

## Council Circle Practice

The process of Council comes from a number of Native American traditions and has been used by many non-native people for generations to facilitate meaningful interaction. The structure of a council can vary from place to place and has had a number of innovations and alterations over time, but the basic form remains constant. A group is gathered in a circle for a conversation about a specific topic. The opportunity to speak is given one at a time to all members of the council, often passing a “talking piece” clockwise around the circle to identify the speaker. Members only speak when it is their turn and are encouraged to listen intently, without comment, while others are speaking. All members have the right to keep silent or “pass” when their turn comes. A facilitator is charged with maintaining the boundaries of the circle to protect the process.

**Intentions.** The following excerpts from the [Ojai Foundation’s](#) Center for Council Training may be helpful in developing your understanding of how to engage in the council process:

Council uses four simple intentions that provide the basis for interaction in the council circle. An intention is a direction that we want to move in to the best of our ability, despite difficulties we might encounter.

The first intention is to “speak from the heart” when you have the talking piece.

This means to speak not only with your head and your ideas, but with your feelings as well. It means to tell your own story as honestly as you can trust in the moment. You have countless important and meaningful experiences.

When you speak about them truthfully, you are speaking from the heart.

The second intention is to “listen from the heart” when another person has the talking piece. This means to listen without judgment, to listen with an open mind, even if you disagree with what the person is saying. Listen not just with your mind, but with your heart as well.

The third intention is to “speak spontaneously.” This means that we try to wait

before the talking piece comes to us before we decide what we want to say. There are good reasons for this. First, if you are thinking about what you are going to say, then you are not listening completely to the person who is speaking. Second, when you don't preplan what you are going to say, you will often be surprised what comes to you when it is your turn.

The last intention is to "speak leanly." Something that is "lean" doesn't have anything extra on it. When you speak, keep in mind that many others would like a chance to speak, and that there is limited time. Use only those words necessary to get your point or story across. Please remember that no one is required to speak.

These four intentions provide the foundation for all council practice.