

Solution Circles

Mike Hayward

June 2023

Solution Circles

Solution circles are a four-stage process for the focused discussion of issues and the formulation of ways in which to deal with them.

The person with the issue/problem sits with the support of the group to be heard and assisted in a non-judgemental way to find ways to progress the issue.

It is important for someone to facilitate the process to enable the clear demarcation of the separate steps and to stop any blurring from one into the other.

Stage 1 - Set the focus (2 mins)

The issue to be dealt with is clearly outlined by the person without any interruption from the group.

Two minutes, uninterrupted, to outline the problem or the issue.

A clear focus is established from what you have said.

Stage 2 - Clarification Questions (4 mins)

This is the only stage where there is direct dialogue between the group and the person with the issue.

The group are allowed to ask clarification questions, typically, “when does this...?”, “how often will they...?”, “who is involved?” etc.”

No solutions are offered, or enquiries made about things/interventions that may have been tried before. Only clarification questions may be asked.

Stage 3 - Solutions (4 mins)

The person with the issue needs paper and a pen.

The group offers direct solutions/ways forward, be creative but concise.

The person with the issue writes down the solutions/ways forward offered by their colleagues.

Do not respond to any of the suggestions, even if they have been tried before, just listen and note the suggestions.

Stage 4 - Selection

The person bringing the issue will add up the solutions offered, subtract those already tried.

The person bringing the issue will, reflect and select the two (or so) suggestions that they will action.

They then share these with the group so that the group can check in with them at a future date to ensure they have been actioned.

Timings

There will be a shorter time given to the outline of the issue (step 1) and more time given to steps 2 and 3.

This means that twice as much time is spent talking about solutions rather than focusing on problems.