

What is Council?

Council is a non-hierarchical, confidential form for speaking and listening from the heart, created and evolved by indigenous cultures worldwide, and shared as a wisdom tradition for all people.

Council practice elicits the co-creation of community, recognizing that each voice needs to be heard, and that every person has a gift, a story to share, and a piece of the whole. Rather than having a discussion, Council Circles offer a place for offering and receiving; a container where each story is heard and held, allowing the deeper wisdom of the group to be revealed.

Council offers a way of communicating that encourages attentive listening, as well as honest and compassionate expression. It makes room for new insights and understandings, wisdom in decision making, and healing. It connects people, strengthens community, and is an effective tool for conflict exploration and co-visioning new possibilities.

What to expect:

First we have a brief grounding moment, followed by an informal, very brief check-in, to gather a sense of where we are all coming from at this present moment.

Dedication

Council begins with a personal dedication, which can be shared publicly or not; something like “I dedicate my time in this Council in support of”

The dedication serves both as a transition to a deeper space within ourselves, and as a recognition that we are all connected - that the work that we each do at an individual level contributes to the well-being of the whole.

Prompt

A theme or prompt is offered to the group, from which each person finds a story from their life. Story is the primary form through which deeper knowing is evoked from the group. There are also times when personal opinions about a particular decision becomes the focus, so that the group

can benefit from hearing from those who resonate with “A”, “B”, “A&B”, and “not A, not B”.

When the theme or prompt is offered to the group, it always ends with “and whatever else”. This is to open the window for something that needs to be shared that may not fit the prompt offered. The most important element is to share whatever story comes to mind. Consider inhibiting any filtering that may be coming up for you, (eg, you don’t think your story has relevance, or is insignificant) - you may not realize how your story may be exactly what someone in the group needed to hear at that moment.

The most common form of sharing is through *a story from your own lived experience*. Rather than the more common sharing of your opinion on a topic, Council often seeks to evoke stories from your life, (which are likely related to how you have formed your opinions!). The implicit belief is that we collectively hold the stories, and experience, which can offer us insight for growth, conflict resolution, and co-creation.

Simply put, share the story that comes to your mind - without filtering. It might jump into your mind immediately when the prompt has been offered - and if so, you are probably the one to share first! If nothing jumps in right away, simply wait until your turn to speak and then ask again inside yourself. The story you need to share may have been prompted by someone else’s story.

Sometimes, when it is your turn, there is nothing that you need to say in that moment, or you would like to be with your material in silence. It is always an option to sit in silence for your sharing. It is also fine to choose to pass your turn. This sometimes happens when time is short and the theme is not bringing out a strong story for you, as it may be for others. You may pass your time on to someone who is processing deeply at that moment.

Since Council is fundamentally a circle form, we accomplish this virtually by creating a random order of names and putting them in the chat. Anyone

can start the sharing, and then we go around the virtual circle by following the order of names in chat.

If the group is large for the time allotted, then we will choose an alternative circle form which holds space for fewer to people to share and others to witness and then share the information gathered from witnessing; or other alternative Council forms.

Guidelines

There are only 4 guidelines for Council sharing:

1. Speak from the heart
2. Listen from the heart
3. Be lean (get to the essence of your point)
4. Be spontaneous (see what pops in, rather than pre-planning)

The essence of these guidelines is to create the opportunity for you to simply listen, without getting sidetracked by your thoughts; eg, thinking of your response to what someone has said, or thinking about a time when that happened to you or someone you know, or pre-deciding what your story will be, (or thinking at all!). Simply let yourself receive another's story and be touched by it in whatever way it comes to you.

When you share, honor whatever story has surfaced truly and honestly. You need not defend yourself nor your actions in Council, it is intended to be a neutral safe space from which to voice your lived experience. It is not a discussion nor a debate.

Talking Piece and Your Sharing

A Talking Piece in our virtual Council is an object that has meaning for you, that you may hold when it is your turn to share. You can indicate that it is your turn by holding up your Talking Piece so that all can see that you 'have the floor'. As long as you hold your piece, you are the only one who will be talking or offering silence. (this is optional - you can just unmute yourself)

There is absolutely no commentary while another is holding a Talking Piece, nor after. You may only speak when *you* are holding *your* Talking Piece. This is essential, as it creates inhibition in our own reactivity to whatever is being shared, and thus, provides safety for us all.

Once you have finished sharing (which will be timed to accommodate everyone), then you say “I pass to (next on the chat list)” and put down your Talking Piece.

When everyone has had a turn, the Facilitator will ask the witnesses (if present) to share their observations, or time-allowing, craft another shorter round of some sort.

Witnesses

You may choose to be a witness in any Council rather than be in the sharing circle. When we gather live, the witnesses form a circle surrounding the sharing circle; when we are virtual, the witnesses turn off their videos.

Their task is to listen, watch, and feel for the underlying themes or energies that these stories have evoked. What words or ideas did they hear throughout? Was there a common emotional palette? What ‘knowing’ or insight that was revealed in Council? Witnesses are asked to share these perspectives after everyone in the Council Circle has shared.

In our Councils oriented towards the mission and vision content, the witnesses might reflect back which material was questioned or expanded, and whatever insights need to be included in ATDC’s Core Group’s next step.

Weaving

Following the witness round, there will be a brief *weaving* round. This is a literal verbal weaving of the stories heard. Anyone, in any order (“popcorn style”) offers a word or phrase or the essence of a moment from anyone’s story. You can offer as many words as you choose, one at a time. The

effect is hearing brief reminders of our collective time together through all of our voices. It is playful and somehow amazing in and of itself - like remembering the best and most poignant parts of a trip we've just taken together.

Then the Facilitator will close the Council.