

## Solution Circles

### Overview Description

A solution circle (Forrest & Pearpoint, 1996) is a quick powerful approach to help an individual or a team 'unstuck' from a problem in life or work. A solution circle is a tool to build 'community capacity'. In an education setting it can help class or teacher teams to discuss issues in a group to generate solutions.

Each circle takes no more than thirty minutes. It involves around 8 people who listen, discuss and collaborate around a focus issue brought to the group by a participant. This 'issue' can be something that is troubling the whole group or it can be something that just concerns the person bringing the problem and the group act as a fresh group of minds who can help the participant think through the issue and identify next steps.



The circle follows **four structured steps**

- Problem presenter describes the issue
- The 'team' discuss creative solutions
- There is dialogue between the team and the problem presenter.
- The problem presenter identifies next steps.

**Roles within the group**

- Problem presenter
- Group facilitator – keeps the time.
- Note taker – who can record ideas and actions agreed.
- Creative team!

Ref: Designed by Marsha Forest & Jack Pearpoint. Inclusion Press.

You can see the steps outlined on the following YouTube clip:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=QCnZVlgHKPc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QCnZVlgHKPc)

More information and resources can be found here:

<https://inclusive-solutions.com/circles/solution-circles/>

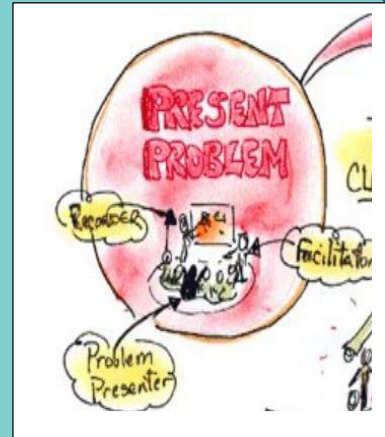
Reference: Forrest, M., & Pearpoint, J. (1996). *Solution circle: Getting unstuck a creative problem-solving tool*. Retrieved from <https://www.unclution.com/ttsolutioncircle.html>

## Solution Circle Steps

### STEP ONE – 6 minutes

The problem presenter will have 6 uninterrupted minutes to outline the problem.

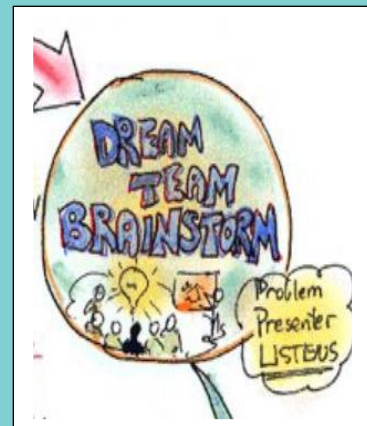
The job of the process facilitator is to keep time and make sure no one interrupts. The recorder takes notes. Everyone else listens. If the problem presenter stops talking before the six minutes elapse, everyone else stays silent until the 6 minutes pass. This is key! The problem presenter gets 6 uninterrupted minutes.



### STEP TWO – 6 minutes

The team contribute with ideas about creative solutions to what they just heard. It is not a time to clarify the problem or to ask questions. The process facilitator must make sure this is a brainstorm. Everyone gets a chance to give their ideas.

The problem presenter listens - without interrupting. He/she must not talk or respond. It's hard to just listen but it is vital!



### STEP THREE – 6 minutes

Now the group can have a dialogue led by the problem presenter. The problem presenter can ask and answer questions from the team. This is time to explore and clarify the problem. Focus on the positive points only and not what can't be done as time is short.



## STEP FOUR – 6 minutes

The problem presenter decides on first steps that are doable within the next 3 days. At least ONE step should be initiated within 24 hours. Research shows that unless a first step is taken almost immediately, people do not get out of their ruts.

If possible the coach/facilitator would ring/speak to the focus person within three days to see if they took this first step.



## Applications

Circles can be used in many different ways. Some suggestions:

- Staff supervision approach
- As a format for a meeting with a parent and the class teaching team where there is a concern that needs to be addressed
- As a way of all the staff within a class/year group can problem solve together about a young person.
- As a way for a leadership team to consider an issue in a structured and quick manner.

## Research Evidence

### **Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015.**

Explored the **impact** of solution circles. They concluded that:

- The circle creates a cohesive group identity rather than being a collection of individuals
- The circle process aims for a 'ripple' effect whereby the impact of the group is experienced beyond the discussions that take place within the circle
- The circle provides social support to those taking part in a safe climate

*Grahamslaw, L., & Henson, L.H. (2015). Solving problems through circles. Educational Psychology in Practice, 31(2), 111-126.*

### **Brown and Henderson (2012)**

Explored how circles can support **staff wellbeing**. They found;

- Circles provided opportunities for people to talk and listen
- Staff became more aware of the difficulties their colleagues were experiencing.
- Circles provided a platform for sharing and encouraging an atmosphere of team work.

*Brown, E., & Henderson, L. (2012). Promoting staff support in schools: Solution Circles. Educational Psychology in Practice, 28(2), 177-186*