

# INITIAL RESTORATIVE SESSIONS

By **Lena H. McCain** with support from the MDD YRUU Community, CPS Office of Social and Emotional Learning, and Restorative Justice Colorado

**Initial Restorative Sessions** are used in response to a breach of a Big 4 Rule or other severe behavior incidents and operate as a conversation or discussion. Initial Restorative Sessions are meant to guide the Actor(s) through reflecting on and understanding their emotions, actions, and overall impact on the larger youth community.

**GOAL:** The goal of an Initial Restorative Session is to help the Actor(s) identify who was affected and how to repair harm.

**GUIDELINES:** Initial Restorative Sessions are to be held in a quiet and confidential space, with seating arranged in a circle, and generally take up to 45 minutes. However, Initial Restorative Sessions may only be used if and when the Actor(s) have accepted responsibility for their behavior and are ready to look at the impact of their actions.

For serious Big 4 Rule breaches, planned Initial Restorative Sessions occur after the Actor(s) have had an opportunity to identify if they are able to reflect on and process the incident that has occurred. *If the Initial Restorative Session would extend after lights out, the Initial Restorative Session will take place the following morning after*

*breakfast and morning worship.*

**IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS:** In addition to restorative justice mindset and language, all persons in a position of authority must take into consideration the impact of:

- Social identities (race, gender, class, family, age, ability, sexual identity, etc.)
- Roles within the youth community
- Existing relationships and past interactions between all participants
- Body language and facial expressions
- Mood and tone of voice

The steps on the next page are a general outline for having a one-on-one restorative conversation with an Actor. It is purposely left unscripted as a way to truly engage all participants in conversation without addressing blame.

# SEVEN STEPS OF INITIAL RESTORATIVE SESSIONS

## **STEP 1: Assemble Restorative Team**

- Event Adult Lead
- Adult Staff or Adult at Large
- One Youth Leader
- One Youth Advocate (Actor's Choice)
- Actor
- Adult Sponsor, Parent, or Adult Advocate (Actor's Choice)
- Other Pertinent Youth or Adult Participants

The Event Adult Lead, Adult Staff or Adult at Large, and One Youth Leader are to be identified before the event.

The event Chaplain or Minister is to be on call to support any and all participants of the Restorative Team. They are to be a supportive presence and do not enforce or enact in the Restorative Session.

## **STEP 2: Introduction & Opening Words**

Open the lines of communication by outlining this process to the group, reading the opening words and reviewing the IR Covenant, and completing a quick check-in.

- Name
- Pronouns
- How are you feeling?
- Do you know why we're all here?

## **STEP 3: Actor's Perspective & Explanation**

Allow the Actor to explain the incident from their perspective.

- What happened?
- Share with us more about \_\_\_\_\_.
- At the time, what were you thinking?
- What were you feeling?

## **STEP 4: Understand Root Causes**

Help the Actor identify what steps led to the incident.

- It sounds like you felt \_\_\_\_\_. What made you feel this way?
- What was happening around you that led up to this incident?

- Are there other factors that contributed to this situation?
- Has this happened before?

## **STEP 5: Identify Larger Community Impact**

Empower the Actor to understand the impact of their behavior on our community.

- How are you feeling about the incident now?
- What have you thought about since the incident occurred?
- What role did you play in this incident and how did this incident affect you?
- Who else do you think has been affected or harmed by this incident and in what ways?

## **STEP 6: Recognize Needs & Repair Harm**

Focus on healing, repairing trust, and repairing covenant.

- How could you have approached this situation differently?
- What end result would you like to see?
- What can you do to make things right and what do you need to help you do so?

## **STEP 7: Moving Forward & Closing Words**

Create an agreement that repairs harm for both the community and the Actor(s). When reached, read Closing Words.

- Based on our conversation, I heard that you will \_\_\_\_\_. We will also \_\_\_\_\_.
- How would you feel about \_\_\_\_\_ as a consequence?
- I appreciate your willingness to discuss this and work through it all with me.

\*\*\*Note that all questions or statements in this process are optional and are meant as a guide for facilitating the process. Any Actor(s) who refuse to engage in the repair process will be asked to leave as soon as transportation and logistical concerns allow.

# OPENING WORDS

*“In the spirit of beloved community, using our principles and values as Unitarian Universalists, we come together to find a restorative solution to a break in our Con Covenant and Rules. We aim to solve the problem with love and compassion, using an inclusive decision-making model. We are here to listen with our hearts and our heads, to speak the truth, and to trust that together, we can come to a fair and loving solution that heals our community.” - Cora Goss-Grubbs*

## RESTORATION SESSION COVENANT

### **1. USE “I” STATEMENTS**

*We acknowledge our ownership over our words and experiences without trying to place blame on one another or this experience.*

### **2. PRACTICE EMPATHETIC LISTENING**

*We approach this restorative session as a conversation, remembering to be present and listen from the frame of reference to all involved instead of our perspective.*

### **3. ENGAGE IN RESTORATIVE LANGUAGE & MINDSET**

*We are here as an opportunity to repair harm done to our YRUU community, choosing to understand how these harmful actions and behavior have impacted more than ourselves.*

### **4. LEAVE SPACE FOR SILENCE & PROCESSING**

*We recognize the vulnerability it takes to be honest and vulnerable, letting go of the need for urgency and offering space for reflection between speakers.*

### **5. UPLIFT LOVE, COMPASSION, ENGAGEMENT, & EQUITY**

*We are all members of the greater YRUU community, deserving of the right to make mistakes without shame and persecution.*

### **6. OWN YOUR IMPACT**

*We are first and foremost individuals who have chosen to be part of this beloved community, and by doing so, choose to take responsibility for how our individual actions and experiences impact our community as a whole.*

## CLOSING WORDS

*“May the lessons of the dark time of the year,  
deepen our roots,  
ground our spirits,  
and keep us true to our whole selves;  
May we find rest, know joy, and broaden  
our view.”*

*- Rev Jude Geiger*

# INITIAL RESTORATIVE SESSIONS CHECKLIST

## Before the IR Session, have you:

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- Considered the positions of power and the impact of social identities, roles within our YRUU youth community as well as existing relationships and past interactions between all participants involved?
- Checked participants' moods, body language, and personal needs?
- Reviewed the process and timing for this conversation, including the Community Restorative Justice Process Flowchart, the Seven Steps of Initial Restorative Sessions, and the Initial Restorative Session Covenant?
- Confirmed that all participants are ready to engage in this conversation and process?

## During the IR Session, are you:

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- Embracing a restorative justice mindset?
- Using and uplifting restorative language, including “I” statements, empathetic and active listening, and restorative questions (*as shown in steps 3-7 of The Seven Steps of Initial Restorative Sessions*)?
- Guiding the Actor(s) in reflecting on their impact on our YRUU youth community and what can be done to repair harm?
- Providing the opportunity for all voices to be heard?
- Ensuring adults are spending 80% of the time listening over talking?
- Creating an explicit agreement on how to repair harm, restore trust, and identify equitable consequences when necessary?
- Thanking all participants, especially the Actor(s), for their open-minds and willingness to come to a fair and loving solution that aims to heal our YRUU youth community?

## After the IR Session, have you:

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- Identified any other steps or support needed to be taken if covenant continues to be broken?
- Filled out and submitted an Incident Report for the Actor(s) to our Youth Specialist?
- Notified the youth, their family, their advocate(s), and their religious professional(s) of the Initial Restorative Session and agreement made?

# COMMUNITY IMPACT CIRCLES

**Community Impact Circles** are used to foster an awareness of actions and to repair harm within our community through facilitated dialogue. Community Impact Circles are meant to be an opportunity to explore the impacts of the Actor(s) actions on the larger youth community by thinking through the intentional and unintentional consequences in a brave, but safer space.

**GOAL:** The goal of a Community Impact Circle is to have a facilitated conversation between the Actor(s) and other Con participants so that the Actor(s) take ownership while being welcomed back into the larger YRUU community.

**GUIDELINES:** Community Impact Circles are to be a confidential space, free of judgment and aggression. Circles are to be facilitated by the Event Coordinator and Community PALS, and take no longer than 45 minutes (and can also be shorter).

It is important to have a Community Impact Circle regardless of whether the Actor(s) are present or not as they provide a space for the larger youth community to have a space to talk, gain accurate information, heal, and prevent future breaches.

**IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS:** The timing of Community Impact Circles is everything - they can be used to proactively offer a chance to

share youth thoughts and experiences while also uplifting our sense of trust as both a youth and Unitarian Universalist community. Without Community Impact Circles, we run the risk of irreversible harm upon the Actor(s) and our community as well as jumpstarting a gossip train.

It is important to continue keeping a restorative justice mindset and using restorative justice language, while also upholding that all participants of the Restorative Team must function as advocates for the Actor(s) as a way to model and support the Actor(s) willingness to repair harm.

The structure on the next page is a general guideline for how to facilitate the process of a Community Impact Circle. It is purposely more scripted than our Restorative Sessions as it serves to bring healing to our YRUU community instead of trying to place blame on the Actor(s) or convince the community of a particular point of view.

# THE STRUCTURE OF A COMMUNITY IMPACT CIRCLE

## **CIRCLE FACILITATORS:**

Circles are facilitated by the Event Coordinator and Community PALS, taking on the role as Circle Facilitators. Circle Facilitators guide participants in discussion, maintain the covenant, and support the flow as well as timing of the circle. Circle Facilitators also engage in the circle itself, modeling how to share in the experience and call the Actor(s) back into covenant.

## **SEATING ARRANGEMENT:**

Seating for circles is to be arranged in a literal circle as a way to uplift equality and inclusion. All participants, including the Event Coordinator, Community PALS, and Actor(s) are to be included in the circle.

In the event that there is not enough space to include everyone in a large circle, have the group split into an outer circle and an inner circle:

## **MEETING SPACE:**

It is important that the meeting space is in a private area with enough room for all participants. Circles can be a vulnerable space for all involved, of which we want to uphold and honor.

## **TALKING OBJECT:**

An object to be passed around the circle so that participants have the opportunity to share equally. It can be helpful to have the Community PALS and/or Actor(s) choose the talking object to use so that it has significance while being used.

## **CHALICE & COVENANT:**

As a Unitarian Universalist community, it is paramount to have a chalice and the event covenant in the center of the circle. These pieces represent our core values as a group

focused on engagement, trust, and healing as a whole.

## **CHECK-IN & CHALICE LIGHTING:**

Check-ins allow the Circle Facilitators to assess the overall impact of the Actor(s) actions. Check-ins are a quick question that each participant can give a one or two word answer to OR a thumbs up, thumbs down, thumb in the middle type of response.

After the check-in question, light the chalice.

## **TRUST BUILDING ACTIVITY:**

Using a quick, trust-building activity ensures that all participants are reminded that we are here as a loving, supportive community for one another, above all else. The amount of time allotted for the activity is based on the overall time you have for your circle and the severity of the breach that is to be shared and discussed.

## **DISCUSSION:**

Discussions center circles around the needs of our youth community and the Actor(s), providing a straight-forward, constructive forum for participants to share their experience and overall impacts.

Not everyone has to or will verbally participate during the discussion, but by being part of our community, they are choosing to actively engage by listening and being present.

## **CLOSING:**

Before parting as a group, it is helpful to close the circle so that the Actor(s) and the community can move forward with their youth event. Closings can be a song, poem, quote, video, light-hearted joke, and/or a spiritual practice, and often include the extinguishing of the center chalice.

*\*\*\*Note that not all Community Impact Circles have to be long and/or serious. Circles can be brief and light-hearted, but serve as a foundation for honest, transparent, and respectful communication throughout our YRUU youth community.*

# COMMUNITY IMPACT CIRCLE PROCESS & CHECKLIST

<p><b>Circle Preparation</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identify the Circle Facilitators</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Determine the point of having the circle &amp; if the Actor(s) are to be identified &amp;/or present</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Complete the Community Impact Circle Template for guidance</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Create the seating arrangement (no extra or open seats)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Place the chalice &amp; event covenant in the center of the circle</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Identify a talking object</li> </ul>
<p><b>Circle Opening &amp; Check-In</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Welcome everyone to the circle, introducing the Circle Facilitators &amp; the reason why we are meeting</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Briefly summarize the circle process &amp; your roles as a the Circle Facilitators</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ask a quick check-in question, such as:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- On a scale of 1-10, how are you feeling right now?</li> <li>- What is a word or phrase that you would use to describe our community?</li> <li>- Share one good thing that has happened this weekend.</li> </ul> </li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Light the chalice</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Review the covenant &amp; explain the chosen talking object</li> </ul>
<p><b>Trust-Building Activity</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Engage in a quick trust-building activity that allows participants to learn more about one Another (Activity ideas can be found in the FAQs)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Discussion</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Start with a reflective question, such as:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- From your perspective, what has happened?</li> </ul> </li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Pass the talking object to those who are answering the question (it may be helpful to have a Circle Facilitator answer the question first OR wait until the end to answer)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ask additional questions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Participants actively listening when they are not answering</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The Restoration Team and/or Circle Facilitators model support and advocacy for the Actor(s)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> End with a positive and forward looking question to transition the group, such as:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What have you learned?</li> <li>- What can you take away from this circle?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Closing the Circle</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Name relevant connections between what was shared</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Thank everyone for sharing and participating</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> End with a quote, poem, joke, or spiritual practice &amp; extinguish the chalice</li> </ul>

\*\*\*Community Impact Circles are to be used for a Big 4 breach and do not always have to be long or intense. Circles can last up to 45 minutes, but can also be much shorter.

# COMMUNITY IMPACT CIRCLE | 20 MIN EXAMPLE

## STEP 1: Circle Opening, Check-In, & Chalice Lighting

*How are you going to welcome everyone to this space? What is the reason for this meeting? What check-in question will you ask?*

Welcome: Hey everyone, circle up! It seems that we've have a Big 4 Breach, which shows to us that we need to spend some time connecting as a beloved community right now.

Chalice Lighting: Let's do what we do best in moments like this - light out chalice. Our words for lighting this chalice are "I only do this because I'm having fun. The day I stop having fun, I'll just walk away." Heath Ledger

Check-In: With a thumbs up, thumbs down, or thumbs in the middle...how is everyone feeling right now?

## STEP 2: Introduce Talking Object & Review Event Covenant

*What object are you using & why? Is everyone in agreement with what our covenant says? Has everyone signed the covenant?*

No talking object needed for today's community impact circle

Review Covenant: As a reminder, we've all chosen to be here as a beloved community who agree to be in covenant with one another. When we break any part of this covenant, we must take a moment to recognize the impact, give space for repair and laughter, and move onward. Yeah?

## STEP 3: Trust-Building Activity

*What game or activity will you play? How long do you have to complete the game/activity?*

Trust Building Activity (15 Mins): Alright, let's repair by having some fun together! Let's play Big Wind Blows...I'll go in the middle first!

## STEP 4: Discussion

*What needs to be addressed in this circle? What questions will you ask? How many rounds of discussion questions are needed?*

Discussion: Wow, thanks for playing everyone! I know I feel better - and I hope you do too. Before we go back to our regular programming, can I get one or two reflections about this last 20 minutes together?

After reflections have been shared: If you notice you need extra support, please remember that our PALS and Chaplain are here to support you. PALS and Chaplain, please wave to remind everyone who you are.

## STEP 5: Closing & Extinguishing the Chalice

*What connections do you hope the group makes from this circle? How will you close this circle (poem, song, video, joke, spiritual practice, etc.)?*

Closing: And with that, let's take a deep breath together. Inhale...2....3....Exhale....2...3....remember to laugh and join with one another!

Deans...what's next?



# COMMUNITY IMPACT CIRCLE | 45 MIN EXAMPLE

## STEP 1: Circle Opening, Check-In, & Chalice Lighting

*How are you going to welcome everyone to this space? What is the reason for this meeting? What check-in question will you ask?*

Welcome: Alright everyone, circle up! By now, you've probably already heard - we've had a Big 4 Breach with illegal substances being brought into our event. As a community, let's take some time to recognize the impact this has on us and process together.  
Chalice Lighting: "You can have an impact anywhere you are." - Tony Dungy  
Check-In: Let's go around the circle. Using ONE word, how are you feeling right now?

## STEP 2: Introduce Talking Object & Review Event Covenant

*What object are you using & why? Is everyone in agreement with what our covenant says? Has everyone signed the covenant?*

Talking Object: We'll be using this bandanna as our talking object today. We chose it because Mary has worn it to event YRUU event so it represents the importance of this community. We'll pass the talking object when people have something to share or a questions has been asked and you're ready to answer.  
Covenant: Before we jump into processing and building trust with one another, let's be mindful of our covenant. As we share together, remember to keep our covenant as the forefront of our words, such as using I statements and active listening.

## STEP 3: Trust-Building Activity

*What game or activity will you play? How long do you have to complete the game/activity?*

Trust-Building Activity (15 Mins): We've set out a giant piece of paper. For the next 10 minutes or so, grab some art supplies and draw or write on this giant paper what being part of YRUU community means to you. No need to worry about whether it makes sense or is obvious.  
After Activity Reflections: Wow! Now I want everyone to take a look at what we just created - this is our community, right here. Right now. To me, it's obvious how important we are to one another.

## STEP 4: Discussion

*What needs to be addressed in this circle? What questions will you ask? How many rounds of discussion questions are needed?*

Discussion: As I look at the art we just created as a community, what comes up for me is how such a violation of the Big 4 can really jeopardize our ability to come together as a community. I wonder...

- What do you think about when a Big 4 breach happens here at Con?
- Why do you think these type of breaches happen?
- How could this situation played out differently?
- What can we as a community do to help move forward from this?

## STEP 5: Closing & Extinguishing the Chalice

*What connections do you hope the group makes from this circle? How will you close this circle (poem, song, video, joke, spiritual practice, etc.)?*

Closing: What I'm hearing is that when people choose to break a Big 4, it makes the community feel worried, scare, and uncertain. I think that's the biggest thing to take away from this today, remembering that this community means so much to so many of us. With that, we're going to close out this time together, internalizing the impact of this and move forward as a community. If you need to process more, your PALS and Chaplain are here for you.  
Deans...what's next? Play upbeat music while transitioning to the next activity.

# COMMUNITY IMPACT CIRCLE PLANNING TEMPLATE

## **STEP 1: Circle Opening, Check-In, & Chalice Lighting**

*How are you going to welcome everyone to this space? What is the reason for this meeting? What check-in question will you ask?*

## **STEP 2: Introduce Talking Object & Review Event Covenant**

*What object are you using & why? Is everyone in agreement with what our covenant says? Has everyone signed the covenant?*

## **STEP 3: Trust-Building Activity**

*What game or activity will you play? How long do you have to complete the game/activity?*

## **STEP 4: Discussion**

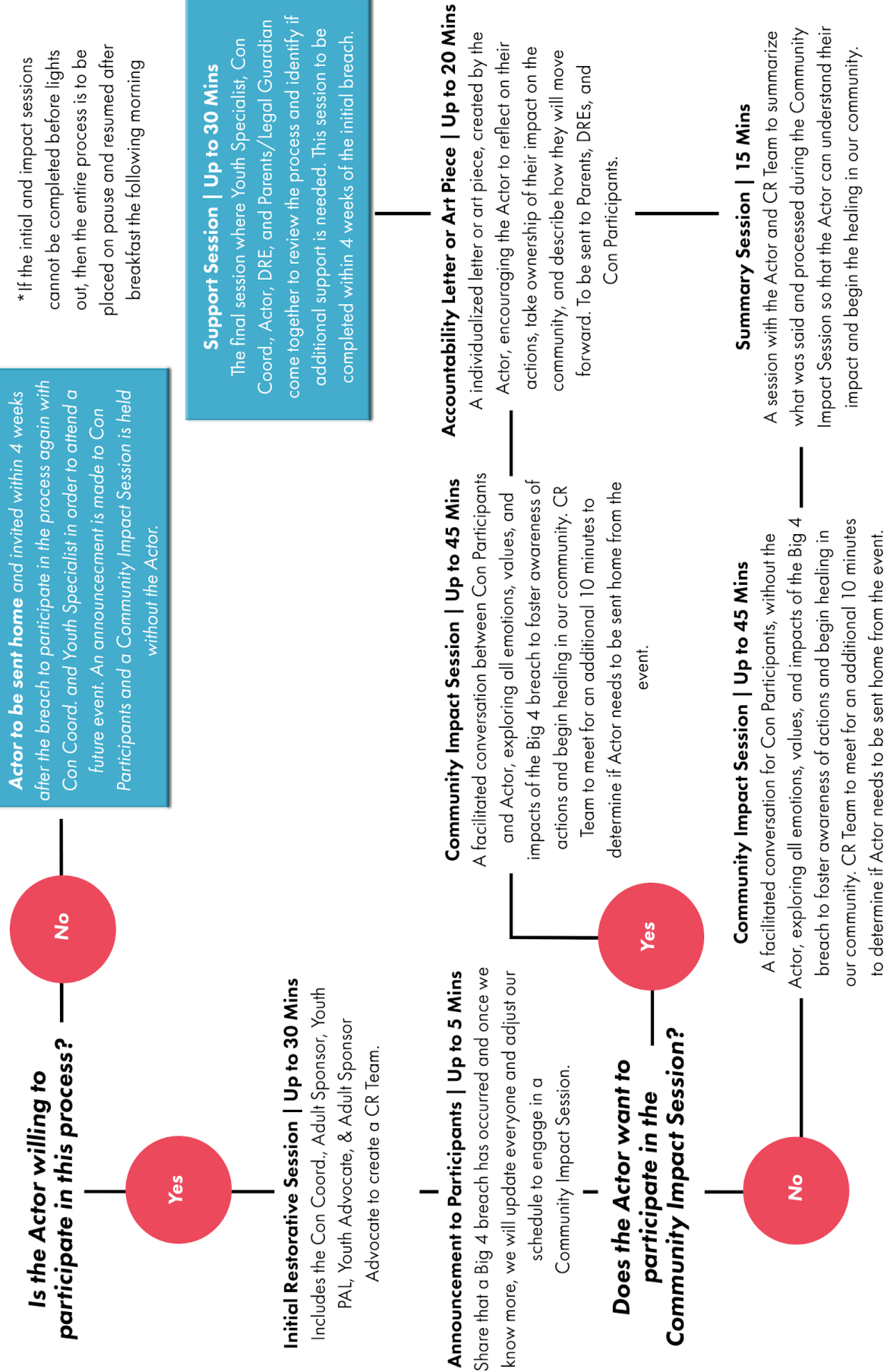
*What needs to be addressed in this circle? What questions will you ask? How many rounds of discussion questions are needed?*

## **STEP 5: Closing & Extinguishing the Chalice**

*What connections do you hope the group makes from this circle? How will you close this circle (poem, song, video, joke, spiritual practice, etc.)?*

# Flow Chart

PWR MDD Youth Cons



**Actor to be sent home and invited within 4 weeks after the breach to participate in the process again with Con Coord. and Youth Specialist in order to attend a future event. An announcement is made to Con Participants and a Community Impact Session is held without the Actor.**

**Support Session | Up to 30 Mins**  
The final session where Youth Specialist, Con Coord., Actor, DRE, and Parents/Legal Guardian come together to review the process and identify if additional support is needed. This session to be completed within 4 weeks of the initial breach.

**Announcement to Participants | Up to 5 Mins**  
Share that a Big 4 breach has occurred and once we know more, we will update everyone and adjust our schedule to engage in a Community Impact Session.

**Does the Actor want to participate in the Community Impact Session?**

**No**

**Community Impact Session | Up to 45 Mins**  
A facilitated conversation for Con Participants, without the Actor, exploring all emotions, values, and impacts of the Big 4 breach to foster awareness of actions and begin healing in our community. CR Team to meet for an additional 10 minutes to determine if Actor needs to be sent home from the event.

**Community Impact Session | Up to 45 Mins**  
A facilitated conversation between Con Participants and Actor, exploring all emotions, values, and impacts of the Big 4 breach to foster awareness of actions and begin healing in our community. CR Team to meet for an additional 10 minutes to determine if Actor needs to be sent home from the event.

**Accountability Letter or Art Piece | Up to 20 Mins**  
A individualized letter or art piece, created by the Actor, encouraging the Actor to reflect on their actions, take ownership of their impact on the community, and describe how they will move forward. To be sent to Parents, DREs, and Con Participants.

**Summary Session | 15 Mins**

A session with the Actor and CR Team to summarize what was said and processed during the Community Impact Session so that the Actor can understand their impact and begin the healing in our community.

\*If the initial and impact sessions cannot be completed before lights out, then the entire process is to be placed on pause and resumed after breakfast the following morning

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## Why restorative vs punitive actions?

When we choose to use punitive action over restorative action, we end up shaming and stigmatizing all of those involved. Moreover, we end up damaging our YRUU community. Using a restorative process and mindset engages our seven principles of Unitarian Universalism, offering our beloved YRUU community the opportunity to understand the source of their behavior and its impact on others, while also offering room to learn and grow.

## In the Community Impact Circles, there are opportunities for games and jokes...doesn't that conflict with the seriousness of a Big 4 Breach?

### How long is a Community Impact Circle supposed to take?

Community Impact Circles are to take no longer than 45 minutes and are able to be much shorter, depending on the needs of our YRUU Community. See pages 8-9 for examples of a shorter versus longer Community Impact Circle.

If additional support is needed for certain community participants, please engage your PALs, Chaplain, and Adult Sponsors.

### What if a breach happens after worship or during lights out?

If and when a breach happens after worship or during lights out, it is important to inform the Event Coordinator and Adult Sponsors of the youth involved as soon as possible. Once informed, the Event Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that all physical safety needs are met and then reminding all involved of the opportunity for an Initial Restorative Session, which would take place the following morning after a night of sleep, breakfast, and morning worship.

We allow for space to sleep, eat, and reconnect because planned Initial Restorative Sessions **must only** occur after the Actor(s) have had an opportunity to identify if they are able to reflect on and process the incident that has occurred. No person can reasonably reflect on or process an incident without having their basic needs met, such as food and rest.

### If a youth doesn't want to participate, what do you do?

If a youth refuses to engage in our Restorative Justice Process, they will be asked to leave as soon as transportation and logistical concerns allow. This excludes their participation in a Community Impact Circle as Actor(s) are allowed to opt out of physically being present or named in this part of the process, especially if participating in a Community Impact Circle would do more harm than good to our Actor(s).

The goal of our Restorative Justice Process is to help Actor(s) identify who was affected and how to repair harm so that we can continue as a beloved community.

**Where can I find trust-building activities?**

**Where can I find more restorative question ideas?**

**Where can I find more information about restorative justice processes?**

**To what extent and when can the anonymity of the actor be protected through these protocols?**