

BIRTHDAY CIRCLING

LEADERSHIP MANUAL



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WELCOME

I led my first Birthday Circle in 2015. Since then I have been practicing a lot with many different people in many different contexts and I still find that this practice keeps giving me new insights into myself and others.

I also find that I keep learning new things about how to lead Birthday Circles. In this leadership manual I try to give a framework for how to set up and lead your circles from a place of presence and connection with yourself.

I hope it is useful for you
Peter Munthe-Kaas

HOW TO LEAD A BIRTHDAY CIRCLE

WHAT IS A BIRTHDAY CIRCLE?

A Birthday Circle is a guided, meditative practice in which one person (the circlee) receives the full attention of the group for a defined period of time.

The primary intention is to bring conscious awareness and acceptance of whatever arises in the person in focus. The group explores the experience of the circlee as well as their own experience of being with them, in real time.

The focus of the practice is on increasing awareness of what already exists in the shared moment. Staying present with what is happening in connection with the circlee is the main purpose of the practice.

Time

A birthday circle typically takes between 25 and 45 minutes although it is certainly possible to do longer birthday circles.

Number of people

A good number of people for a birthday circle is between 4 and 7. With only 3 participants the circle loses a bit of its power and with 8 or more it can be hard to stay with the focus on the circlee.





HOW TO LEAD A BIRTHDAY CIRCLE

PREPARING THE CIRCLE

A birthday circle typically has a leader who is responsible for the form, timing and principles of the practice. The leader sets up the container for the circle, picks the circlee, sets context for the practice, continuously leads by example and ends the circle when the agreed upon time is up.

Picking the Circlee and setting up the circle.

Find a way to choose who will be in focus for the duration of the circle. You can do this in many different ways, but it is usually a good idea to check with everyone in the group if they are interested. You can simply ask everyone or you can ask people to close their eyes, feel into it and put up their hand if they want to be circled. Ultimately it is your choice and you can go with your own curiosity, where the group seems to gravitate or who seems to want it the most depending on your intuition in the moment.

When you have found a circlee, make sure that the physical setup feels good and comfortable for them. Also make sure you have a clock or other device to keep the time.





HOW TO LEAD A BIRTHDAY CIRCLE

OPENING THE CIRCLE

It is usually nice to start a birthday circle with some kind of context setting. This can support the participants in dropping into presence and sets the tone of the practice.

Often the context setting has the form of some kind of short guided meditation, but it can also simply be speaking to where you are in the present moment and how you relate to what is going to happen in the coming 30 minutes (or however long the circle is).

Do the context setting from your own present experience and allow it to be an organic invitation for everyone to step into the circle - including yourself.

A good picture for the context setting is that you open a magic circle (In game/ritual theory the magic circle is the space in which the normal rules and reality of the world are suspended and replaced by other rules of engagement), define the invitation for what is going to happen in it, and then step into it yourself, inviting the others to come with you.

After the context setting you can invite the circlee to begin the exploration. Typically this is done by asking them what it is like to be starting this circle or what it is like to be them in this moment, but notice if that feels right for you. There might be a more truthful expression for you to start from.





HOW TO LEAD A BIRTHDAY CIRCLE

LEADING THE CIRCLE

As the leader of the circle, your embodiment of the practice serves as a model for others to follow. The more you can trust your experience and bring yourself forth, the more the group will likely be willing to do the same. The more you can stay with non-directional curiosity on the experience of the circlee, the more likely it is that the group will drop into presence with you.

Notice if you get trapped in a leadership dilemma of wanting the circle to be in a particular way. For example if you have a sense that it is not going well. If you start believing that what you are with is not relevant for the circle, use it as an impulse to bring the thing that you think is not relevant. This is important, because even if you are right that it is completely irrelevant for what is happening, you will likely be keeping yourself at a distance if you don't name the experience in the circle.

Leading a circle is deep practice and it is not easy to hold the formal container of the circle while showing up fully and holding each arising moment with curiosity and non-judgment. Be gentle with yourself.

Some guidelines for leading are:

- Maintaining focused attention on the Circlee's present-moment experience.
- Trust your own experience and bring yourself into connection with the circlee.
- Name what you observe in the circlee or the group.
- Check your perceptions with the circlee. Return to their experience. "What is it like to hear that"?
- Include the other participants in the circle by inviting their experiences into connection with the circlee.
- Bring attention back to the circlee if it seems to go somewhere else in the group.



HOW TO LEAD A BIRTHDAY CIRCLE

ENDING THE CIRCLE

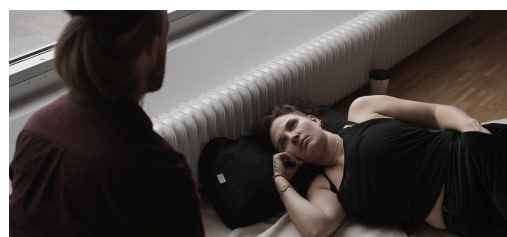
Ending a birthday circle can be tricky. There might be a lot happening as you are approaching the ending and it can feel hard to find a good way to close. A good trick is to name what it is like for you to get close to the end and to check with the circlee what it is like for them.

Sometimes the circlee might have a specific wish for an ending. Other times you might want to share your sensemaking of what has happened in the circle – what landscapes you have travelled in with the group.

It might also happen that it is just really difficult because so much is going on. In those cases you might end up simply naming that it is difficult for you to find a good ending and your hopes for what will happen after the circle ends.

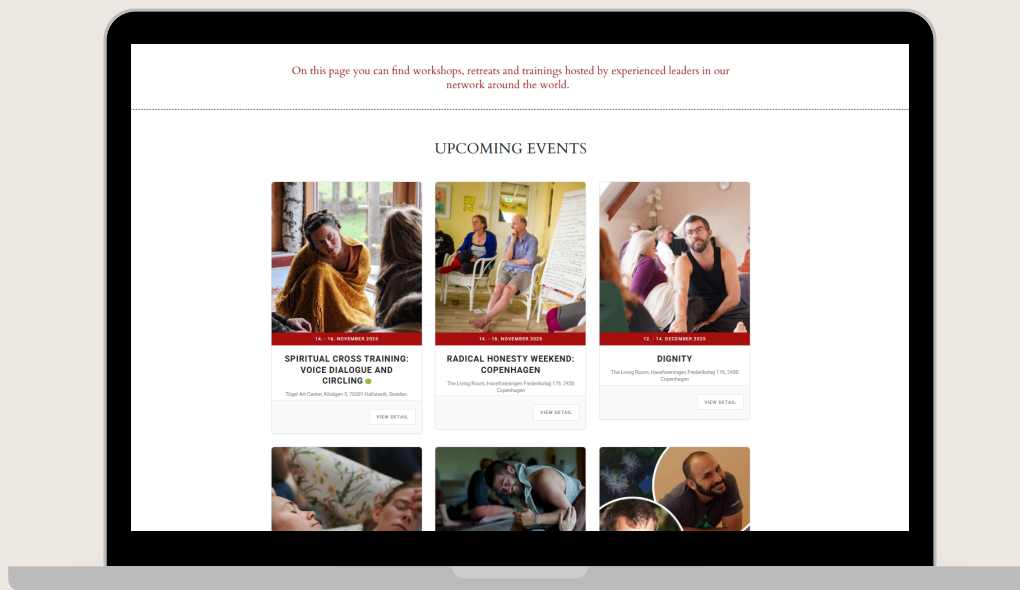
Do your best to end the circle on time. It is your responsibility as the leader to acknowledge that you have come to the end of the agreed upon container for practice. Do not extend the time unless it feels out of integrity to end. And even then, remember that you still hold the responsibility to end the circle.

Make sure that it is clear that the circle has ended. You metaphorically invite everyone to step out of the magic circle and close it behind you.



GO DEEPER IN YOUR PRACTICE

EVENTS AND COURSES



If you're interested in going deeper in your practice, you are super welcome to check out our events. On the Relating Arts website you can find weekends, courses and retreats led by experienced Circling leaders.

www.relatingarts.com

THANK YOU
FOR READING!



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