



## Trauma-Informed Reflection Strategies

A trauma-informed lens is an essential tool when working with adolescents, especially adolescents who have experienced harm at the hands of supposed systems of care and rehabilitation like the foster care system and the juvenile legal system. Youth leaders in Juvenile Law Center's Youth Advocacy program sometimes strategically share portions of their personal and often traumatic experiences to support policy advocacy efforts and push for systemic changes. Deciding whether to share such a story is a deeply personal choice; youth leaders' participation in the program is never dependent on their willingness to share stories, and indeed youth are never required to share stories. When youth leaders do engage in this work, it is essential to support these advocacy efforts with reflection and wellness opportunities to promote healing from these experiences. It is the ethical obligation of trauma-informed social work to provide this wrap-around support for youth leaders.

**Restorative Circles, Skill-Building Workshops, and Group Meditation** led by clinical social workers or other trained staff can effectively support these goals. For staff at other organizations who are interested in integrating restorative circle practices, they can also reach out to a local organization to seek training opportunities.

### **Restorative Circles**

Circles are rooted in history and practice within Indigenous communities around the world. They can be used to invite conversation and reflection in community. They can create introductory spaces to explore group knowledge and lived experiences with sensitivity to what may arise.

**Community agreements** remain an integral part of circles to ensure that all participants' agency remains at the center.

**Topics can include** mental health, parenting/caregiving, grief, current events, interpersonal relationships, and conflict resolution.

**Key Practice:** Development and use of a circle participation order from the start of the meeting

### **Circle Participation:**

1. Everyone has a chance to be heard. Everyone can pass or share.
2. Everyone has the ability to listen to each other.
3. No one opinion is prioritized over another.
4. We learn about the diversity of opinions in the circle.
5. We move slowly.

### **Circle Expectations:**

1. You are welcome to arrive, participate, and leave as you wish.

2. You are responsible for the community agreements even if you join late.
3. You will be paid based on when you arrive and when you leave.
4. If you can't join on time or leave early, please communicate that.

### **Skill-Building Workshops**

Workshops can serve as a medium to deepen community education about topics that respond to the learning needs of the entire group. Workshops aim to provide all participants with access to the same knowledge.

**Community agreements** remain an integral part of workshops to ensure that all participants' agency remains at the center.

**Topics can include** practicing boundaries, emotional slowdown, navigating collaborations and conflict at work, self-advocacy and consent in relationships.

#### **Workshop guidelines:**

1. No one will be called on to share but everyone is welcome to.
2. No knowledge is more important than any other.
3. We all can ask questions to help us learn.
4. We don't have to have a good question or right answer.
5. We move slowly.

#### **Workshop participation expectations:**

1. You will be expected to actively listen for questions and reflection prompts and participate as much as you feel able.
2. You are responsible for the community agreements even if you join late.
4. If you can't join on time or must leave early, please communicate that.

### **Group Meditation**

Meditation can provide a space to practice slowing down and cultivating a practice of mental and somatic awareness. Using a trauma-informed approach to meditation can create an opportunity to gather in community and not be expected to participate or share. Meditation can be used to reflect, to prepare and respond to ongoing advocacy efforts or movement building efforts.

**Common prompts for meditation** can include: to reflect on mental and physical presence on an ongoing basis, to prepare for opportunities that may surface sensitive experiences, to debrief after an opportunity or event in the community that may have surfaced sensitive experiences, to honor a historical holiday or current event that impacts the community.

**Common practice scripts** can be accessed online. UCLA Health provides scripts to facilitate meditations: [Guided Meditations - UCLA Mindful | UCLA Health](#). Themes include processing trauma, grief, anxiety, and other emotions and lived experiences. Common guided meditations include practices of loving kindness, body and sound

awareness, nature visualizations, and more as relevant to the community. Facilitators can also integrate poetry, music, and other media as guides for the scripts.

**Meditation Values:**

Every trauma-informed practitioner may choose to center different values in their approach. These are the ones that have been most present in work with youth advocates in the Youth Advocacy Program.

**Agency/Autonomy:** Each individual can decide what they do and don't want to do. The facilitator offers the meditation in the spirit of invitation and suggestion, not direction or prescription.

**Access:** Each individual has different access needs based on their lived experiences and identities. They can be present as they need to be during the meditation.

**Boundaries:** Each individual understands what is within the scope of their body's need for safety and security. The facilitator can remind them of their ability to make their own assessments throughout the meditation to attend to their own boundaries and capacities.

**Intuition:** Each individual has their own awareness of their body and mind and the needs of each. The facilitator can continue to remind individuals to listen to what feels right for each of them.

**Sample Meditation Template:**

1. **Purpose:** Begin with a prompt or issue to center the mediation.
2. **Meditation Introduction:** Setting the intention for how participants can engage in the meditation.
3. **Topic/Prompt Introduction:** Share something for the group to reflect upon like a piece of art, topic, poem, or video.
4. **Meditation Script:** Select a meditation medium like a body scan, creative writing, drawing, etc.