



T-VSTTA

OVC TRIBAL VICTIM SERVICES TRAINING
AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Culture is Healing: Facilitating Talking Circles

Talking Circles honor and build upon a community's rich history of storytelling—sharing and listening to heal ourselves and each other.

Purpose: Elder Wilson Justin believes Talking Circles allow people to speak from the heart. The Talking Circle honors and builds upon traditional values of healing; being in community to share, connect, and heal. Talking Circles are a culturally responsive method for supporting healing, and helping communities restore wellness after harm. Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) grants can be used to fund cultural healing practices like Talking Circles. Talk to your grant manager about how to include Talking Circles in your OVC-funded projects.

Who is in the Circle: Every participant sits in the circle to symbolize completeness. Every victim of crime deserves to belong in the circle. Talking Circle conversations focus on one topic such as domestic violence, sexual assault, or Missing or Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP).

Honoring Safety: Safety is central to the circle. Be mindful of the topic and consider what may make the participants feel safe in the conversation. For example, consider separate circles for men and women when talking about sexual abuse or domestic violence. The setting contributes to participants willingness to share openly and freely. Provide information on advocacy services for those who may need support after the Talking Circle; hearing and telling stories can bring on strong emotions.

Honoring Confidentiality: Common agreements among participants set the tone for the conversation and contribute to safety. Honor and uphold the saying, “What is said here stays here,” at the start of the circle. Traditional values of respect, compassion, and listening without judgment are practiced in the circle. Have a plan in place to safeguard personal or sensitive information for circle participants.

Honoring Spirituality: Spirituality is a significant component of the circle. Traditionally, circles will open with a prayer from an elder or the burning of sage, depending on the culture and community preference.

*“Healing from
the center,
from the
light within.”*

*- Dr. Rita Pitka Blumenstein,
Bob Morgan, PHD.*

How to Facilitate

The design of the circle is aligned to traditional practices. One method is to set chairs in a circle with an opening, called the doorway, to the east. Participants enter and exit clockwise (to the left) to avoid disrupting the energy of the circle. As participants enter, the facilitator sits in the first chair to the left with an elder in the second chair. A circle should not be broken once started.

A talking piece such as a rock, stick, feather, or soap stone carving is used during the circle process. This represents that the individual holding the piece has the focus of everyone's attention. Once the person is finished talking, the piece is handed to the next person clockwise in the circle. Every person in the circle decides for themselves if they would like to share and can express themselves in the ways that make them feel comfortable.



THE CIRCLE HAS THREE ROUNDS.

The *first round* is the sharing of introductions. The facilitator demonstrates how to start the circle by introducing who they are, who their ancestors are, and where they are from; then passes the talking piece to the left.

The *second round* introduces the topic of the circle. The facilitator creates a safe space to address traumatic events and focus on restoring healing and wellness. Examples of second round topics include addressing domestic violence or sexual abuse.

The *third and final round* is a discussion about how to heal after trauma. For example, if the focus of the circle is around sexual abuse, attendees would identify how they will recognize triggers and find ways to become more comfortable in their own body when triggered.

An elder closes the Talking Circle with a prayer or a blessing.

Talking Circles connect victims of crime to healing and their relatives. This cultural practice is centered on the shared responsibility to take care of each other.

Adapted from [Doorway to a Sacred Place: Restoring Community Wellness & Responding to Traumatic Events with Culturally Relevant Practices](#).
Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium

Tribal Victim Services Training and Technical Assistance (T-VSTTA) is a capacity-building program providing tailored, hands-on training and technical assistance to victim service providers in American Indian and Alaska Native communities. With over 100 years of combined experience in victim services, the T-VSTTA team meets you where you are, working together to build on the resilience within your community.

The U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) funds the T-VSTTA program, which is available at no cost for grantees and potential grantees.



CONTACT INFORMATION

Email or call to request training and technical assistance. A member of the T-VSTTA team will respond promptly.

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