

**I've been
invited to a
Healing
Circle, now
what?**

A guide to protecting your spirit.



meztli projects (operating out of Tongva land)

I've been invited to a Healing Circle, now what?

The phrase “healing circle” has become a catch-all term for many things that might visually appear as such but most likely aren't.

For example, a Men's Circle can act as a “healing circle” but it usually isn't and the same applies to other similar circles for specific groups such as Youth Circles, etc.

Being a Healing Circle facilitator requires a lot of experience (not something you can purchase training for) and there are a few organizations that offer training to become a circle facilitator but even those are limited in what you learn and what you actually need to know to conduct a Healing Circle. Other organizations out there that offer training in “Council” or other names they use, simply are appropriations of practices by Indigenous communities.



This is not to say that gathering with folks you are in affinity with can itself be good for you and begin a healing process, but it is not THE healing process itself.

Healing Circles are ceremonial circles, they are vulnerable spaces and so these gatherings should be cared for with the same regard as any ceremony. Would you attend a ceremony in a public space where anyone can interrupt or cause harm? Probably not.



Important Components (Basics).

Altar

At most gatherings that function as healing spaces there will always be some form of a center, be it an elder/s, a goal/intention, but mostly always an altar.

A responsible facilitator should be able to tell you where the objects that make up the altar come from. Where the items were gifted to them, where they were earned in a specific way such as through a ceremony.

The facilitator should also be able to share the purpose of each specific item.

It is an immediate red flag when certain ceremonial objects that carry specific instructions are placed next to other items that carry other instructions. In short, altars that appear like a mismatch of things should raise concerns. The same goes for instruments such as drums.



Facilitator

A facilitator should always be able to share their lineage as to who they learned from and other important connections such as:

- Elders
- What communities they're accountable too
- Who they learned specific songs from
- Who gave them permission to teach certain songs to you
- What their limitations are as a guide

Although an individual or group facilitating an actual “Healing Circle” can bring a pan-indigenous approach to a gathering, most facilitators that do this responsibly would use practices connected to a very specific Tribal Nation or tradition.



Smudging & Cleansing

Would you let anyone person prescribe you medicine? Nope. So why would you consider allowing anyone to “bless” you with smoke?

Your facilitator should be able to tell you where they harvested their medicines from and at this point in time because of cultural appropriation and the over-harvesting of medicines, they should be able to share with you the exact source of it, not necessarily the physical location. A responsible facilitator will have a personal connection to these medicines.

If they are using California White Sage, and they didn't harvest it from a private garden such as their own, and they harvested sage in off-seasons, that's a red flag.

The same applies to Palo Santo.



Healing

What exactly is being healed?

Many times healing circles when managed by inexperienced facilitators can cause more harm and result in you absorbing someone else's trauma (Trauma Transference), or suppressed memories and feelings resurface.

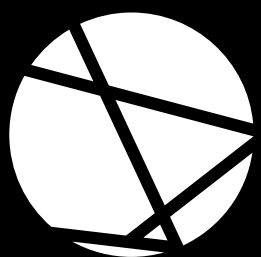
- How are you being protected from this?
- How is the facilitator closing the circle to ensure you don't leave carrying a pain?
- Do they know how to close a circle?

These are basic components that you should always be aware of. Healings Circles aren't this one monolithic thing but these are four components included in all Healing Circles and probably the most important ones aside from who else is in the circle with you.



Considerations

- Cultural Appropriation: Is the facilitator an Indigenous person? If not should this circle be taking place at all? Maybe not.
- Indigenous Facilitators: What is the relationship of the facilitator to the local Tribal Nations? If they have no concrete relationship should they be facilitating a healing circle? Maybe not.
- Harm Free Space/s: If the facilitator has no analysis regarding Patriarchy, Settler Colonialism and Classism maybe reconsider entering or remaining in the circle.
- Healing: Have a clear understanding of what the facilitator is committing to and capable of providing and what their definition of healing is. What is your definition of healing?
- Money: Nope!!!!!!!!!!!! No one should be charging you for this.



Confidentiality

Your privacy should be the highest priority.

Do you know the facilitator's views on alternative conflict resolution options? Do you know if they work with law enforcement or report to institutional entities? Some facilitators are funded by government entities whose values might not align with cultural practices putting you at risk.

Disclaimer

This is a guide that can be used to ensure that you walk into a circle with an informed understanding of a Healing Circle and these critical components. By no means is this THE guide.

There are many teachings and processes but nonetheless there's a level of authenticity or "cultural competency" that needs to be present.

