

What is a Peace Circle?

Peace Circles are a way to resolve disputes between community members that does not involve the Tribal Court. It utilizes ceremonial traditions, talking circles, and circle keepers to bring people involved in disputes to common ground. This is something we already do in our community. We are formalizing the process to give access to the most people possible. This forum is open to anyone, with any background or belief system. American court systems focus on determining a winner and a loser. The utilization of peace circles strives to preserve community harmony and relationships within the community.

The use of peace circles exists worldwide in many native and non-native communities because it is the most community-appropriate way to resolve disputes and conflicts. Since it is so effective with better outcomes, it has attracted the interest of legal scholars worldwide within the past couple of decades. Many other Indian tribes across the United States have revitalized it to complement the adversarial process courts have superimposed upon their communities. Additionally, many other court systems across the United States now require or involve some sort of alternative conflict resolution.

What can I expect to happen at a Peace Circle session?

There will be two circle keepers, one male and one female, leading the circle session to guide participants in restoring relationships.

- **Circle keepers are not judges; they do not decide the outcome. Those involved in the dispute will resolve their disputes themselves.**
- **Circle sessions are voluntary.**
- **Each participant will get a chance to speak without interruption by other participants.**
- **Listening with respect means: not having side conversations, paying attention to nonverbal behavior, and not using mobile phones.**
- **It is OK to disagree.**
- **There will be no name-calling or personal attacks, shouting, or use of disrespectful language during sessions.**
- **Speak for yourself and not as the representative of any group.**
- **What is discussed during the session is confidential and shall not be shared with people not involved in the session.**

The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Circle Keepers reserve the final decision to determine the eligibility of matters that will be handled by the forum on a case-by-case basis. Denials will be in writing and provided to the requesting participant or referral source by an authorized circle keeper.

How do I request a Peace Circle session?

Participation in a Peace Circle session is voluntary regardless of the referral source.

- **Referrals may be self-initiated by participants involved in a matter, such as citizens, parents, youth or adults;**
- **Referrals may be submitted by a tribal program; or The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Tribal Court may submit referrals.**

Peace Circle sessions may be requested through the Native Justice Initiative support staff or by directly contacting the designated Native Justice Initiative point of contact person.

Do you find that people always come to you for help with their problems? Are you the person who helps resolve issues within your family or circle of friends? You may be interested in becoming a circle keeper.

For more information and additional resources about the Native Justice Initiative or peace circles, please visit our webpage at PokagonBand-nsn.gov and search "Native Justice"