

Self-Disclosure Circles LE 25

([Self-Awareness Module](#))

Grade Level Range: Middle School - Adult

To Teachers

If you have not already done so, please review the [Introduction to Teaching Relationship Skills and Healthy Relationships](#) ([Relationship Skills & Healthy Relationships](#)) for suggestions on teaching SES Skills, processing learning experiences, applying skills in real-life situations, and assessing, evaluating, and grading SES Skills. In addition, please see the [Self-Disclosure Reading](#) ([Self-Awareness Module](#)).

[Self-Disclosure Circles](#) is a very powerful learning experience because it develops the essential skills of self-awareness and self-disclosure. The ability and willingness to self-disclose is essential in developing and maintaining healthy relationships, working through misunderstandings and conflicts in relationships, and building trust and cohesion within a class. In addition, when students self-disclose within a group of their peers, it also helps them become aware of how they have similar feelings and experiences around the same or similar issues as their peers and that they may express and manage their emotions in similar ways. Depending on the class and how willing they are to self-disclose with people in class, this learning experience can take several days and is well worth the time. It is best to use this learning experience after a class has been together a while so they have had time to get to know one another and when they are somewhat comfortable sharing their feelings. The [Self-Disclosure Reading](#) provides the theoretical background information on the importance of self-awareness and self-disclosure.

Procedure/Directions:

1. Create a paper (turned horizontally) with five large concentric circles on the page and label it [Self-Disclosure Circles](#).
2. Label the center circle *Me*, the next circle *Best Friends*, followed by *Friends*, then *People in this Class*, and finally, *Someone I Just Met* (but have a good chance of meeting again).
3. You will read a list of questions (see below) and ask students to whom they would disclose certain things about themselves. We would keep some information about ourselves private, while other information we would share with best friends but no one else. Some information we would share with our best friends and friends but no one else. Other information we would share with our best friends, friends, and people in this class. And some information we would even share with people we just met but have a good chance of meeting again.
4. Distribute the [Self-Disclosure Circles](#) paper below with the concentric circles to students.
5. Outside of the *Someone I Just Met* circle, have students label it *Family*. Regarding family, students need to determine where a “circle” for *Family* or individual family members would be located. Depending on a person’s relationships with their family, some people might self-disclose to family members before best friends. In contrast, others may self-disclose to someone they just met before they would self-disclose to family members.

6. Ask students to think about where a circle for *Family* would go and have them draw an arrow to where it would go (e.g., between *Friends* and *People in this Class*).
7. Next, read the questions below one at a time, asking students to whom they would self-disclose the following information. Tell them to place the keyword in the appropriate circle.
8. If a question doesn't pertain to them, they can skip it or determine to whom they would tell if it did pertain to them.
9. After doing approximately 6, ask for volunteers to share their responses if they said they would share it with someone in this class or people outside the *Someone in This Class* circle. See the Processing Questions below.
10. After completing a discussion of the first 6, read another six questions ("To whom would you disclose the following information?") and then continue with a discussion of those 6.
11. When you have finished discussing all of the questions, review (and distribute them depending on the age of your students) the Self-Disclosure Talking Points below.
12. Next, have students complete the attached Self-Disclosure Summary and process their responses.

Processing the Learning Experience:

Processing questions for pleasant feelings include:

1. Why did you feel this way? What lead to this feeling? What activity, relationship, environment, or other situation caused you to feel this way?
2. How did you express this feeling?

If appropriate, point out the number of students who have felt the same way recently and the similarities and differences in why they felt this way.

Processing questions for unpleasant feelings include:

1. Why did you feel this way? What lead to those feelings? What activity, relationship, environment, or other situation caused you to feel this way?
2. How did you manage this feeling?
3. Did how you manage this feeling make the situation better, worse, or have no impact?
4. If you had it to do over again, what, if anything, could you have done to improve the situation?

If appropriate, point out the number of students who have felt the same way recently, the similarities and differences in why they felt this way, and the similarities and differences in how they managed their feelings and the consequences of their behavior. Summarize, or have them summarize, all the actions that made situations better and the actions that made situations worse.

Follow-Up Learning Experiences: Applying Relationship Skills In Real Life Situations

It is not enough to have students only use skills in class. They must be given opportunities to apply skills in real life outside of class. The process of using skills in real-life situations, processing the results, and modifying their response is necessary and must be continuous and ongoing.

Follow-Up Learning Experiences: Self-Disclosing In Real Life Situations

1. **My Goals Learning Experience** ([SES Projects Module](#)). Students can keep a My Goals Log to develop and track a goal to change the way they self-disclose. It requires less time and fewer assessments than the Self-Disclosure Project. ([SES Projects Module](#)).
 - **My Goals Log** ([SES Projects Module](#)). Students use this log to write their goals, to assess how they are doing at a midpoint and what, if anything, they need to do to be more successful, and then to evaluate their success at the end of the project. The log keeps track of all goals they develop throughout the year.
2. Based on their answers to the questions in the *Self-Disclosure Summary*, have students develop and implement the Self-Disclosure Project in the **SES Project** module ([SES Projects Module](#)). The purpose of this project is to help students feel more comfortable and proficient in self-disclosing in real-life situations. It is a more extensive project than the My Goals LE. It requires students to monitor their progress over time using self-monitoring charts and self-assess their effort, progress, and the extent to which they completed the project.

Self-Disclosure Circles Questions

To whom would you disclose the following information?

1. Your grade in your best course (keyword best course)
2. Your grade in your worst course (keyword worst course)
3. A time when you felt sad (keyword sad)
4. Your dreams for the future (keyword dreams)
5. A recent embarrassing experience (keyword embarrassed)
6. Your innermost desires (keyword desires)
7. A trait or characteristic about yourself you do not like (keyword trait)
8. Your religious views (keyword religious views)
9. If you had doubts about your religion (keyword religious doubts)
10. A personal problem (keyword problem)
11. What makes you happiest (keyword happiest)
12. What makes you most frustrated (keyword frustrated)
13. Your feelings in general (keyword feelings)
14. A doubt about yourself (keyword self-doubt)
15. A health problem (keyword health problem)
16. About your first boy/girlfriend (keyword boy/girlfriend)
17. Something you dislike about your best friend (keyword best friend)
18. When recently when you were jealous (keyword jealousy)
19. What you cried about the last time you cried (keyword cried)
20. Something you did that your parents would disapprove of (keyword parental disapproval)
21. If you ever contemplated suicide (keyword suicide)
22. Something you dislike about your parents (keyword parents)
23. A pet peeve (keyword pet peeve)
24. A time recently when you felt disappointed (keyword disappointed)
25. A time recently when you were very angry (keyword anger)
26. A fantasy you had (keyword fantasy)
27. A time recently when you felt hurt (keyword hurt)

You can develop additional questions for your students and/or ask them to develop questions.

Self-Disclosure Circles Summary

1. On a scale of 1-5, how willing are you to self-disclose generally? Place an X in the appropriate space.

Very Closed 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 Very Open

2. Answer the following questions in complete sentences.

2. In general, when you self-disclose (or think about self-disclosing), how do you feel, and why do you feel that way? Does self-disclosing or the thought of self-disclosing put you in your comfort, stretch, or panic zone? Explain why.

3. Why are you willing to disclose some information about yourself but not other information? Be specific. Don't just say: "because it is personal."

3. Why are you unwilling to disclose to some people? Be specific. What about these people makes you reluctant to disclose to them?

4. What do the people you feel comfortable disclosing to have in common? Be specific. Don't just say: "because they are friends". What are the qualities and characteristics of people to whom you are comfortable disclosing?

5. On a scale of 1-5, how willing are you to self-disclose in this class? Place an X in the appropriate space.

Not Willing 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 Very Willing

Why did you answer this way regarding your willingness to self-disclose or not self-disclose in this class?

6. Write a minimum of one I learned, I relearned, I was surprised at, I was pleased about, or I was disappointed statements regarding your willingness to self-disclose or not self-disclose.

7. Write an “I plan to change,” “I plan to be more consistent in,” or an “I plan to continue to be consistent in...” statement regarding your willingness or unwillingness to self-disclosure. Include the names of the people involved and why you plan to change or continue to be consistent.

Self-Disclosure Talking Points

How well do you know yourself? How well do other people know you? To know yourself and for others to know you, you must be willing to self-disclose. Self-disclosure is the willingness and ability to let yourself be known to others. This means sharing what you think and especially what you feel. It means sharing the real you.

Benefits of Self-Disclosure

Self-knowledge.

It is a psychological truth that you cannot fully know yourself until you self-disclose yourself to others. There is something about sharing that makes you understand yourself better.

The Development and Maintenance of Meaningful Relationships.

A relationship between two individuals develops as they become more open about themselves—more self-disclosing. Relationships are based on knowledge of the other person. How can someone like, accept, respect, and love you if they don't know you? Healthy relationships are built on knowledge, self-disclosure, and the willingness to trust and be trustworthy. We must trust others before we are willing to reveal our true selves, and we must act in trustworthy ways before others reveal themselves to us. Thus, the willingness to self-disclose is essential in developing and maintaining trust, and not reciprocating another's self-disclosure hinders the development of trust.

People involved in close relationships will have misunderstandings, problems, and reach impasses, all of which are normal. Self-disclosure of feelings and needs is essential to work through misunderstandings, problems, and impasses. If you hide how you feel or react to the other person, your concealment can sicken the relationship. The energy you pour into hiding adds to the stress of the relationship and dulls your awareness of how you feel.

*I am afraid to tell you who I am,
because, if I tell you who I am,
you may not like who I am,
And it's all that I have*
John Powell

Risks in Self-Disclosing

Fear of Rejection.

Many people are afraid to let themselves be known for fear of being rejected—they are afraid people will laugh at them, ignore them, use the information against them, or leave or break up with them. As a result, people remain to themselves, keeping their authentic selves hidden, or maybe even creating false selves, trying to convince others they feel differently or are different than they really are. Creating a false self is usually lonely—it is also dishonest. The person is being phony, and other people usually see through that. Often, when a person is being rejected, it is not a rejection of the real person (which is hidden) but a rejection of the false self, the phony self. (I may disagree with you, but if you seem real, I will probably respect you. If you are phony, I will not know you, and I will not like your phoniness). People are unwilling to let their true selves be known because we have been conditioned to believe in impossible concepts of how we ought to be. These concepts (such as how we should be in our roles as boys/girls and men/women) make us ashamed of our true feelings and being. Thus, we often feel like we “should” be different. Because most people are at least a little insecure and need to be liked and loved by others, we may go along with what others say or want, keeping our feelings to ourselves out of fear of rejection. Remember: hiding yourself from others because fear of rejection and conflict or through feelings of shame and guilt leads to loneliness. Being silent is not being strong; strength is the willingness to take risks in relationships to disclose yourself to build a better relationship.

Discovering things about yourself that you do not like.

Because self-disclosure increases self-knowledge, we may find aspects of our lives that we don’t feel good about. Once we discover this, we are confronted with change (or faced with continuing to be unhappy in the situation). One way to stay unaware is to avoid self-disclosing.

When self-disclosing, it is important to remember that immediate uncontrolled expression of feelings is inappropriate. There are effective and ineffective ways of sharing. In addition, there are some things we might not want to share and people we don’t trust enough to share parts of who we are. When sharing, it is important to consider the positive and negative consequences of self-disclosure.