

# Choosing an Activity Phase for your adolescent circle



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Facilitators, working with programme coordinators and adolescents, should use different strategies and processes to assess which phase is best for their Adolescent Circle. They can use the tools and activity guides offered in the Adolescent Kit to assess how ready adolescents in a circle are to work together and take the lead in carrying out their own initiatives. Facilitators choosing a phase for the first time, may want to review the Circle self-assessment tool, the overview of each Phase provided in the Understanding the Four Phases section above, or the summary guide in the box on this page.

Once facilitators have been working with adolescents in a phase for some time, they can also use the **Circle self-assessment tool** to guide adolescents in assessing their own development as a circle. They can also use the **Competency assessment questionnaire** tools to assess adolescents' individual development of knowledge, skills and attitudes in relation to the Ten Key competencies.

Facilitators can and should use their own impressions and judgment in choosing a phase for adolescents. They should consult directly with adolescents as they do so, and base their plans on adolescents' own suggestions and preferences (when working with adolescents who are ready to express opinions). Remember there is no one 'right' or 'wrong' way to choose a phase for your Adolescent Circle. Remember, too, that if a phase does not seem to be working well for adolescents, you can always adapt and move to a more or less advanced phase.

The most important purpose of the phases is to allow adolescents the flexibility they need to work at their own pace, so that they can take as long as they want and need to practice skills at a level that works for them, and move forward to new challenges as soon as they are ready. Facilitators should always keep this important concept in mind as they choose phases for adolescents, and determine whether adolescents should stay in their current phase or move to a new one.

## Starting Our Circle and Knowing Ourselves



Provide structure and support

- ▶ Adolescents of any age who are tired or distressed, and for younger adolescents (ages 10-14).
- ▶ Simpler activities
- ▶ Individual sessions that do not require a lot of planning or group interactions

## Connecting and Taking Action



Let adolescents lead

- ▶ More challenging activities
- ▶ Adolescents work together on activities and projects that involve complex thinking
- ▶ Take place over several days or longer
- ▶ May be rewarding for more confident adolescents of any age, who are calmer and more connected with each other
- ▶ May be good for older adolescents (ages 15-17) with better developed critical thinking and organizational skills

## Getting started

When facilitators first bring adolescents together as a circle, they should strongly consider beginning with the Starting Our Circle Phase. This phase gives adolescents a chance to introduce themselves and to develop some basic trust and comfort being with each other. Even for a circle in which adolescents already know each other but have never worked together as a group, the Starting Our Circle phase gives them a fresh start. It provides an opportunity to begin interacting and working together in a new way, creating a solid foundation for new activities that require trust, cooperation and collaboration.

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From Starting Our Circle, adolescents can follow their own path to the Knowing Ourselves phase, the Connecting phase, and the Taking Action phase. Each phase is designed to build on the one before it, supporting adolescents to recover, develop their skills and engage more actively as they progress from one cycle to the next. Depending on the maturity and interests of adolescents in a circle, and the extent to which they already know each other and have previous experiences working together, they may also 'skip' over some phases and move directly to the more advanced phases.

## Moving through the phases

After adolescents have been working together in one phase for some time, they may be ready for a change. They develop new competencies through their activities and in their lives beyond, and become more experienced in working together as a circle. In many cases an Adolescent Circle may become ready to take on greater challenges, advancing to phases that allow them to work together with more independence from the facilitator. Adolescents in the two more advanced phases (Connecting and Taking Action) may want to take a break and move to a phase that includes simpler, fun, easy activities – even if only for a few sessions.

Other circumstances may have a bearing on which phase is best for Adolescent Circles. If new adolescents are joining a circle, or if those who are part of a circle are leaving for any reason, it may be helpful to move back to the more basic phases to give the circle a fresh start. If adolescents in a circle have very different interests or are at different levels of developing competencies it may work well to divide them into different circles, then choose and plan different phases that are appropriate for each.

Adolescent Circles do not need to move from one phase to the next in any particular order or timeframe. Adolescents should decide when they are ready to move on, and, with support from the facilitator, which phase will work best for them. They may decide to repeat a phase that they have done in the past. This can be a good way to strengthen their skills, and to improve how they work together.

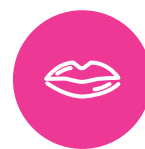
Alternatively, if adolescents find a phase helpful and fun, they can continue it for as long as they want. This may be a good way to feel safe doing things that are familiar and comfortable. If adolescents are ready for a new challenge, they can move on to a phase they haven't tried.

It is important to understand that each of the phases can be helpful and enjoyable. Each phase involves activities that can be fun for any age group, and each focuses on skills that adolescents can practice throughout their lives. Do not pressure the adolescents to move to a more 'advanced' phase, taking on more serious and/or complex topics before they are ready or interested in doing so. Remember that some adolescents have not developed the cognitive or social capacities to work together on complex tasks. Remember, too, that adolescents' activities should address their goals – and that having fun and taking a break from stress is a valid goal for adolescents, especially for those living in challenging circumstances.

To determine whether an Adolescent Circle should move to another phase or continue in the same one, facilitators should...

**Complete 5-10 sessions in a phase** before considering whether to move to a new phase. This gives the circle time to participate in a few activities so that they and the facilitator have a sense of whether they are in the best phase. Within a sequence of at least five sessions adolescents also have time to go through the process of setting their own goals, and deciding when they have achieved them.

**Observe the adolescents.** If many seem restless, bored or disengaged, they may be ready for something more challenging. If they seem overwhelmed or confused, a less advanced phase may help them to develop the competencies and strength as a circle at a more appropriate level. Disagreements and conflicts between adolescents may also be a sign that activities are too challenging for them, or are requiring them to work together in ways for which they are not yet ready.



Listen to adolescents

**Consult adolescents.** Ask adolescents if they would like to take on greater challenges, or if they just want to have more fun and relaxing time together.

The **Setting group goals activity** is one process for hearing more from adolescents about what they want from their time together.

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## Taking Action

- ▶ Practicing and using skills for teamwork.
- ▶ "Rehearsing" to work together.
- ▶ Critical thinking.
- ▶ Selecting choices for community action.

## Starting our Circle

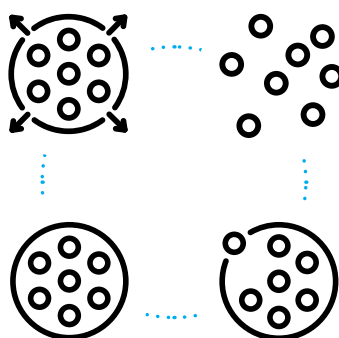
- ▶ Getting to know each other.
- ▶ Developing the circle.
- ▶ Developing ground rules.
- ▶ Developing a group ritual.
- ▶ Preparing for future learning.

### Entry point



### Move on when

adolescents understand and use skills for working together



### Move on when

adolescents know each other and you see most of the same adolescents at every session



## Connecting

- ▶ Developing a sense of value and self-respect.
- ▶ Becoming confident that we have something to contribute.
- ▶ Practicing skills for teamwork.

## Knowing Ourselves

- ▶ Learning more about who we are as people.
- ▶ Expressing what we feel.
- ▶ Sharing how we learn.

### Move on when

adolescents can describe their feelings and strengths

