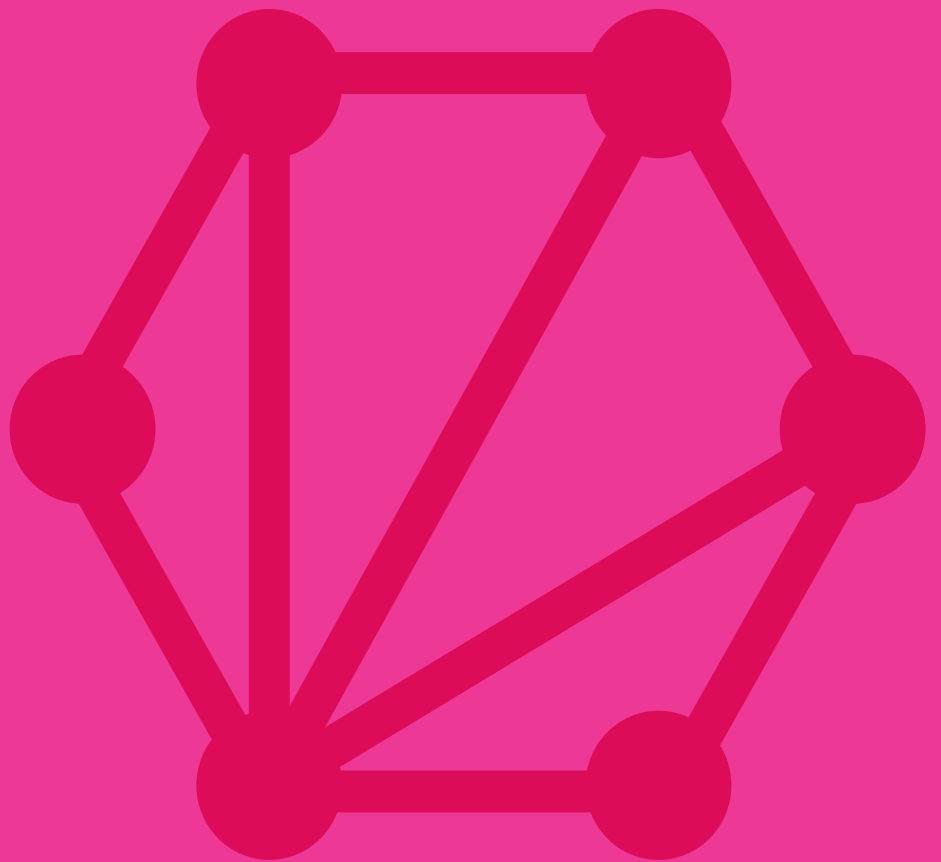# Building a strong Adolescent Circle

Building a strong Adolescent Circle

Getting Started

Any group of adolescents needs support in forming a Circle. This is true of adolescents who have newly arrived in a community or just joined a programme, and are meeting each other for the first time. It may also be true of a group of adolescents who have been participating in activities together for some time, but have not yet had a chance to get to know each other, build trust, or feel connected to each other as a team.

The **Planning Activity Phases** section of the Facilitators' Guidance outlines steps that you can take and activities that you can use to work with adolescents to forming a strong, supportive Circle according to a pace that works for them. One valuable step you should take is helping them to agree to and use **group rules**.

Setting group rules

In addition to setting goals for what they will do and achieve together, adolescents should form group agreements for how they will participate in their circles and work together. Adolescents coming together as a Circle should have a chance to discuss and agree to their rules during one of their first sessions together. The **Agreeing to group rules activity** can be a useful tool.

Giving adolescents the chance to set their own rules helps them to feel ownership of their Circle, and to feel secure as they start their work together. Group rules are also helpful when adolescents encounter challenges in their work. They provide a reference point for discussion. If possible, the group rules should be written down and posted somewhere visible during each session.

To decide their group rules, each Circle should answers to question such as:

▶ What will we do (or not do) to make sure that everyone feels equally included?

▶ Are there words, ways of talking to each other, or other actions that we agree never to use in our Circles?

▶ Are there things we will always do or never do in our Circles?

▶ Are there things we will always bring or never bring to our Circles?

▶ What will we say or not say, if someone says something that we disagree with?

▶ If someone arrives late, how will we make sure that he or she feels welcome? What should he or she do to keep from interrupting the activity that we are already doing?

▶ If someone shares ideas or something they have made (such as a drawing or collage), how will we make sure they feel encouraged and respected?

▶ How will we talk with others outside our Circle about what we do in our sessions? Are there things that we discuss in our Circle that we agree to keep private or confidential?

Give adolescents a chance to use their own ideas as they discuss and agree to their rules. However, make sure that the rules are consistent with human rights principles, especially inclusion and non-discrimination. The Group rules tool gives more examples of rules that could work well for Circles in different phases.

As Circles continue in any of the four phases, members should take time for the Reviewing group rules activity to discuss their progress in using their rules. Just as with setting and reviewing group goals, new Adolescent Circles (in the **Starting our Circle** or **Knowing Ourselves** phases) may find it helpful to include a brief review of rules as one step in a session. Circles that have been working together for some time (such as those in the **Connecting** or **Take Action** phases) may find it helpful to take an entire session to review and possibly revise their group rules.

Facilitators may also suggest that an Adolescent Circle review their group rules if they have faced difficulties or disagreements while participating in activities together, or if any member feels hurt or excluded. Adolescents in the Circle can to refer to their own agreements, to recognize when they have and have not successfully used the rules and to discuss possible changes. They can clarify, change, add or even remove rules from their agreement. This also provides adolescents with an opportunity to review what they have learned and accomplished.