

Solution Circle: Getting Unstuck

A Creative Problem Solving Tool

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<http://www.inclusive-solutions.com/solution%20circles%20handout2.htm>

This is a short and powerful tool that takes no more than a half hour. Its effective in getting “unstuck” from a problem in life or work. Solution Circles are tools to build “community capacity”. It assumes and demonstrates that nearby people - in any community or work place have the capacity to help if asked. It requires a person to **ASK** - not an easy thing in our culture of privacy and ‘do it alone’. This tool puts all the values we espouse into practice and demonstrates that **TOGETHER WE'RE BETTER**.

Time required: No more than thirty minutes.

People per Solution circle: Best with 5-9.

Roles to be played:

- * **Problem Presenter** (focus person)
- * **Process Facilitator** (team manager, time keeper)
- * **Note Taker or Graphic Recorder**
- * amazingly creative **Brainstorm Team**

The greater the diversity in the team the better.

Explain the steps to the teams in detail:

Step One: (6 minutes)

The **problem presenter** will have **6 uninterrupted minutes to outline the problem**. The job of the **process facilitator** is to keep time and make sure no one interrupts. The **recorder takes** notes. Everyone else (the **brainstormers**) **listen**. If the problem presenter stops talking before the six minutes elapse, everyone else stays silent until the 6 minutes pass. This is key! The problem presenter gets **6 uninterrupted minutes**.

Step two: (6 minutes)

This is a **brainstorm**. Everyone chimes in with **ideas about creative solutions** to what they just heard. It is not a time to clarify the problem or to ask questions. It is **not** a time to give speeches, lectures or advice. The process facilitator must make sure this is a brainstorm/thought shower. Everyone gets a chance to give his or her brilliant ideas. No one must be allowed to dominate. The **problem presenter listens - without interrupting**. He/she must not talk or respond. We often give the person masking tape to facilitate their listening. It's hard to just listen!

Step 3. (6 minutes)

Now the group can have a **dialogue** led by the problem presenter. This is time to **explore and clarify** the problem. **Focus on the positive** points only and not what can't be done.

Step 4: (6 minutes)

The **First Step**. The **focus person** and the group decide on first steps that are doable within the next few days. A **coach** from the group volunteers to phone or see the person within 3 days and check if they took their first step.

Finally the group just does a **round of words** to describe the experience and the recorder gives the record to the focus person. If in a large group, the teams returns to the main group, debrief and continue. In our experiences people love this exercise and find that it generates action. It does not guarantee a solution, but it usually gets people "unstuck" and at least points to the next logical step.

