



## Yarning Circles

### Rationale

Yarning Circles allow all students to have their say in a safe space without judgement. Each student is encouraged to speak, one at a time, without interruption. This is a process that helps to develop deep listening skills, sharing knowledge and establishing rules around respectful behaviour.

The use of a Yarning Circle is an important process within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island culture. It has been used by Indigenous peoples from around the world for centuries to learn from a collective group, build respectful relationships, and to preserve and pass on cultural knowledge.

*Belonging and a sense of connectedness is the most important element to a child's emotional health and wellbeing. Connectedness, belonging, and attachment are essential if children are to engage fully with life and learning.*

### Guidelines

- You cannot develop an empathetic classroom if students don't know each other or do not have the ability to see another person's perspective. Therefore, sharing of personal information is the cornerstone to developing empathy
- Foster accountability and provide a safe place to be heard and to respond
- promote student–student interactions and student–school–community connectedness.
- It is only through discussion and reflection, suggestions and sharing that students learn to take responsibility for their behaviour and how it directly affects them, class and community
- Enables student issues, that the teacher may or may not be aware of, to be discussed and for the class community to collectively work together to solve.
- Provides an avenue for student-based problem solving and positive peer influence
- Reflects a deep commitment to the development of personal and social capabilities. Our task is to guide children to a deeper understanding of themselves, others and the reason and motives that underpin behaviour.
- Very effective in targeting bystander behaviour

### Running a successful yarning circle - Marmion PS model

#### Establish clear expectations (Code Switch)

- Only speak when you are holding the yarn/object. Then when you finish, hold the yarn/object and pass it on.
- If someone in the circle calls out – remind them they are not holding the yarn/object. Talk to the class about impulse control.
- Be clear about what is appropriate
- No ridicules, put downs, bullying
- Safe place

## Yarning Circle Set Up

- Take place in the yarning circle – children sit on logs
- If in classroom children sit in a circle either on the floor or on chairs
- The space must be cleared, and room made available for the circle. With practice students can effectively move desks/chairs to create the space in less than 90 seconds.
- Watch for comfort sitting. Students always choosing to sit with friends. Ask students to check for comfort sitting. This creates an unsafe classroom. By simply sitting next to someone outside of your friendship group you are signalling to that person that you feel comfortable to talk/work with them. It is a physical sign of acceptance
- If a child can't hear another child speak, encourage the children to put their hand up and let that child know. This shows they care about what the child has to say.

## Structure

- **Code switching**  
Students sit in a circle and switch to appropriate behaviour.  
Check for comfort sitting
- **We respectfully acknowledge the Wadjuk Noongar people, the traditional custodians of the land in which we are meeting today**
- **Question**  
General question- think/pair/share-optional
- **Issues-general**  
Classroom/playground/individual  
Think/pair/share enables students to be involved in the problem solving process prior to discussion
- **Strategies**  
Think/pair share, class strategies, individual strategies documented.
- **Issues individual student**
  - Use names/no judgement message
  - Affects behaviour having on self and others
  - Bystander message-how can we help
  - Targeted student "I acknowledge your comment"
  - Response from student
  - Individual strategies documented
- **What makes student a valuable member of the class?**  
Why important to help
- **Character Strength focus.**  
Why is this character strength important? When/why use it  
OR
- **Cultural focus**  
Use resources to discuss Indigenous history and stories
- **Question**  
Personal question

## Things to note

- The teacher must not try and resolve issues. Students need to discuss then decide on course of action
- If a student does not want to answer a question they can say “later” and wait for others to contribute giving them time to think
- Sometimes a think/pair/share prior to answering enables students to think through responses
- Students designate next speaker unless the teacher wants a specific student to respond

## Questions

- Mutual vulnerability – Teacher is vulnerable and tells students something that is specific to them and then students do the same.
- Maintain question structure when responding. For example, "What do you like to do with your friends? Student responds 'With my friends I like to...'
- Always try and add the word “because” wherever possible so they have to justify their response.
- Never use the word favourite as you force kids to narrow their decision down to one thing. IE: what is your favourite toy and why? Should say “What toy do you like and why?”

## General Questions

- Something I like to do with my friends is....
- If you had an empty swimming pool what would you fill it with...
- I'd rather be able to swim underwater or Fly.....
- I would like to holiday on a cruise ship or an island...
- If I could have anything built in my backyard it would be.....
- I'd rather be a movie star or a singing star
- If I could live anywhere in the world other than WA I would choose...
- If you could have any animal for a pet what would you choose....
- If I could have been in a movie I would have chosen.....
- What makes the better pet dogs or cats.....
- I wish teachers would.....
- One thing I would change about this school is....
- I get angry when...
- When I get angry I...
- Something that makes me laugh is...
- If I could be an animal I would be...
- The worst thing about being a kid is...
- If I were the teacher I would....
- The cleverest person I know is..
- When it is my birthday I like to...
- When I grow up I want to be...
- I was most happy when..
- I wish that I could..
- The best thing about being a kid is..
- If I had special powers I would..

- At school I like to..
- If I could be a superhero I would be...
- Which is better TV or movies
- I prefer summer because or I prefer winter because

### **Personal questions**

- Something I like about my mum is...
- Something I like about my dad is...
- A good time I had with my family was...
- One thing that annoys me about my family is...
- When I'm on my own I prefer to....
- I wish my parents would...
- One thing that nobody knows about me is..
- I need my mum/dad/carer/grandparents because....
- My friends like me because...
- The thing I like most about my family is..
- The thing I don't like about my family is..
- Something my family does that makes me laugh is...
- I don't like it when my family..
- The best thing about where I live is...
- The worst thing about where I live is....
- I laugh with my friends about...
- I feel let down by my friends when..
- When I'm cross I...
- Something I am embarrassed about is..
- I remember feeling really sad when..
- The hardest thing I have ever had to do is...
- If I could have another brother or sister I would choose...
- If I won a lot of money the first thing I would do for my family would be...
- I love my dad because..
- I love my mum because...
- Something I can't do without is...
- My hidden talent is?

### **Cultural focus- History-8 WAYS**

- Originated in Western NSW specific to the Wiradjuri people. Developed through extensive research through the work of Professor Tyson Yunkaporta.
- Explores specifically what the general principles of learning were prior to colonisation, and what are still being used in Australia today.
- Sits alongside on Country learning and yarning.
- Many similarities with Western pedagogical approaches.
- Story sharing – Approaching learning through narrative – Narrative is hugely important, sharing your story (as a teacher), listening to the stories of the students. As a group you gain more from this process.
- Learning maps – This is a visual representation of a learning journey, it should be based on the local geography of the area and the shapes that are found there can correspond with the challenges, assessments and achievements of the students, maps were a very important part of learning for indigenous people.

- Nonverbal learning – This is the knowledge that is gained through nonverbal means. Includes gestures, inferences, expressions, eye movement, kinaesthetic learning. In the aboriginal classroom it was imperative to use physical learning and teaching methods.
- Symbols and images – Knowledge is not necessarily written but can be taught and learnt through images to express knowledge and share information.
- Land links – The land contains the deep knowledge that we want to access. This includes all the plants, animals and geographic forms. They provide metaphors for concepts and knowledge of local country. There is no story without place and no place without story.
- Nonlinear process – Students do not learn in one direction. They will stop and start, go off on tangents and use seemingly irrelevant information to build greater knowledge depth. This is often one of the most challenging aspects to build into a lesson, as the western education context always has a specific goal in mind. However, saying that I believe it also relates to the fact that children need a concept delivered to them in several different ways in order for them to attain true understanding at times.
- Deconstruct/reconstruct – This recognises that knowledge can be taught by back tracking and applying what is known in different alternative ways.
- Community links – Teaching and learning is a two-way street, both within the classroom between the teacher and student and externally between the school and the community.
- Making these 8 ways visible to your students – saying to the students, this is a First Nations way of learning. Beyond that where can we start including these more broadly in the work that we do?

### **Keep it formal/structured**

- The last thing any teacher wants is for a Yarning Circle to become unduly uncomfortable, chaotic, or emotionally damaging. The best safeguard against this happening is to build a structure around it that slows things down and helps students to resist the temptation to fall into casual, reflexive and ill-considered behaviour or remarks.
- Ritual implies importance and fosters controlled and reflective behaviour. Ritual requires thought and the safety of a set and recognisable stepping sequence that affords predictability and planning. In a ritual, participants not only know what's coming next, they also know how to respond and the minimum requirements of behaviour and participation required to attain a sense of belonging.
- In a nutshell Yarning Circles slow things down (necessary as participants should carefully consider their remarks before sharing them) while ensuring the emotional and physical safety of everyone (formalised structure).
- It can be anticipated that there will be times when a student is surprised that they are the focus of a Yarning circle. It will be at these times especially that the ritualised structure and formalised responses are of considerable benefit.

### **Avoid personal authority remarks**

- You are all working so hard and that makes me very happy.
- What a terrific suggestion. You have made my day.

- I think that is a brilliant idea.
- You have put a smile on my face.
- Your behaviour really upsets me.
- Can you see how disappointed I am in you?
- That has got me in a bad mood.