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Yarning Circle Notes

All our mobs had different ways to run yarning circles and yarning took many forms from casual conversations to important decision-making gatherings. There is a hierarchy within yarning circles and often Elders hold the responsibility of the circle. Yarning circles, unlike group work where everyone decides on the rules, have specific protocols. Some common protocols are

- It is a place where everyone has an equal voice, so each person speaks in turn while everyone else practises deep listening or what Dr Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr calls *dadirri*. Sometimes the use of a ‘talking stick’ or ‘talking stone’ passed around helps this process.
- The first round of a yarning circle is usually for people to introduce themselves, contextualise their place in the circle (why they are here) and find their voice.
- Ask people to think about “whose story am I telling? Is this my story to tell?”
- Ask people to not talk about graphic incidents or details.
- Confidentiality of what is said in the circle; ask people to keep what they hear safe.
- The last round is often a ‘checking out’ to ensure everyone is feeling heard and safe.

The Safety Plan

When yarning in a gathering that is specifically for suicide prevention, some people may feel overwhelmed by the nature of the information or sharing, and those with personal experience are particularly vulnerable.

These are risks that need to be acknowledged, addressed, minimised and managed so that everyone is looked after, has support, and has strategies to help ground themselves. This is why this type of yarning needs special planning called a **Safety Plan**.

Developing a **Safety Plan** is how you help participants to feel safe, heard and in control of themselves during and after yarning about this difficult and important issue.

When preparing a **Safety Plan**, it is necessary to consider the following things.

1. This gathering will most likely attract people who have a lived experience of a suicide crisis.
It is important that they are expected and catered for, so that everyone (including yourself) is safe and protected.
2. How will you know who is in your circle and their state of Social and Emotional Well-Being (**SEWB**)?
3. How will you stay grounded as the facilitator?
4. How will you teach others to be grounded?
5. What is re-triggering, what does it look like and what will you do if someone is re-triggered?
6. How will you know everyone is safe after you have ended the yarn?

How to work safely:

Here are several strategies for working safely.

At the start of the yarning circle:

1. Work out and articulate the yarning circle's protocols before you start

Having considered the particulars of this group, you need to decide on the protocols that will help keep the gathering yarning safely. Articulating the protocols ensure that everyone understands and agrees on how to participate.

During the yarning:

2. Recognise when someone is being re-triggered

Re-triggering occurs when feelings or memories of a traumatic experience suddenly arise causing emotional distress. The trigger could be a thought, an object, a place, a feeling, a sensation, or a word which sets off the body's fear response, the fight or flight response. When a person is in fight or flight, they experience a physiological response, are less able to think clearly or reason effectively.

This overwhelming fear response while important for self-preservation, can make it difficult to manage emotional regulation responses, like anger, crying or withdrawing. This can make it very difficult or impossible for a participant to continue with the group and would most likely benefit from taking a supported break. It will be beneficial to decide if the whole group wishes to break with the participant at this time or continue before the yarning circle. This will remove any pressure to ask the participant to give permission to continue without them during this time of emotional escalation.

Grounding exercises are designed to minimise or interrupt the physiological and emotional responses that overwhelm someone when they are re-triggered into the fight or flight response.

They aim to redirect a person's thoughts away from the distressing feelings, reconnect their mind with their body and bring that person back into the present.

Recognise different fear responses There are a range of signs that a person is being re-triggered. A person could become agitated; angry; sad; start crying or can't stop talking. For another person it may be signs of dissociation – not paying attention, looking at their phone, talking to the person beside them or zoning out.

➤ The facilitator can lead and teach participants grounding exercises such as

- *Deep Breathing*
- *A Self-hug*
- *Bringing our senses online*
- *Asking strength-based questions.*

Grounding Exercises:

Deep Breathing When we are anxious or nervous our body is detecting danger (even if it is only in our minds). When we are in fight or flight, we *shallow breathe* as our nervous system changes to prepare for fighting or running. Deep breaths in and long breaths out calm our autonomic nervous system and bring us back into a place where we can think clearly and reason.



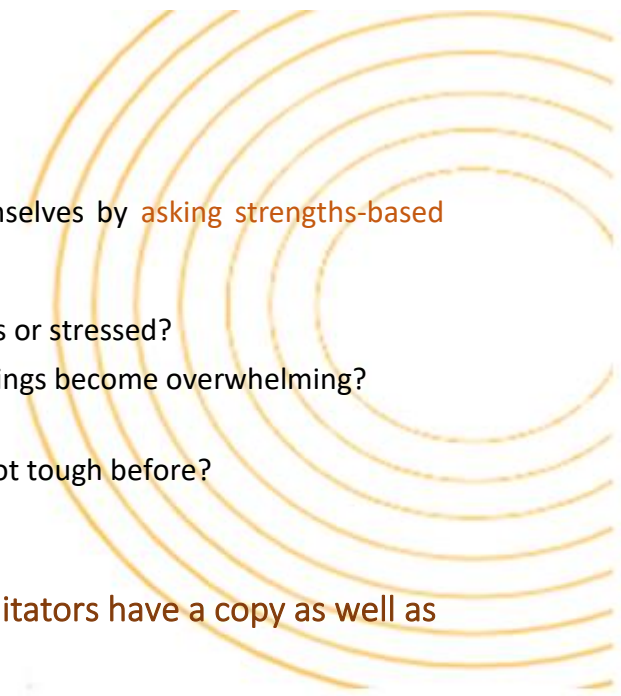
A Self-hug Place your right hand under your left armpit and your left hand hugs your right shoulder. Follow with some deep breathing.



Bring your senses online Ask, what can you hear? What can you smell? What can you taste? What can you see? What can you feel on your skin or in your body? This exercise takes you out of a dissociated place to be in the present where you can think and reason and hear what is being said.



Point to each of your five fingers to refer to each of the five senses.

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- The facilitator can help participants to help themselves by **asking strengths-based questions** such as:

- Q. What grounds you when you are feeling anxious or stressed?
- Q. Who are your support people (person) when things become overwhelming?
Do they know they are your support person?
- Q. What strengths have helped you when things got tough before?

3. Build your safety plan and make sure all facilitators have a copy as well as support people on the plan.

A. Before the yarning circle

Design the Safety Plan by using these 4 documents.

The Safety Plan has 4 parts

1. **Risk Matrix and Assessment planning document**
2. **Communication Plan document**
3. **Support Person Table**
4. **Debriefing Template**

B. After the yarning circle:

Every gathering or event will be different in some way.

Robust workshopping by your team as organisers will ensure that everyone gets the most out of the event and everyone stays safe in the process. There are always things that are impossible to predict and therefore a good debriefing to reflect on your event once it is over, is an essential way of ensuring each event is more fulfilling and safer than the one before. Use the **Debriefing Template** to do this.

Best wishes and stay safe,

Nicole

Safety Plan Template Directions

The template provided will allow you to get started with your planning. Clicking on the fields will allow you to enter your details. Your plan will make sure you have thought of different scenarios and how you can ensure a successful event. It will also help funders and others to understand your planning and preparation process. You may in time develop your own template with specific requirements that suit your organisation.

1. Risk Matrix and Assessment planning document

[Template link](#)

Identify who your participants will be and do a risk management plan (see example below). This will change with each gathering or event.

Take some time as a team to discuss and think about the risks that your venue/content/activities may produce.

This can be a living document and keep each matrix to help you with future events.

THE FAMILY CENTRE		
EXAMPLE		
RISK MATRIX AND ASSESSMENT		
Risk	Risk Rating	Mitigation
What could happen that we must be prepared for?	How likely?	What is our plan to a) avoid or b) be ready for this event?
The chance that there may be people present with unresolved trauma.	Medium	Pre-attendance checklists or phone checkins (see appendix 1)
Social environment changes (such as Co-vid) makes it unsafe to go forward.	Medium	Stay abreast of latest health regulations and have a communication method so alert participants as necessary.
People can't find the venue	Low	Link to Google map directions embedded in the welcome documents
Someone triggers throughout the gathering	Medium	Professional MHW/Counsellor/Psychologist available on site
Someone is triggered after they have left the gathering	Low	Ensuring a planned check out process will mitigate this risk, however have someone available for contact and ensure everyone leaves with this person's number. Develop a list of local health services and emergency services that can be given to all participants.
Sorry Business	Medium	
Political and Social unrest	Medium	Form a committee who can meet to discuss changes needed as they become necessary.

2. Communication Plan document

[Template link](#)

Decide on the best way you will communicate with all of your stakeholders and who needs to know what and when (see example below).

Think of all the people who will be involved in any way with your event. This includes you, the organiser(s), the people you hope will attend (participants), those professionals who you may call on to support participants before and after the event (such as community health organisations or ACCHOs who may be able to offer support).

This step takes some brainstorming and yarning with others to gain support.

Communication Plan Example

Nicole Tujague | January 18, 2021

Goal: The goal of this communication plan is to make sure stakeholders are updated throughout the project. Communicating frequently about the status of tasks, team accomplishments, milestones, etc. will help us stay on track and meet project deadlines.

Project name: Redesign the picking process.

Stakeholder	Deliverable	Frequency	Owner	Priority	Preferred way to deliver	Notes and attachments
Participants	Invitations Timelines Follow-up Documents	Before and after the gathering	(Name of the person who will be doing this)	High Priority	Email	Copy of Invitation and Evaluation document
Organisers of the Gathering	Weekly status report	Weekly - Monday @ 9 am	Blake Stevens	High Priority so everyone knows what is happening	Conf. call	Mickey can help with special requests if needed
The Sponsor e.g. The Family Centre key person	Status update	Weekly	Blake Stevens	Low priority - would like to be updated weekly, but this request is flexible	In-person meeting	Mainly interested in status of each task and timeline
Project team	Timeline review/update	Daily by EOD	Project team	High priority	Email	All team members are required to send update by EOD
Project team	List of blockers	As needed	Project team	Medium priority	Team meeting	Must meet with team when major blockers arise

3. Support Person Table

[Template link](#)

Identify volunteer or paid support people.

Support people can be volunteer or paid professionals who you brief about your event. Work out exactly how they can support you and how they can be contacted.

Name	Responsibility	Contact email	Phone number	Confirmed Y/N
*MHO/Counsellor	Be available on the day to meet with participants who need support	mho@abc.org	0411 222 333	Y
Psychologist	To be available after the event for phone/Zoom calls with participants who need support			
Community Health Service	Agree to be on a sheet of contact people for further support. Full briefing of the event before commencing.			

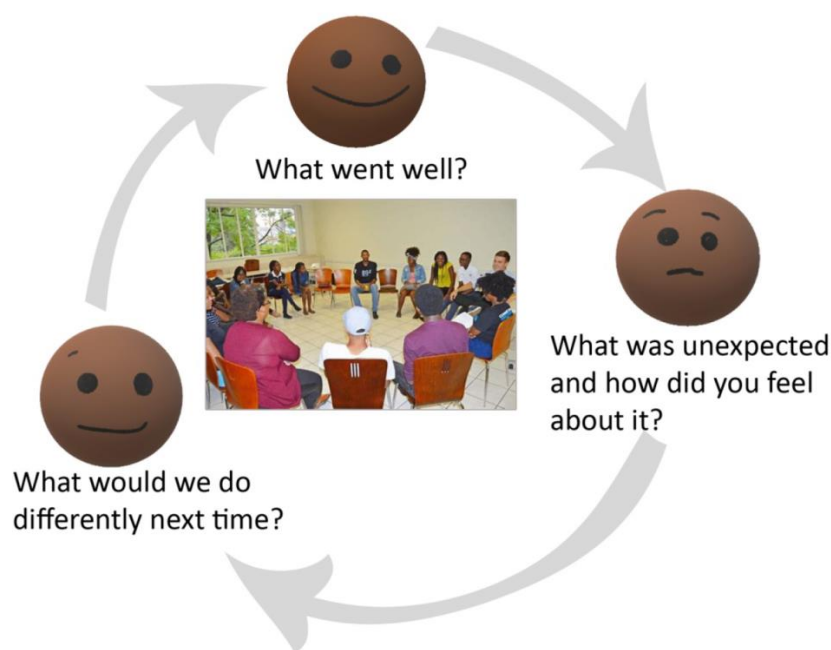
*Mental Health Officer

4. Debriefing Template

[Template link](#)

Some simple questions can help you identify things you may not have anticipated but also allow you to reflect on the unexpected wins you had.

You can follow this example below.



Notice that the tables/documents are linked in different ways, for example you may identify that the local Aboriginal Community Health Service can be a support for participants of your gathering.

They will be mentioned in the mitigation section of your **Risk Matrix and Assessment** plan, they would then need to appear on your **Communication Plan** to discuss how they will be contacted and then kept in the loop.

Next, they will appear on your **Support Person Table** so that relevant organisers have access to their details and understand their agreed capacity of support.

Finally, they may get a mention in your **Debriefing Template** as something that went really well.

Safety Plan Template

Name of Organiser:

Contact Details of Organiser

Mobile:

Email:

Location Address:

Name of Event:

Date of Event:

Location:

Brief explanation about the event, e.g. why are we holding this event/who are our sponsors/is this a regular event or a one off? *(Double click below to enter details)*

Click here for:

[Risk Matrix and Assessment planning document](#)

[Communication Plan document](#)

[Support Person Table](#)

[Debriefing Template](#)

IF COMPLETED (tick box)

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Risk Matrix and Assessment planning document

Organisation name: _____		
Risk Matrix and Assessment		
Risk	Risk Rating	Mitigation
What could happen that we must be prepared for?	How likely?	What is our plan to a) avoid or b) be ready for this event?

Communication Plan document

Goal:

Project name:

Stakeholder	Deliverable	Frequency	Owner	Priority	Preferred Way to Deliver	Notes and Attachments

Support Person Table

Identify volunteer or paid support people. E.g. MHO/Counsellor, Psychologist, Community Health Service

Support people can be volunteer or paid professionals who you brief about your event.
Work out exactly how they can support you and how they can be contacted.

Name	Responsibility	Contact email	Phone number	Confirmed Y/N

Debriefing Template

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Some simple questions can help you identify things you may not have anticipated but also allow you to reflect on the unexpected wins you had. You can follow this example below.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What went well?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What surprises did we encounter? How did that feel?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What would we do differently next time?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Other suggestions for the next event

Managing Disclosures of suicidal thoughts or experiences of trauma or abuse

Be prepared for a situation where someone discloses their thoughts of suicide or past trauma experiences.



Kelleigh Ryan – psychologist

<https://qr1.be/87YK>

Preparation before event

It is important to have sat down together in your group to figure out your policy on handling a disclosure. Each program and each organisation will have different needs and response plans. Think about your process for different groups, e.g. is it a BBQ where families are gathered or an event where young people are gathered? It is better to have your policies thought through before you run the event, they can be changed and updated as time goes on. Some guiding thoughts to get you started could be:

The Environment

Is there shade or a covered area to rest?

Is there somewhere quiet and safe to sit with a distressed person, or a place to walk with this person?

Is there tea or a cold drink available to offer this person?

Are there tissues and seats available?

Is there a wellbeing space for workers and volunteers out of sight/audible range of the event?

The Individuals

Do I feel confident to support this person and have I been coached on what to say or do?

Do I have a buddy that can support me when I support this person?

Is there gender or cultural issues I need to be aware of here?

Do I know the safety plan, can I access it somewhere easily?

Do I know my self-calming techniques, and can I practice them if I need to?

Team

Do we have names and phone numbers of people in our team?

Do we have a formal buddy system set up for the day for team members?

Do I know the names and numbers or faces of Elders who may be able to assist on the day?

Do we have a pre-briefing organised before the event and a debriefing organised for after the event?

When an incident happens:

1. Ensure everyone is safe in the immediate instance – how will I do that?
2. What is the best action of plan for that person e.g. is it a young person? Is it an older person? Who will decide that on the day?
3. What services can you connect them with? Do we have a prepared list with key contacts identified?
4. Does someone need to stay with that person until they are connected with a service or another support person? Who will decide that on the day?
5. How will you know the person has been supported after the event? It is important that you have peace of mind.

Partners

Do we have the name and phone number of support agencies who we can do a soft handover to, are any of them ready to take a call during this event?

Who will do a follow up of the individual to ensure they are safe and when?

Add more questions to your checklist that feel right for your organisation and project groups.



THE
SEEDLING
GROUP

Written by The Seedling Group for The Family Centre, 2021.