



wetheuncivilised
alifestory

"Activism is profoundly tied in with a sense of being responsible for your community, and your place."

Alastair Macintosh

FireCircle Guide

This document is a step-by-step guide to organising and hosting a **FireCircle** in your community.

When we create opportunities to share our stories openly with one another - the things that bring us joy, the things that bring us grief, the things that challenge and enliven us – the resilient threads of connection and mutual aid are woven. It is in this coming together of community that our individual and our collective power sits, and this is why we have extended the **wetheuncivilised** project to include the seeding of a network of **FireCircles**.

Whether the need to hold such a gathering has emerged from a Community Screening Event, a Home Screening Event, or a private viewing, **FireCircles** are a place to gather with members of your community: to listen and be listened to, and to transform feelings into action.

This **FireCircle** Guide consists of 4 parts – everyone in your group should have access to this document (preferably shared online before you meet):

PART I	What is a FireCircle?	Pages 2 - 3
PART II	Elements of FireCircle	Pages 4 - 7
PART III	Holding a FireCircle	Pages 8 - 12
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PART I: What is a FireCircle?

"Gathering in circle started around the fires of our ancestors and has accompanied us ever since. We remember this space. When we listen, we speak more thoughtfully, and discover a shared purpose." Circle Way

A **FireCircle** is based around the model of a Talking Circle. A Talking Circle is also known as a "*Way of Council*", or "*Circle Way*", and draws on indigenous wisdom from around the world, as a way of connecting, decision making and coming together to find solutions.

A **FireCircle** is a gathering where people come together in a circle with a clear intention of supporting one another as members of a community. What makes a **FireCircle** different from other ways of getting together is that sitting in circle represents the willingness of people to shift from informal socialising or opinionated discussion into a receptive attitude of thoughtful speaking and deep listening. In a **FireCircle**:

- Leadership passes amongst all circle members
- Responsibility is shared
- Reliance is on wholeness, rather than on any personal agenda

At the centre of each **FireCircle** sits a symbol of the children's fire. This represents the commitment of the group to honour future generations in their thoughts, words and actions. With the aid of a talking piece and some simple agreements (see '**FireCircle Elements**' pg. 4), an egalitarian environment is created to foster individual and group empowerment.

A **FireCircle** may have a clear objective, such as to explore a specific theme or to develop a community project or strategy, or it could have no agenda other than being a space for coming together and for sharing. Its function is interchangeable, and this will depend on the community and its unique needs at any given time.

A **FireCircle** can be a space to:

- Gather and connect with members of your community
- Support others and feel supported
- Resolve conflict
- Collectively acknowledge/celebrate/discuss an event within the community
- Cross-pollinate and create solutions

Understanding a sustainable future lies in the actions of today, organising and calling a **FireCircle** is a way of cultivating supportive, resilient, and healthy communities, creating the future we want in this moment.

The Children's Fire

"The Children's Fire is part of the Earth teachings of the elders of ancient America. It was a reminder of the first promise: No law, no action of any kind, shall be taken that will harm the children seven generations hence." Embercombe

In a culture where many of our decisions and actions are having an immeasurable impact upon the environment and our future generations, the **Children's Fire** is a powerful symbol of our efforts to re-write this story.

The **Children's Fire** sits at the centre of all **FireCircles**, serving as guide for all decisions and actions taken by the group, and to remind people they gather not only for themselves but also for future generations.

Practically speaking, **The Children's Fire** can be translated as observing the following three ([permaculture](#)) ethics in our decisions and actions:

EARTH CARE Does your decision/action support the Earth's living ecosystems?

PEOPLE CARE Does your decision/action have a positive impact on the wellbeing of all people involved or affected by it?

FAIR SHARE Does your decision/action take into account the setting of fair limits and the re-distribution of surplus?

Note:

Faced with our complex lives and the uninvited demands put upon us, It isn't always possible to observe the above ethics all of the time, so, be kind to yourself and each other in this time of transition. Nonetheless, let these ethics challenge, inspire, and inform your actions, as together, one step at a time, we rewrite the story.

PART II: FireCircle Elements

The Elements

A **FireCircle** consists of the following elements. Please make yourself familiar with them before organising your own **FireCircle**.

Intention

What is your *intention* for the gathering? Intention shapes the circle and determines who will come, the duration of the circle or time required, and what kinds of outcomes are to be expected. Setting a clear intention for your gathering will help to keep your precious time together focused as well as giving those attending a clear idea what to expect. Examples may include gathering to focus on a specific event/idea/issue as a group, or deciding to focus more on individual projects or personal sharing relating to a specific theme.

The Centre - The Children's Fire (for more information see pg. 3)

The **Children's Fire** sits at the centre of the circle. Like the hub of a wheel: all energies pass through it, and it holds the rim together. Placing the **Children's Fire** in the centre reminds people of the core principle of the circle, that '**No law, no action of any kind, shall be taken that will harm the children seven generations hence.**'

EARTH CARE
PEOPLE CARE
FAIR SHARE

We suggest using a candle, fire-bowl, or symbolic object to represent the **Children's Fire**.

Setting of Group Agreements

The use of agreements allows all members to have a free and profound exchange, to respect a diversity of views, and to share responsibility for the well-being and direction of the group. You can decide on these agreements as a group, using the consensus model¹. Agreements often used include:

- We hold all stories or personal material in **confidentiality**
- We listen to each other with **compassion** and **respect**
- We **ask** for what we need and **offer** what we can
- We **consent for a group guardian** to track our needs, timing and energy.
- We **agree to pause** at a signal when we feel the need to pause

¹ Consensus is a group discussion where everyone's opinions are heard and understood, and a solution is created that respects those opinions. Consensus is not what everyone agrees to, nor is it the preference of the majority. Consensus results in the best solution that the group can achieve at the time. Remember, the root of "**consensus**" is "consent". This means that even if parties disagree, there is still overall consent to move forward in order to settle the issue. This requires co-operation among people with different interests and opinions.

FireCircle communication culture

In order to cultivate an atmosphere of mutual respect and collaboration, people are asked to observe the communication culture of the circle:

- **Speak with intention:** noting what has relevance to the conversation in the moment
- **Speak only when it is your turn to speak** (when you have the talking piece), or are invited to by the speaker
- **Listen with attention and without judgement:** be respectful of all members of the group
- **Tend to the wellbeing of the circle:** remaining aware of the impact of our contributions
- **Everything shared is confidential and for members of the circle only** (unless expressed otherwise by the person).

WAYS OF COMMUNICATING IN CIRCLE

The Talking Piece enables people to speak without interruption, and is often used during check-in/check-out or whenever there is a desire to slow down the conversation, or to collect all voices and contributions. The talking piece (an object such stick or stone) can be placed in the centre and picked up as people feel called to speak, or it can be passed around directly from one person to the next in a sun-wise (clockwise) direction. Silence is an acceptable response. It is everyone's right to say 'I pass.'

Conversation can be invited when reaction, interaction and an interjection of new ideas, thoughts and opinions are needed – this can be done in smaller break-out groups

A call for Reflection, or Silence - gives each member time and space to reflect on what is occurring (or needs to occur) in the course of meet-up. Silence may be called so that each person can consider the role or impact they are having on the group, or to help the group realign with their intention, or to sit with a question until there is clarity.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS/SUGGESTIONS

- Be aware of people's individual needs or circumstances, and how this may effect their personal experiences/perspectives
- Respect the different comfort zones of people within the group
- Ensure that people feel safe
- Everyone's contribution is equally important
- State what you feel or believe starting with 'I-statements,' e.g., 'I feel ...' 'I am...', 'I need to...'. This discourages generalising and helps cultivate personal responsibility
- Speakers should feel free to express themselves in any way that is comfortable; by sharing a story, a personal experience, by using examples or metaphors, and so on

Time Keeper/Guardian

A key role in aiding self-governance and bringing the circle back to intention is the role of guardian. The guardian is a different volunteer from the group each meeting. The guardian takes care of time keeping, loosely keeping all people's contributions to 3 minutes or less, and focusing the intention of the group. The guardian usually employs a gentle noise-maker, such as a chime, bell, or rattle, as a signal.

The guardian may also use the signal to request everyone to stop, take a breath and rest in a space of silence. The guardian makes this signal again and speaks to why s/he called the pause – for example, if any of the agreements are not being observed, or if, in another case, the group needs some space to reflect on what someone has said or expressed. Although it is one of the guardian's main responsibilities, *any member may call for a pause during Circle (not just the guardian)*.

Beginning/Welcome

Once people are sat in Circle, it is helpful for the host, or another willing person, to begin the circle with a gesture that shifts people's attention from social space to Circle space. This gesture of welcome may be a moment of silence, reading a poem, an inspiring quote or listening to a song. This would be a good opportunity to light the candle and acknowledge the **Children's Fire**, and to speak the intention for the meeting.

Check-in/Greeting

Check-in helps people settle into the Circle and reminds everyone of their commitment to the expressed intention. It ensures that people are truly present. This sharing helps to weave the interpersonal net.

To 'check-in', there is an invitation for people to respond to the following questions:

Who are you?

What brought you here/why? (optional)

How are you feeling today?

Check-in usually starts with a volunteer and proceeds *sun-wise* (clockwise), around the circle. If an individual is not ready to speak, the turn is 'passed' and the person is given another opportunity to speak after others have spoken. Sometimes people may like to place individual objects in the centre as a way of signifying their presence and relationship to the intention of the circle.

In addition to a round of basic introductions, you may want to go into another round before the focus of the meeting. Examples of further rounds may include:

Making a Pledge - What action will I take/am I already taking to honour the Children's Fire?

Needs/offers – What does each person need today/what can they offer? (This is optional – someone may not be able to offer something or may not need something, it's simply an invitation)

The Focus – Conversation/Activity

This part of the session is an organic process, designed to allow for a natural emergence of discussions/solution-focused group work. If there are many voices to be heard or there is a desire for people to explore different aspects of an issue or project, the group may break into smaller circles (each with their own appointed guardian), summarising their conversations and feeding back to the larger circle afterwards. Using a talking piece at this point may still prove useful, or you may decide to move into a more open conversational mode, keeping awareness on communication culture and any agreements made. Activities may include:

- Planning an event/action/campaign
- Doing a task/activity together
- Sharing an idea/information – is someone in your group holding valuable knowledge that could be shared?

Each group may want to appoint a Scribe – someone to write down any ideas or developments to feed back to the larger group. It's also helpful to decide on some next steps for the group before finishing this part of the session.

Ending/Check-out

At the close of each **FireCircle**, it is important to allow a few minutes for each person to comment on what they learned, or what will stay in their heart and mind as they leave. Closing the circle by 'checking out' provides a formal end to the meeting, a chance for members to reflect on what has transpired, and to pick up objects if they have placed something in the centre.

As people shift from council space to social space or private time, they release each other from the intensity of attention being in Circle requires. Often after check-out, the host, guardian, or a volunteer will offer a few inspirational words of farewell, or signal a few seconds of silence before the Circle is ended.

Summary

Now you are familiar with the various elements and stages of a **FireCircle** gathering you should feel confident in holding a gathering yourself. You may have previous experience that gives you a confidence, or you may be new to this. Don't worry though, in these times when so much of our indigenous ceremonial traditions are so deeply buried, we must start somewhere in reclaiming these authentic spaces.

To offer further support the following part of this guide will provide you with a step-by-step guide for your first meeting. It may be a good idea to print this off for reference to give further confidence as we find our way back home...

Ref. The Circle Way <http://www.circleway.org/>

PART III: Holding a FireCircle

"Held by the simple rituals of opening & completion, honouring & appreciation, the Circle acts as a vehicle for both storytelling & transcending our stories." Baraka Elihu

The **FireCircle** is, most importantly, your space, to create and hold in a way that works for you and the people you are gathering with. It works best with groups of 4-16, but can be any size, depending on your group – bigger groups just need more time!

You may already be familiar with much of what is written here, so feel free to interpret this document in a way that feels comfortable to you. Pick the bits that work for you. Remember, this is just a guide.

Your first meeting – Practicalities and Suggestions

You may need a longer session for your first meeting – allowing a whole afternoon can help things to feel more relaxed and spacious.

People

- Decide on a Host
- Have someone to help set-up/support the host
- Send a digital copy of the **FireCircle** Guide to the people in your group, so they know what to expect.

Preparing the space

Use items you already have rather than buying anything new, ask people to bring something to add if you don't have enough of something such as cushions or chairs.

Essential Equipment

- Pens and paper
- A Candle to light at the centre of the Circle (to represent/remind people of the Children's Fire)
- Talking piece (stone/stick/pinecone/feather – anything that feels appropriate)
- Prepare your seating/floor cushions for people to sit in circle

Optional

- Make the space feel comfortable and welcoming by using cushions, throws and rugs
- You can create your own Centre piece with items contributed by people in the **FireCircle**, or items from the nature such as water/leaves/stones/pinecones/berries/flowers

Food

Ask people to bring-a-dish or healthy snacks/drinks to have before or after the **FireCircle** to create a feeling of celebration and sharing – happy bellies are an essential part of people care!

How to hold a FireCircle - step-by-step instructions

In your first meeting, you may want to watch the film together before sitting in Circle together. Straight after the film, read the 'Guided Meditation' to the group. The meditation helps to ground people straight after the film and also to re-introduce the **Children's Fire**. (Please see the 'Guided Meditation' on pg. 10)

Watching the film may not be practical (or necessary), but you may still find the 'Guided Meditation' helpful to set the tone for your first meeting – you can do this at the 'Starting Point' (see below).

1. Invite people to sit in Circle

Introduce the **FireCircle** (you can refer directly/indirectly to part I and II of this Guide, or ask people to offer an explanation, if they have read the document at home).

- Outline the running order/timescale of the gathering
- Outline the core ethics of the Children's Fire (see page 3 - The Children's Fire)
- Explain **communication** culture of the group to the circle (see page 5)
- Ask for a volunteer to act as Guardian (see page 6)

2. Setting Agreements

Set the Circle agreements – you may want to read these from the **FireCircle** Guide, or you may also want to use some of the 'Conversation time' to explore these agreements, and to create some of your own as a group. Either way, a good starting point is:

- Confidentiality – show of hands
- Compassion and respect
- Ask for what we need, offer what we can
- Agree to the group 'guardian' tending to our needs and our timing
- Agree to pause, when someone calls a pause
- 1-4 minutes maximum per person on each round (depending on group size)

3. Open the Circle

Call the Intention of gathering

For example “This circle is gathered today in honour of the Children’s Fire and all our future generations” – you may want to actually light a candle at this point

Starting Point

Offer a poem/moment of silence/inspirational quote. You may want to use the guided meditation below.

Guided Meditation

The meditation helps to ground people straight after the film and also to invite consideration for the Children’s Fire. It can also stand alone as a group meditation. You can read it from here, or create your own.

“I invite you now to close your eyes.

*Place a hand on your heart, or your belly, and become aware of your breath.
Feel the rise and fall of your hand with each inward and outward breath.*

As you breathe in the oxygen from our forests and oceans, feeling it seep into your core, become aware of your living blood as it flows to every cell of your body. Feel your feet on the ground, feel the earth below you, supporting you, giving you life. Unconditionally.

In this moment let’s give gratitude for these life-giving systems,

And also for the fact that we can gather here, in this room, today, free to share our thoughts, feelings and ideas without the direct threat of violence or oppression. Let’s also take a moment to think of all the protectors, Past, Present and Future, who are taking action to stand in honour of the Children’s Fire. Thank you.

(A moment’s pause)

Coming back to the inward and the outward breath, notice what is moving in you right now. What emotion is there? How does it feel? Where in your body do you feel it?

Place a hand there; send your breath there.

Coming back to the inward and the outward breath...

... the rise and fall of your belly or your chest...

(A moment’s pause)

Deepen the breath once again, as you bring your awareness back to your body, to your hands, your feet, your arms, legs...to your whole body, sitting here.

Slowly and gently, and in your own time, allow your eyes to open, allow yourself to arrive back into this space, to this community of people, your community...”

4. Check-in/Greeting

Check-in using a talking piece. Start with a volunteer and proceed in a sun-wise direction around the circle (remember there is no obligation to speak, each person is free to “pass”.)

In addition to a round of basic introductions, **who are you/how are you today/what bought you here? What are you grateful for?** You may want to go into another round before the focus of the meeting. Examples of further rounds may include:

- Sharing **individual pledges** to the **Children’s Fire** or the
- Communicating **personal needs** or **offers** to the group

5. The Focus – Conversation/Activity

Depending on the focus of the gathering or what is arising, decide on whether to remain in circle or break -out. Either way, things to consider or remain aware of at this stage are:

- Communication culture/agreements
- Assigning a guardian/scribe to break-out groups (if needed)
- Time for feeding back
- Exploring/agreeing on next steps for the group

6. Close the Circle – regroup/reflect

Using the talking piece, start with a volunteer and proceed in a sun-wise direction around the circle (remember there is no obligation to speak, each person is free to “pass”.)

To keep things focused you might like to invite people to respond to specific questions, depending on the nature of the **FireCircle**, such as:

- How are feeling now (one word)?
- What are you grateful for?
- What are you taking away from the gathering?
- What is your pledge to the **Children’s Fire**?
- What is your ‘Action’? (ie. “I will research X, and feed it back to the group at the next **FireCircle**)

Close the **FireCircle** with a suitable poem, song or quote. Planned or by invitation.

7. Planning your next FireCircle

Before people leave, make a plan for the next FireCircle. It is up to you how you organise your group/how often you meet/whether it is a closed or open group. We suggest you decide this (and any other decisions) as a group, using the consensus model (see Consensus Handbook Link below).

Share responsibility

Ensure that people take turns in hosting/holding the space (it can still be in the same location). If this feels too intimidating for some, consider pairing-up with someone else in the group, so that the role is shared. Those with experience can make themselves available in a support role.

Enjoy your time together reweaving the threads of community and re-telling the story of our lives here on this beautiful planet, as we collaborate to honour the Children's Fire.

Host a Community Screening

Screening a film can be a powerful community event, and we want to support you in making it happen. We have created a Screening Kit to guide you, based on our experience coordinating and hosting over 60 screenings on the 2016 Community Screening Tour.

Connect with other FireCircle Groups

FireCircle Facebook Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/301646386893357/>

Get in touch

Tell us about your Community FireCircle Group, and share your stories/questions/challenges with the wetheuncivilised online community on our 'Your Stories' page (email: alifestory@wetheuncivilised.org), where you can post pictures and stories about your group.

We will also add your group to the wetheuncivilised map, so that we can see how the uncivilised network is growing.

Donate

wetheuncivilised is a grassroots, not-for-profit project – The film and all the supporting material was produced with the help of friends, family, and a few generous people and organisations who have believed in the project. Money raised through sales or donations goes directly back into the project, enabling the creation and refinement of further online content and resources for sharing, and toward realising our vision for a physical place where we can support ecological education, community resilience and resistance.

If you would like to make a donation towards the project, to support this work, please go to the [donate](#) page on the website.

PART IV: Resources

(A more extensive list can be found on our website under "Take Action")

The Circleway - <http://www.thecircleway.net/resources>

Conflict exploration/ Way of Council – www.heart-source.com (*Rob Dreaming works with Landmatters every year to help with their communication and connection as a group*)

Consensus - A Consensus Handbook – Seeds for Change
<http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/handbookweb.pdf> – *for practical information on Consensus Decision Making*

The 8-Shields Model - *What is 8-Shields? Looking at a natural model with a flow and structure that can be applied in various learning scenarios, long-term mentoring, event facilitation, and many other diverse areas.*

Earth Activist Training - Starhawk – <http://starhawk.org/permaculture/my-personal-journey/>

Grief - Sobonfu Some – Embracing Grief Article:
<http://www.sobonfu.com/articles/writings-by-sobonfu-2/embracing-grief/>

Grief and Deep Ecology – <http://workthatreconnects.org/>

Non-Violent Communication – <http://nvc-uk.com/resources/nvc-tree-life/> PDF
<http://nvc-uk.com> *a way of working through conflict – workshops across UK*

Permaculture Ethics and principles - <https://permacultureprinciples.com/ethics/>

Seeds for Change – <http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk> – *loads of great free resources- they offer training, meeting facilitation and online resources on collective organising and consensus decision making, developing strategy, campaign and action skills, setting up groups and co-ops, co-operative governance and training for trainers.*

Way of Council explained - http://www.heart-source.com/council/way_of_council_page.html

Books

Sacred Earth Celebrations - Glennie Kindred – *For ideas on DIY ceremonies, based around the wheel of the year*

Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World by Joanna R. Macy, Molly Young Brown, Matthew Fox (Foreword) - *for practical guide to group work around grief and deep ecology - Pete and I have often used this book as a guide to holding sessions with groups*

Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature by Jon Young, Evan McGown, Ellen Haas – *for practical ways to cultivate your nature connection*

Calling the Circle - The First and Future Culture by Christina Baldwin

Circle Round: Raising Children in the Goddess Tradition by Starhawk Co-written with Anne Hill and Diane Baker

The Circle Way: A Leader in Every Chair by Ann Linnea with Christina Baldwin

Have You Lost Your Tribe? by Manitonquat (Medicine Story)

The Joy of Caring for Children in the Circle Way: It Takes a Child to Raise a Village by Manitonquat (Medicine Story)

Non-Violent Communication: A Language of Life by Marshall B. Rosenberg

Non-Violent Communication: Companion Workbook by Lucy Leu

People and Permaculture by Looby Macnamara

Hopefully you now have everything you need to get you started. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you need anything. May your event be a beautiful and powerful gathering of Community.

With Deepest Love and Gratitude for your Commitment,

Lily and Pete Sequoia