

# Solution Circle: Getting Unstuck

## A Creative Problem Solving Tool

*Designed by Jack Pearpoint, Marsha Forest & John O'Brien*

<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.

