

# Circle of Trust Approach from Parker Palmer

One of the challenges for an FLC is for members to feel that they are in a safe place to grow in authentic ways. Growth requires that we identify our assumptions and to practice new skills. Many times, the practice of these skills is awkward at first and can appear ungraceful. Parker Palmer (2009) has identified a method called a Practices of the Circle of Trust Approach to facilitate some ground rules for groups to create a safe space to learn and grow together. In an excerpt from his work, Parker Palmer (2009) wrote the following about creating a safe space for faculty:

In this culture, we know how to create spaces that invite the intellect to show up, to argue its case, to make its point. We know how to create spaces that invite the emotions to show up, to express anger or joy. We know how to create spaces that invite the will to show up, to consolidate effort and energy round a common task. And we surely know how to create spaces that invite the ego to show up, preening itself and claiming its turf! But we seem to know very little about creating spaces that invite the soul to show up, this core of ourselves, our selfhood.

1. Creating spaces that are open and hospitable, but resource-rich and charged with expectancy.  
In a Circle of Trust, we are invited to slow down, listen and reflect in a quiet and focused space. At the same time, we engage in dialogue with others in the circle—a dialogue about things that matter. As this “sorting and sifting” goes on, and we are able to clarify and affirm our truth in the presence of others, that truth is more likely to overflow into our work and lives.
2. Committing to no fixing, advising, “saving” or correcting one another.  
Everything we do is guided by this simple rule, one that honors the primacy and integrity of the inner teacher. When we are free from external judgment, we are more likely to have an honest conversation with ourselves and learn to check and correct ourselves from within.
3. Asking honest, open questions to “hear each other into speech.”  
Instead of advising each other, we learn to listen deeply and ask questions that help others hear their own inner wisdom more clearly. As we learn to ask questions that are not advice in disguise, that have no other purpose than to help someone listen to the inner teacher, all of us learn and grow.
4. Exploring the intersection of the universal stories of human experience with the personal stories of our lives. Guided conversations focused on a poem, a teaching story, a piece of music or a work of art—drawn from diverse cultures and wisdom traditions—invite us to reflect on the “big questions” of our lives, allowing each person to intersect and explore them in his or her own way.
5. Using multiple modes of reflection so everyone can find his or her place and pace. In Circles of Trust, we speak and we listen. We explore important questions in large group conversation and dialogues in small groups. We make time for individual reflection and journaling. We respect nonverbal ways of learning, including music, movement and the arts. We honor the educative power of silence and the healing power of laughter. Together we weave a “tapestry of truth” with many and diverse threads, creating a pattern in which everyone can find a place that both affirms and stretches them.
6. Honoring confidentiality. Participants in Circles of Trust understand that nothing said in these circles will be revealed outside the circle and that things said by participants will not be pursued when a session ends, unless the speaker requests it (Palmer, 2009, (<http://www.couragerenewal.org/approach/>)).