALKING CIRCLES:

A Practical Guide

Introduction

Using a talking circle to bring people together is one of a number of strategies that managers and workers can use to identify and reduce stress, and improve the overall wellbeing of the workforce.

Talking circles can be used either separately or in conjunction with other resources that comprise the Feeling Deadly, Working Deadly Kit.

The following is a brief overview of talking circles. It provides managers and staff with suggestions on how to conduct talking circles in their workplace.

This document forms part of the National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction's (NCETA) Feeling Deadly, Working Deadly Kit for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander¹ alcohol and other drug (AOD) workers.

The aim of the Kit is to:

- provide a user friendly and culturally appropriate resource
- maintain and improve the wellbeing of Indigenous AOD workers.



¹ The terms Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous are used interchangeably throughout this resource kit. We understand that some people have a preference for using one term over the other and we have used the terms interchangeably to be sensitive to these differing perspectives.

What is a Talking Circle?

1. Talking circles are a great way of bringing people together to create a safe and positive environment to raise and discuss various relevant issues.
2. In particular, talking circles are extremely useful for encouraging participants to share their experiences and communicate in groups.
3. Talking circles allow people to speak freely and to share what is on their mind.
4. They allow people who may not have been heard before to share their views and experiences.
5. Talking circles can also act as a valuable healing process as they provide an opportunity for people to talk, laugh, share knowledge and make decisions in a non-threatening and positive environment.
6. The energy created in a talking circle can be both very powerful and sacred.
7. Importantly, talking circles represent equality, interconnectedness and continuity.
8. Talking circles rely on both spoken and unspoken language and members of a talking circle show respect and trust by listening to one another.

The Talking Stone²

1. Talking Stones are special healing stones used to facilitate talking circles.
2. A Talking Stone is used to allow people to speak freely and to share what is on their mind.
3. When a Talking Stone is held with faith and belief, it empowers the mind to focus and attract positive thoughts.

2 The Talking Stone used by NCETA was specially designed by Irene Allan who is a descendant of the Tanganekald Clan from Kingston, South Australia. She has been painting and programming Healing Stones for over two decades.

How do you run a Talking Circle?

1. The person running the talking circle starts by holding the Talking Stone and acknowledging the traditional ancestors and owners of the land.
2. The talking circle can be used as an opportunity for a broad discussion or it can be used to focus on a particular topic or issue. For example, a facilitator can set the scene for the talking circle by giving the group a topic that they are able to discuss or explore further.
3. A talking circle can be a useful tool to help managers and staff to identify stressors and to develop strategies to maintain and improve wellbeing.
4. Once the facilitator has introduced the topic for discussion they then pass the Talking Stone to the person on their left with an invitation to speak.
5. When that person has finished they pass the stone again to their left.
6. This continues until everyone in the circle has been given the opportunity to hold the Talking Stone and to speak if they choose to do so.
7. Only the person who is holding the Talking Stone is able to speak. This ensures that the speaker's views, thoughts and experiences are fully respected and that the other members of the talking circle are able to give the speaker their undivided attention.
8. Anything that is of a personal nature must stay in the talking circle.
9. At the end of the talking circle, the facilitator thanks the participants for their involvement and summarises the key issues discussed.
10. The outcomes of the talking circles can then be used to implement additional strategies to foster resilience and wellbeing in the workplace.



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Produced with funding from the Australian Government Department
of Health and Ageing