

M6-S3: Building, strengthening, and maintaining relationships through community-building circles

GK	<p>Hello, Christina and hello, listeners. Welcome to the third session in Module 6 of TALE Academy, Building, strengthening, and maintaining relationships through community-building circles.</p> <p>As you learned in the previous sessions in this module, New York State developed Social Emotional Learning Benchmarks to serve as a roadmap for schools to integrate SEL into their instructional programs and support students' college and career readiness.</p>
CLH	<p>The goals for New York State's SEL benchmarks are:</p> <p>First, young people develop a self-awareness that nurtures and affirms a strong sense of identity, informs decisions about their actions, and builds a sense of agency.</p> <p>Second, young people use social awareness and interpersonal skills to establish, navigate, and maintain mutually supportive relationships with individuals and groups that nurture a strong sense of belonging.</p> <p>Third, young people demonstrate intentional decision-making skills and behaviors that consider social, emotional, and physical safety and well-being in personal, school, and community contexts.</p>
GK	<p>Remember, there is a strong alignment between Goal 2 of the NYSED SEL Benchmarks and two of the CASEL 5 competencies – social awareness and relationship skills.</p> <p>Let's take a moment to refresh our understanding of the SEL competencies of social awareness and relationship skills.</p> <p>First, let's look at social awareness.</p> <p>The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, or CASEL, defines social awareness as "[t]he abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts. This includes the capacities to feel compassion for others, understand broader historical and social norms for behavior in different settings, and recognize family, school, and community resources and supports, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Taking others' perspectives● Recognizing strengths in others● Demonstrating empathy and compassion● Showing concern for the feelings of others

M6-S3: Building, strengthening, and maintaining relationships through community-building circles

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understanding and expressing gratitude ● Identifying diverse social norms, including unjust ones ● Recognizing situational demands and opportunities ● Understanding the influences of organizations/systems on behavior”
CLH	<p>Next, let’s look at relationship skills.</p> <p>CASEL defines relationship skills as “[t]he abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups. This includes the capacities to communicate clearly, listen actively, cooperate, work collaboratively to problem solve and negotiate conflict constructively, navigate settings with differing social and cultural demands and opportunities, provide leadership, and seek or offer help when needed, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Communicating effectively ● Developing positive relationships ● Demonstrating cultural competency ● Practicing teamwork and collaborative problem-solving ● Resolving conflicts constructively ● Resisting negative social pressure ● Showing leadership in groups ● Seeking or offering support and help when needed ● Standing up for the rights of others”
GK	<p>In this session, we will explore community-building circles as an effective and portable practice for building the bridge between Goal 2 of the NYSED SEL Benchmarks and the CASEL 5 competencies of social awareness and relationship skills. What we need is an example that shows us the journey from conflict...to cohesion!</p>
CLH	<p>I’ve got this. Second-year teacher Elizabeth was beginning to doubt she had what it takes to succeed as a middle school teacher. Her class after lunch fueled her self-doubt on a daily basis. The students were in constant conflict with each other; it was nearly impossible to teach, and no true learning seemed to be happening!</p> <p>After unsuccessfully trying several classroom management strategies, Elizabeth found the courage to express her challenges at a weekly grade-level team meeting in hopes that a more experienced teacher could offer suggestions. Tanya, a</p>

M6-S3: Building, strengthening, and maintaining relationships through community-building circles

	<p>paraprofessional, spoke up at the meeting: “What about daily community-building circles to create more positive relationships among the students?”</p> <p>Each day after lunch, Tanya and Elizabeth co-planned community-building circles that included mindfulness activities to ground the students, cooperative games to build cohesion, and “getting-to-know-you” activities that build self-awareness and awareness of others’ perspectives. After a couple of weeks, it felt like a miracle to Elizabeth. The students were noticeably more cooperative. They weren’t perfect, but they seemed to be more at peace with each other. This restored Elizabeth’s hope, and she asked to attend the next district training on community-building circles.</p>
GK	So, Christina, what exactly is a community-building circle?
CLH	You actually don’t know?
GK	I mean, it was more of a rhetorical question for the benefit of our listeners. But yeah, I’m interested in your take.
CLH	I would say that a community-building circle involves members of the classroom community forming a circle and passing a talking piece to take turns answering questions on a chosen theme. This practice is simple, yet the range of topics and social emotional skills that are enhanced are broad. Community-building circles can be particularly helpful when modifying or shifting across learning environments.
GK	<p>That’s great! And we can add these principles to distinguish classroom circles from a regular class meeting, or group therapy:</p> <p>These five principles provide a foundation for a community-building circle and ensure the creation of a safe space for sharing.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Respect. Too often, our societal communication habits have eroded the value placed on respectful listening and speaking. Community-building circles are a place to explicitly teach and practice respectful communication skills, both listening and speaking. 2. Relationships. The central purpose of community-building circles is to make authentic connections. Over time, as relationships grow between members, the level of trust increases, too. 3. Emotions. Throughout the community-building circle, opportunities are provided for identifying one’s emotions and expressing feelings. 4. Voice. A talking piece provides equitable opportunities for sharing, meaning that students share when holding this object. Community-building circles elevate the quieter voices and equalize the more confident voices, while also offering opportunities to “pass.” 5. Role of Facilitator/Circle Keeper. The facilitator/circle keeper role is to create a safe space for sharing by introducing prompts and serving as a guardian of

M6-S3: Building, strengthening, and maintaining relationships through community-building circles

	<p>the circle's norms. The circle keeper is a participant in sharing; the facilitator may speak first in a round to model a response, or they may speak last to avoid having too much influence. With experience, the circle keepers learn to “trust the circle,” allowing the group to respond and avoiding being too direct. Students may also be trained to facilitate circles.</p>
CLH	<p>Those are really important. It’s wise to refer back to these principles after each community-building circle to reflect: Was communication respectful? Are relationships growing? Was there an equal voice for all? Did the facilitator make sure the values and norms were honored? Were emotions identified and feelings expressed? This makes the purpose of the circle very transparent to the students.</p>
GK	<p>The thing about circle, too, is that it is not a random share-session. It’s designed, the way lessons are designed. But we don’t “teach” the circle; we facilitate it. Let’s go over some of the design elements that make community-building circle a safe space for sharing and building trust.</p> <p>First, form a circle. When in person, it is important to sit in a circle, preferably with no furniture between people. This arrangement provides equality and balance and allows everyone to see each other, enhancing openness. For virtual circles, the norm of having cameras on, if possible, should be openly discussed and agreed upon or not in the norm-setting process.</p>
CLH	<p>Second, use a talking piece. The talking piece is a distinguishing feature of community-building circles. The person who is holding the talking piece is the only person who speaks until they have finished what they wish to share and passes it to the next person. The pattern follows around the circle. The use of a talking piece slows dialogue and reinforces listening skills. The best talking piece is one that has personal meaning to the group.</p> <p>For example, one teacher used a small paperweight as a talking piece. When he introduced the talking piece, he shared that it was made by his daughter in kindergarten and that it is her handprint on the paperweight. He explained that when he sees it on his desk each day, it makes him think of her and how much he enjoys being a father. This type of personal sharing enhances the value of and respect for the talking piece.</p>
GK	<p>Third, use a script. The remote classroom provides us with an opportunity to visually share the script and prompts on-screen along with the circle graphic indicating the sharing order. Prompts can also be shared with students using platforms such as Voice Thread or Flip.</p>
CLH	<p>Finally, stick to the norms, or agreements, that the class develops in the earliest circle experiences.. During emergency remote teaching, or ERT, we witnessed just how critical the process of co-creating and regularly reviewing norms for remote engagement were. Just as we shared norms for engaging in remote instruction with students during ERT, norms for community-building circles can be shared via a small</p>

M6-S3: Building, strengthening, and maintaining relationships through community-building circles

	<p>poster displayed on the wall, a flipchart, placed on the floor in the center of the circle, displayed as a slide, or posted as text or video.</p>
GK	<p>In remote community-building circles, connections are made that translate into a new level of compassion, empathy, and patience among students and their peers, which is essential for a healthy and productive virtual classroom</p> <p>Have you tried community-building circles in your classroom? If so, what impact did it have on the climate of the classroom?</p>
CLH	<p>Now it's your turn. As you explore additional resources in this session, remember that we are wired to be in relationships with one another. Community-building circles meet this profound human need while developing the SEL competencies of social awareness and relationship building.</p> <p>The goal of the TALE Academy is to help teachers rethink education so that everyone—students, families, educators, school leaders, and communities—all have the opportunity to succeed. You've just added another tool to your toolbox when you use community-building circles to build, strengthen, and maintain relationships in your classroom.</p> <p>Thanks for watching. You can now return to Canvas to continue your learning!</p>