

## GUIDE: Supporting Guardians of Unaccompanied Children

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# Guidelines For Listening Circles Facilitators

### D3.1

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## Table of Contents

PART A - Understanding Listening Circles .....	6
Introduction to Listening Circles .....	6
The Concept of Listening in Interpersonal Contexts .....	7
The ACI Model .....	7
Cultural Sensitivity and Trauma-Informed Listening.....	8
Listening Circles as a Platform for Support.....	8
The Role of the Facilitator in Listening Circles .....	8
The ACI Model in Practice.....	9
Creative Elements in the Dialogue Phase .....	10
Structured Feedback .....	10
The Foundations of Listening Circles .....	11
The Structure of Listening Circles .....	11
Opening the Circle .....	13
Dialogue and Reflection .....	15
Closing the Circle.....	18
Benefits of Listening Circles .....	21
Challenges of Implementing Listening Circles.....	22
Practical Applications of Listening Circles .....	24
Conclusion.....	25
PART B - Listening Circles and Guardians of Unaccompanied Children .....	27
Introduction .....	27
The Importance of Culturally Sensitive Approaches.....	27
Psychological Support Through Listening Circles .....	27
Implementation of Listening Circles .....	28
Challenges and Considerations.....	28
Conclusion.....	29
PART C - Facilitator Guidelines for Listening Circles with Guardians of Unaccompanied Children ..	30
Introduction .....	30

Developing and Facilitating Listening Circles for Guardians of Unaccompanied Children.....	30
Organizing and Guiding Listening Circles.....	30
Guest Speakers: Enhancing Listening Circles Through Expert Insights.....	34
Selecting Guest Speakers.....	34
Benefits of Guest Speakers.....	35
Planning and Integration.....	35
Example Applications.....	36
Conclusion.....	36
Confidentiality Action Plan: Protecting Sensitive Information in Listening Circles.....	36
Part D - Step-by-Step Guidelines for Facilitators of Listening Circles for Guardians of Unaccompanied Children.....	39
I. Pre-Circle Preparation.....	39
II. Opening the Circle (15–20 Minutes).....	40
III. Facilitating the Dialogue (60–75 Minutes).....	41
Special Subchapter. Introduce Peer-to-Peer Focused Activities.....	41
IV. Closing the Circle (10–15 Minutes).....	43
V. Post-Circle Reflection.....	44
References.....	45
Annex I: Participant Information Letter.....	47
Annex II: Note-Taker Form.....	50

## PART A - Understanding Listening Circles

### Introduction to Listening Circles

Listening circles are an ancient practice that have been used for centuries in different cultures to foster **deep communication** and **mutual understanding** within groups. The basic concept is to create a space where people can share their thoughts and feelings in a respectful and supportive environment. In the circle, each person has the opportunity to speak while others listen attentively and without interruption. This process encourages participants to be fully present, fostering a sense of community and connection. Creating a **physically and emotionally safe environment** is essential, as it ensures that all participants feel secure and supported, which is critical for open and honest communication (Tigelaar & de Ruijter de Wildt et al., 2019).

Traditionally, listening circles have been used in cultural and spiritual settings to **resolve conflicts**, **make decisions**, and **build stronger relationships** within communities. The structure of these circles is both simple and powerful: participants sit in a circle, **symbolizing equality and unity**, and a talking piece is passed around to indicate whose turn it is to speak. This practice ensures that everyone's voice is heard and valued.

In the context of **guardians of unaccompanied minors**, listening circles provide a vital platform for promoting understanding, sharing experiences, and **building emotional resilience**. Guardians face unique challenges in their roles, and listening circles offer a space where they can express concerns, share strategies, and receive support from others in similar situations. This practice strengthens their ability to provide **compassionate and effective care** for the children in their charge.

Additionally, listening circles help guardians develop and refine their **listening skills**, enabling them to better understand the needs and emotions of unaccompanied minors. By offering a space where guardians feel **heard and respected**, these circles foster mutual learning and cooperation. They help build a **sense of community** among guardians, reducing feelings of isolation and creating a **network of shared knowledge and support**.

In their often demanding and emotionally charged roles, guardians benefit greatly from the opportunity to engage in meaningful, reflective dialogue. Listening circles not only facilitate communication but also serve as a tool for **strengthening resilience**, enhancing empathy, and **empowering guardians** to navigate the challenges of their work with greater effectiveness and compassion (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017).

## The Concept of Listening in Interpersonal Contexts

**Listening** is much more than simply hearing words; it is a complex and deliberate process that requires full engagement with the speaker. For guardians of unaccompanied minors participating in listening circles, effective listening is crucial for understanding and supporting one another. This process is guided by three essential elements: **attention**, **comprehension**, and **intention**, collectively known as the **ACI model**.

### The ACI Model

#### 1. **Attention**

In the context of listening circles, giving full attention means focusing entirely on the person who is speaking. Guardians must listen without distractions, demonstrating genuine engagement and interest. This can be shown through non-verbal signals, such as maintaining eye contact, nodding, or offering gestures of encouragement. Being fully present creates a safe and supportive environment where participants feel heard and valued.

#### 2. **Comprehension**

Listening comprehension goes beyond understanding the literal meaning of words. It requires guardians to grasp the emotions, context, and experiences behind what is being shared. This includes recognizing cultural sensitivities and understanding the impact of trauma, which often shapes the perspectives and emotions of both guardians and the children they care for. Active listening ensures participants accurately interpret the thoughts and feelings of the speaker.

#### 3. **Intention**

The mindset and attitude of participants are equally important. Listening with positive intention means creating an open, respectful, and non-judgmental space. Guardians can approach conversations with empathy and a willingness to understand others' perspectives. This fosters an atmosphere where participants feel safe to express themselves freely. This intentionality is particularly vital for guardians who may be managing difficult emotions or seeking peer support.

## Cultural Sensitivity and Trauma-Informed Listening

In listening circles for guardians of unaccompanied minors, cultural sensitivity and trauma-informed approaches are essential. Participants and facilitators must remain aware of the diverse backgrounds and experiences within the circle, ensuring communication is both respectful and inclusive (Tigelaar & de Ruijter de Wildt et al., 2019). Trauma-informed listening involves recognizing signs of distress, responding with care, and avoiding behaviors that could trigger or re-traumatize participants.

## Listening Circles as a Platform for Support

Listening circles provide a structured space for guardians to share their experiences, challenges, and strategies in caring for unaccompanied minors. These circles promote mutual learning, emotional support, and the development of practical solutions to shared challenges. Guided by the principle of the "best interests of the child," they encourage guardians to reflect on their practices and consider how their decisions impact the children in their care (Arnold, Goeman, & Fournier, 2014).

## The Role of the Facilitator in Listening Circles

The facilitator plays a central role in the success of listening circles. Their main responsibility is to create a space where people feel safe to share their thoughts and feelings, and to ensure that discussions remain respectful, open and supportive. Facilitators guide the conversation, encourage participation and maintain fairness, helping participants to feel heard and valued.

### Main responsibilities of a facilitator

#### 1. Setting the tone

The facilitator sets rules that promote respect, confidentiality and active listening. By creating a welcoming environment, they ensure that participants feel free to speak without fear of judgement. Simple acknowledgments such as "That sounds really hard" or "It makes sense to feel that way" help participants feel heard (Kohli, 2006; Listening Circles Toolkit, 2018).

#### 2. Managing the dynamics

The facilitator ensures balanced participation by encouraging quieter voices to share, while preventing dominant speakers from overshadowing the discussion. They gently redirect conversations that veer off-topic, and intervene when discussions become judgmental or confrontational. Remaining neutral is key to keeping the circle safe and inclusive.

#### 3. Provide support



Recognising signs of distress, facilitators offer reassurance and emotional support. If necessary, they connect participants to additional resources such as counselling, social services or legal assistance. They can also use the GUIDE Service Maps to refer individuals to specialised professionals, ensuring they receive appropriate follow-up support.

#### **4. Avoid personal bias**

The facilitator maintains neutrality and avoids imposing personal opinions. Their role is not to provide solutions, but to create a non-judgmental space where participants can share freely. Listening circles are not meant to solve problems, but to provide a space for emotional support, connection and affirmation.

#### **5. Encouraging reflection**

The facilitator helps participants to process their experiences by guiding them to explore their thoughts and feelings. They may use tools such as a talking piece to ensure equal opportunities for sharing and to reinforce the purpose of the circle as a space for meaningful dialogue (Kohli, 2006; Listening Circles Toolkit, 2018).

#### **6. Summing up the main points**

At the end of the discussion, the facilitator summarises the main points to provide a sense of closure. This ensures that participants leave with a clear understanding of what has been shared, even if no immediate solutions have been reached. The focus remains on fostering connection and support.

#### **7. Supporting participants before, during and after the workshop**

The facilitator ensures that support extends beyond the listening circle. They check in with participants who may need additional support and provide follow-up resources. Scheduling future sessions or maintaining engagement through updates can help sustain the sense of community and trust built in the circle.

## **The ACI Model in Practice**

When guardians practice attention, comprehension, and intention, they not only enhance their communication skills but also build stronger connections with their peers. For example:

- **Attention** helps guardians focus fully on others' experiences, making them feel valued.
- **Comprehension** allows deeper understanding of challenges and fosters shared solutions.
- **Intention** creates an empathetic, respectful atmosphere that encourages honest dialogue.

By using the ACI model, listening circles empower guardians to support one another while enhancing their ability to care for unaccompanied minors. These circles are not just a platform for sharing but

also for growth, connection, and collective strength in overcoming challenges (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017).

### The Use of a Talking Piece

During the dialogue phase, participants take turns speaking, guided by the use of a ‘talking piece.’ This object, passed around the circle, allows only the person holding it to speak. This practice ensures that everyone has an equal opportunity to share without interruptions. It also encourages those not speaking to listen intently, focusing entirely on the words and emotions of the speaker.

## Creative Elements in the Dialogue Phase

In some variations of listening circles, creative elements like art-making are integrated into the dialogue phase. For instance, participants may use materials like clay, paint, or collage to express emotions or ideas that are difficult to articulate verbally. This creative process enhances reflection, allowing participants to process complex feelings and share experiences in alternative ways (Hodges & Orkibi, 2023). Facilitators ensure that these activities align with the circle's goals and contribute to the group's understanding and connection (Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health, 2018).

## Structured Feedback

Certain listening circle models, such as those described by Bommelje (2012), incorporate structured feedback from an outer circle of observers. Observers use frameworks like the **Situation-Behaviour-Impact (SBI)** model to provide constructive, objective feedback focused on behaviors rather than personal characteristics. Facilitators manage this process to ensure feedback remains supportive and productive.

The dialogue phase of a listening circle provides a space for open, honest, and meaningful communication. Led by skilled facilitators, the circle encourages **deep listening, thoughtful reflection**, and a **sense of community**. By structuring the conversation and incorporating creative expression and constructive feedback, listening circles foster stronger connections, new insights, and collective growth. Facilitators are essential in upholding the circle's values and ensuring it remains a transformative experience for all involved (Tigelaar & de Ruijter de Wildt et al., 2019; Bommelje, 2012; Listening Circles Toolkit, 2018).

## The Foundations of Listening Circles

Listening circles are built on three key principles that ensure meaningful communication and interaction:

1. **Speaking with Intention** . Participants are encouraged to speak thoughtfully and purposefully, ensuring their contributions are relevant and valuable to the group (Bommelje, 2012).
2. **Listening with Attention**. Participants listen fully and respectfully without distractions or interruptions, creating an environment of trust and deep communication (Listening Circle Facilitator's Guide, n.d.).
3. **Awareness of the Circle's Well-being**. Participants are mindful of how their actions affect the group, contributing positively to the circle's dynamics (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017).

By adhering to these principles, listening circles become a safe and productive space for meaningful conversations, fostering understanding and stronger relationships among participants.

## The Structure of Listening Circles

The structure of listening circles is essential for their effectiveness, as it enables participants to engage in open, inclusive, and meaningful conversations. The set-up of the circle is carefully designed to create a supportive environment where everyone feels comfortable sharing their thoughts and listening to others.

A listening circle typically consists of 6 to 10 participants seated in a circle. This small group size is intentional to foster an intimate atmosphere that encourages deeper interaction and connection. The circular seating arrangement is symbolic, representing the equality of all participants - there is no "head" of the circle. This layout reinforces the idea that every voice is of equal importance. To support trust building and deeper engagement over time, each group is encouraged to attend six sessions, held every two weeks. This structured approach ensures continuity and fosters a strong sense of community among participants.

The circle is facilitated by one or two trained individuals who play a crucial role in ensuring the meeting runs smoothly. The facilitators are not there to lead or direct the conversation, but to help participants stay aligned with the principles and goals of the circle. They begin by introducing the session, explaining the guidelines, and gently guiding the discussion as needed. Facilitators ensure

that everyone has the opportunity to speak and that the conversation remains respectful and focused.

The success of a listening circle heavily depends on the training and preparation of its facilitators. Facilitators should be well-versed in active listening techniques, cultural sensitivity, and trauma-informed care to effectively guide the circle. Receiving cultural sensitivity training is particularly important, as it helps facilitators respect the diverse backgrounds of participants. For unaccompanied migrant children, understanding cultural norms and values is crucial to creating a supportive environment (Corona Maioli et al., 2023). Such training ensures that sensitive topics are addressed thoughtfully and that participants feel supported in a way that fosters trust and open communication (Tigelaar & de Ruijter de Wildt et al., 2019).

To accommodate participants who face language barriers – common among unaccompanied young migrants – listening circles should include interpreters or multilingual facilitators. This approach ensures that all participants can communicate effectively, reducing barriers to self-expression (Corona Maioli et al., 2023).

A unique feature of listening circles is the use of a ‘talking piece,’ an object passed around the circle to indicate whose turn it is to speak. This practice encourages everyone to listen attentively to the person holding the talking piece without interruptions. The talking piece helps maintain order, allowing participants the time and space to express their thoughts without feeling rushed.

The circle often begins with an opening activity, such as a moment of silence, a grounding exercise, or a simple group reading. These activities help participants transition from their daily lives into the focused, reflective space of the circle. After the opening, the session moves into the main discussion, where each participant has the opportunity to share and listen.

Throughout the session, the structured format of the circle fosters a sense of trust and community. Because participants are encouraged to listen with full attention and speak with intention, the circle becomes a space where people feel safe to express themselves openly and to feel truly heard. Facilitators work to maintain a supportive environment, ensuring the conversation flows naturally and allows for both deep reflection and meaningful communication.

In conclusion, the structured approach of listening circles – with their small, equal group size, guided facilitation, and use of a talking piece – creates a framework that supports inclusive dialogue. This structure helps participants connect with each other on a deeper level, making the listening circle a powerful tool for both personal and collective growth.

## Opening the Circle

The beginning of a listening circle is marked by an **opening ritual**, which is a critical step in setting the tone for the entire session. This ritual is designed to create a safe, respectful, and focused environment where participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings. The specific format of the opening ritual may vary but often includes activities such as a group reading in unison or expressions of gratitude from the facilitators.

### Icebreaker Activities to Build Trust and Comfort

To help participants feel relaxed and connected, facilitators can use simple icebreaker activities at the start of the session. These activities encourage participants to get to know each other and establish a positive group atmosphere.

#### Suggested Activities:

1. '10 Things in Common'

○ **What to Do:**

- As a group, participants work together to find 10 things they all have in common.
- These can include shared interests, experiences, or everyday preferences (e.g., "We all enjoy coffee" or "We all love sunny weather").
- Avoid physical traits (e.g., "We all have eyes").

- **Why It Works:** This activity helps participants focus on their similarities, fostering a sense of connection and belonging.

- **Time Needed:** 10-15 minutes.

2. 'Truth, Truth, Myth'

○ **What to Do:**

- Each participant shares three statements about themselves: two true and one false.
- The group guesses which statement is false.
- Example: "I've been skydiving, I have a pet dog, I dislike pizza." (The myth is the dislike of pizza.)

- **Why It Works:** This activity creates a fun and interactive way to learn something surprising about others.
- **Time Needed:** 15 minutes.

### 3. Candy Color Challenge

- **What to Do:**
  - Participants pick a candy or jelly bean at random.
  - Each color represents a topic to share, such as:
    - **Red** = favorite food.
    - **Blue** = a favorite memory.
    - **Yellow** = a goal they have.
  - Participants share based on the color they picked.
- **Why It Works:** This lighthearted activity helps participants start conversations and feel at ease.
- **Time Needed:** 10-15 minutes.

These icebreakers help participants transition into the session, fostering a sense of community and readiness for the deeper discussions ahead (Listening Circle Facilitator's Guide, n.d.).

#### Introduction and Purpose

After the opening ritual, the facilitators introduce themselves to the group. This introduction is important as it establishes the facilitators as neutral guides who are there to support the process rather than lead the conversation. Facilitators then explain the purpose of the listening circle, outlining what the group hopes to achieve during the session. Goals might include sharing experiences, addressing a specific problem, or simply supporting one another through open dialogue.

#### Explaining Communication Rules

One of the most essential aspects of the opening is to explain how communication will take place during the circle. Facilitators typically introduce the use of a **'talking piece,'** a tool inspired by indigenous practices. The talking piece is an object passed around the circle, and only the person holding it is allowed to speak. This tradition ensures that each participant has an equal opportunity

to share their thoughts without fear of being interrupted. It helps maintain a respectful and inclusive atmosphere within the circle (Listening Circles Toolkit, 2018).

### **The Introductory Round**

Once the rules and purpose are clear, the session moves into an **introductory round**. During this round, participants are invited to share their current thoughts, feelings, or state of mind. Each participant speaks while holding the talking piece, which helps them focus on their words and encourages others to listen deeply. This initial sharing is not merely a formality; it centers participants, grounds them in the present moment, and prepares them for the meaningful dialogue that will follow.

## **Dialogue and Reflection**

The central part of a listening circle is the **dialogue phase**, which typically lasts about 60 minutes. This phase is the heart of the circle, where participants engage in meaningful conversations, sharing their thoughts and experiences in a structured and respectful manner. The dialogue is carefully organized to encourage **deep listening** and **thoughtful reflection**, which are essential to the circle's effectiveness.

### **Incorporating Creative Methods to Enhance Engagement**

Creative methods can be powerful tools in listening circles, particularly for participants who may find it challenging to express themselves verbally. These approaches allow individuals to communicate their thoughts and emotions in ways that feel safe and natural, fostering deeper connections and more meaningful engagement.

#### **1. Art-Making**

- **What It Is:** Participants use creative mediums like painting, drawing, clay modeling, or collage to express their feelings, experiences, or ideas.
- **How It Works:**
  - Provide materials such as paper, colored pencils, markers, paints, clay, or magazines for collage-making.
  - Give participants prompts like, “Create an image that represents how you feel today,” or, “Use colors and shapes to show what this group means to you.”

- After the activity, participants can share their artwork with the group and explain its meaning, if they choose.
- **Why It Works:**
  - Art-making bypasses the limitations of verbal communication, enabling participants to convey complex emotions or experiences.
  - It is especially helpful for individuals who are hesitant to speak or who have experienced trauma, providing a safe outlet for expression.
- **Duration:** 15-30 minutes, depending on the activity.

## 2. Storytelling

- **What It Is:** Participants share personal narratives or anecdotes reflecting their experiences, values, or emotions.
- **How It Works:**
  - Introduce storytelling as an optional sharing method. Use prompts like, “Share a story about a moment when you felt strong,” or, “Tell us about someone who has inspired you.”
  - Participants can choose to tell their stories verbally or write them down to share with the group.
- **Why It Works:**
  - Storytelling fosters connection and empathy as participants learn about one another’s journeys and perspectives.
  - It helps individuals reflect on their experiences and derive meaning from them.
- **Duration:** 10-20 minutes per story, depending on the group size and participants’ willingness to share.

## 3. Important Days Gatherings

- **What It Is:** Participants come together to recognize and celebrate meaningful cultural, personal, or international events or days that hold significance for them.



- **How It Works:**
  - Identify key dates that are important to the group, such as cultural holidays, personal milestones, or international awareness days (e.g., **International Migrants Day (December 18)**, **World Refugee Day (June 20)**, and **Universal Children's Day (November 20)**). These days highlight the experiences of migrants and refugees, promote children's welfare, and encourage global solidarity.
  - Facilitate activities related to the occasion, such as sharing stories, preparing traditional foods, or engaging in reflective discussions.
  - Encourage participants to contribute their own ideas on how they would like to honor these days.
- **Why It Works:**
  - Recognizing important days fosters a sense of belonging and inclusion, especially for participants from diverse backgrounds.
  - It provides an opportunity for cultural exchange and deeper understanding among group members.
  - Celebrating shared moments strengthens group cohesion and emotional connection.
- **Duration:** Flexible, typically 30-60 minutes, depending on the activity and significance of the day.

### Benefits of Creative Methods

- Encourage deeper engagement by providing participants with diverse ways to share and reflect.
- Break down barriers for those who may feel uncomfortable or unable to articulate their feelings verbally.
- Foster a sense of accomplishment and pride as participants create something meaningful.
- Help the group appreciate and understand each other's unique experiences and perspectives.

### Example Scripts for Facilitators

- **For Art-Making:** "We'll spend the next 20 minutes creating something that represents how we're feeling today. You can use the materials provided—paint, markers, or collage

items—and there’s no right or wrong way to do this. Afterward, anyone who feels comfortable can share their work with the group.”

- **For Storytelling:** “Let’s take a moment to share stories. You might tell us about a time when you faced a challenge and overcame it, or about someone who supported you when you needed it most. Sharing is optional, and we appreciate whatever you feel comfortable contributing.”

**Note:** *Facilitators can use any creative method they believe will best serve the purposes of the listening circles and align with the profiles of both the participants and the facilitators.*

## Closing the Circle

The conclusion of a listening circle is marked by a **closing round**, a crucial phase designed to help participants reflect on their experiences and consolidate what they have gained from the session. During this phase, each participant is invited to share what they are taking away from the session. This might include new insights they have gained, emotions they have processed, or any thoughts or realizations that emerged during the discussion. The purpose of this reflection is to give participants an opportunity to express the personal impact of the session and to acknowledge the learning and growth that has occurred.

The **talking piece**, which was used throughout the session to guide the flow of conversation, is passed around again during the closing round. This ensures that every participant has the opportunity to speak and be heard without interruption, reinforcing the circle’s values of respect and inclusion. The talking piece also maintains the focused and deliberate pace of the session, giving each person the time they need to articulate their thoughts.

In addition to participant reflections, facilitators may use this time to share information about upcoming events or initiatives related to the circle’s theme. This could include details about future listening circles, related workshops, or opportunities for participants to get involved in broader initiatives. By doing so, facilitators foster a sense of continuity and encourage participants to stay engaged with the circle’s larger goals and objectives beyond the current session (Listening Circles Toolkit, 2018).

The **closing of the circle** is a vital part of the process because it brings the session to a thoughtful and respectful conclusion. To assess the session’s effectiveness, facilitators may include simple evaluation activities, such as:

## Evaluation Activities

### 1. 'Weather Report'

- **What It Is:** Participants describe their feelings about the session using weather-related metaphors.
- **How It Works:**
  - At the end of the session, invite participants to reflect on their experience and express it as a "weather report."
  - Examples:
    - "Sunny with clear skies" (indicating positive and satisfied feelings).
    - "Cloudy with occasional rain" (indicating mixed emotions or challenges).
    - "Stormy" (indicating difficulties or frustration).
  - Participants can share their "weather" metaphor aloud or write it anonymously on a card if they prefer.
- **Why It Works:**
  - Encourages participants to reflect on their feelings in a creative and non-intimidating way.
  - Provides facilitators with a snapshot of the group's overall emotional state.
- **Duration:** 5-10 minutes.

**Example Script for Facilitators:** "Let's end today's session with a quick 'weather report.' Think about how you feel right now, and describe it using weather terms—like sunny, cloudy, or stormy. Feel free to share your weather with the group if you're comfortable."

### 2. 'One Word'

- **What It Is:** Participants summarize their experience or takeaway from the session in a single word.
- **How It Works:**

- Ask each participant to think of one word that captures their experience during the session.
- Examples:
  - “Grateful,” “Connected,” “Overwhelmed,” or “Hopeful.”
- Participants can share their word aloud in the circle or write it on a shared board or piece of paper if privacy is preferred.
- **Why It Works:**
  - Distills participants’ overall impressions into concise feedback.
  - Allows facilitators to identify recurring themes or emotions within the group.
- **Duration:** 5 minutes.

**Example Script for Facilitators:** “Before we finish, I’d like each of us to sum up our experience today in just one word. It could be how you’re feeling, something you learned, or what stood out to you most.”

Both activities are simple yet effective tools for gauging the group’s mood and identifying areas for improvement. Facilitators can use this feedback to tailor future sessions to better meet the needs of the participants.

### **Providing Closure and Follow-Up Support**

This final round allows participants to leave with a clear sense of what they have accomplished and how they have connected with others. It provides a feeling of closure, ensuring that participants do not leave the session feeling unsettled or incomplete. To further support participants, particularly those from vulnerable groups, it is essential to provide follow-up care. Facilitators should:

- Provide a summary of key themes discussed, ensuring confidentiality.
- Use the **GUIDE Service Maps** to refer participants to relevant specialists, ensuring they receive the necessary support to address their concerns. This also helps integrate project materials more effectively.
- Share resources, such as contact information for counselors, legal advisors, or social services.

- Schedule follow-up sessions or provide updates on related initiatives to maintain participant engagement.

Addressing these post-session needs ensures continuity of care and builds trust among participants (Corona Maioli et al., 2023).

### **Reinforcing Bonds and Building Community**

The closing phase also helps to strengthen the bonds formed during the session. As participants recognize and acknowledge their shared experiences and the mutual support offered within the circle, a stronger sense of community and connection develops. This can have lasting positive effects on their relationships and interactions outside the circle.

In conclusion, the closing round of a listening circle is an essential component for allowing participants to reflect on their experiences, express their takeaways, and achieve a sense of closure and connection. It ensures the session ends on a positive and meaningful note, leaving participants feeling heard, valued, and ready to carry forward what they have learned (Listening Circles Toolkit, 2018).

## **Benefits of Listening Circles**

**Listening circles** offer numerous benefits, particularly in workplace settings. By fostering open communication and mutual respect, they create a supportive environment that enhances individual and group dynamics. Key benefits include:

1. **Improved Listening Skills.** Regular participation in listening circles helps employees and managers become more effective listeners. This practice cultivates a workplace culture of mutual respect and understanding, where everyone feels valued and heard. Research emphasizes the importance of listening in promoting meaningful dialogue and strengthening relationships (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017).
2. **Effective Peer Feedback.** Listening circles often incorporate structured feedback models like **SBI (Situation-Behavior-Impact)** to provide clear and constructive peer evaluations. This method helps participants offer feedback that is objective, specific, and actionable, promoting learning and performance improvement. Research highlights that peer feedback is instrumental in developing essential skills such as communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and lifelong learning habits (Bommelje, 2012; Dochy, Segers, & Sluismans, 1999; Topping, 1998).

3. **Building Trust and Inclusivity.** Listening circles create a safe and non-judgmental space where participants can share their thoughts and experiences openly. This openness fosters trust, strengthens interpersonal relationships, and promotes a sense of belonging within the organization, ensuring that all individuals feel included (Meerbott, 2024).
4. **Enhanced Participant Well-being.** Structured listening circles, particularly those designed with cultural sensitivity and trauma-informed approaches, can significantly enhance psychological well-being. As demonstrated in guardianship systems for unaccompanied children, providing a safe and supportive environment helps participants feel understood and valued. This is especially beneficial when working with vulnerable or marginalized groups (Tigelaar & de Ruijter de Wildt et al., 2019).
5. **Conflict Resolution.** Listening circles provide a constructive platform for addressing conflicts. By enabling open and respectful dialogue, they promote better understanding and support collaborative decision-making, leading to more harmonious team dynamics.
6. **Empowerment and Inclusion.** These circles ensure that every participant has a voice. By creating an inclusive environment where individuals can express themselves freely and without judgment, listening circles empower participants to contribute confidently to discussions and initiatives.
7. **Reduced Social Anxiety.** The non-judgmental and supportive atmosphere of a listening circle helps alleviate social anxiety, enabling participants to communicate openly and honestly. This reduction in anxiety fosters healthier interpersonal interactions and more productive teamwork.
8. **Balanced Attitudes.** Research shows that participating in listening circles helps individuals develop more balanced and less extreme perspectives. This ability to see multiple viewpoints reduces workplace tensions and creates a more harmonious environment (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017).

## Challenges of Implementing Listening Circles

While listening circles offer many benefits, they also come with several challenges that facilitators and participants need to address to ensure the success of the process:

1. **Maintaining Intimacy.** The effectiveness of a listening circle relies heavily on participants adhering to its principles, such as respect, empathy, and active listening. If even one

participant is dissatisfied or behaves inappropriately, it can disrupt the close and trusting atmosphere necessary for meaningful dialogue. Maintaining this sense of intimacy requires careful facilitation and the commitment of all participants (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017).

2. **Time Management.** Listening circles encourage deep and reflective sharing, which can sometimes lead participants to lose track of time while speaking. If sessions run longer than planned, it may test the patience of other participants and disrupt the flow of the meeting. Facilitators must balance providing enough time for meaningful contributions with ensuring that the session stays on schedule.
3. **Handling Vulnerability.** The personal and emotionally intimate nature of listening circles can make some participants feel uncomfortable or even resistant to the process. Creating a safe environment where everyone feels secure enough to share is a critical but challenging task. Facilitators must establish a supportive atmosphere through clear guidelines, empathetic listening, and encouragement.
4. **Listening Circles for Vulnerable Populations.** When implementing listening circles for vulnerable populations, such as guardians of unaccompanied young migrants, additional challenges arise. Collaboration with multidisciplinary teams—such as social workers, healthcare professionals, educators, and the GUIDE Service Maps—is essential. This integration ensures that the circle is part of a broader safeguarding strategy and adequately addresses the complex needs of participants (Corona Maioli et al., 2023). However, it is equally important to recognize that a listening circle is not meant to "solve" the issues at hand. Its primary value lies in providing a safe and supportive space where participants can share their struggles, listen to others, and feel less alone—offering emotional support and solidarity, even if immediate solutions remain out of reach.
5. **Working with Vulnerable Populations.** Facilitators working with vulnerable groups, such as unaccompanied children, must be prepared to navigate unique challenges. These may include addressing emotional and psychological needs, managing language barriers, and being sensitive to cultural differences. There is also the risk of re-traumatization when participants discuss deeply personal or painful experiences. To mitigate these challenges, it is essential to have trained interpreters and culturally sensitive facilitators who can create an inclusive and supportive environment. Specialized training in trauma-informed care is also necessary to help facilitators respond effectively to participants' needs (Tigelaar & de Ruijter de Wildt et al., 2019).

6. **Confidentiality Risks.** Personal and sensitive information is often shared during listening circles, which can make participants feel exposed. If confidentiality is not maintained, individuals may regret what they have shared or feel violated. Establishing and strictly enforcing confidentiality rules is crucial to protecting participants' privacy and ensuring trust within the circle (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017).

## Practical Applications of Listening Circles

Listening circles have been successfully applied in various settings and can be adapted to benefit guardians of unaccompanied children. Below are some ways in which listening circles can be utilized effectively:

1. **Management Training.** Listening circles are widely used in management training programs to help students improve their communication skills and learn effective conflict resolution techniques. Similarly, for guardians, listening circles can enhance their ability to communicate and manage the unique challenges they face in caregiving roles. This approach equips them with practical tools to navigate difficult situations with empathy and clarity (Shuffler et al., 2011).
2. **Workplace Conflict Resolution.** In workplaces, listening circles are commonly employed to resolve conflicts between employees by fostering understanding and empathy. For guardians, this approach can be adapted to resolve conflicts within their caregiving networks, such as disagreements with other caregivers or support staff. By promoting a cooperative and supportive environment, listening circles help guardians work together more effectively and harmoniously (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017).
3. **Community Building.** Listening circles are often used in religious and community settings to strengthen interpersonal connections and foster a sense of belonging. These circles are not intended for therapy or problem-solving but instead provide a space for participants to share their experiences and understand different perspectives. For guardians, listening circles can serve as a platform to build a supportive community, exchange coping strategies, and share valuable insights, creating a network of mutual support and understanding (Steiner & Markantoni, 2014).
4. **Peer Feedback in Education.** In educational settings, listening circles utilizing the **SBI (Situation-Behavior-Impact)** model help students develop essential communication skills, work collaboratively, and give constructive feedback to peers. Similarly, guardians can use



this model to provide structured feedback and support to one another. This practice not only improves individual caregiving abilities but also enhances the collective effectiveness of their support networks (Carless & Boud, 2018).

## Conclusion

Listening circles are a powerful tool for fostering **empathy, understanding, and connection** among guardians of unaccompanied children (UAC). These circles provide a **safe and structured environment** where guardians can share their thoughts, experiences, and challenges while feeling truly heard. By promoting trust and cooperation, listening circles play a pivotal role in enhancing guardians' ability to effectively support the children in their care. This sense of connection is vital for creating a caring community where guardians can rely on one another for advice, emotional support, and shared solutions.

However, successfully implementing listening circles for caregivers of unaccompanied children requires careful attention to potential challenges. **Maintaining the intimate and respectful atmosphere** of the circle is crucial. Disruptions can occur if participants do not adhere to the principles of speaking with intention and listening attentively. Strong emotions or conflicts that arise during discussions can be difficult for participants to manage, underscoring the critical role of the facilitator in maintaining balance and mutual respect within the circle.

**Time management** is another important consideration. The reflective and emotional nature of the conversations in listening circles can sometimes lead sessions to extend beyond their planned duration. Given the demanding responsibilities of guardians, facilitators must balance providing ample space for meaningful dialogue with respecting participants' time constraints.

Additionally, the **vulnerability** participants may feel when sharing personal experiences requires skilled facilitation. Creating a **safe and supportive environment** where guardians feel comfortable expressing their thoughts is key to the success of the circle. Facilitators must also enforce strict **confidentiality** to ensure participants feel secure discussing sensitive issues, such as the emotional toll of caregiving or the complexities of supporting children affected by trauma.

With proper facilitation and a strong commitment to the **core principles** of listening circles, these gatherings can have a transformative impact on caregivers of unaccompanied children. They foster a **sense of community**, reduce **feelings of isolation**, and provide a platform for **understanding and mutual support**. By creating a space where every voice is valued, listening circles empower guardians to approach their roles with greater confidence and effectiveness.

When thoughtfully implemented, listening circles help caregivers develop a **balanced approach to care**, build **resilience**, and enhance their **communication skills**. These benefits extend to the children in their care, as more cohesive and supported caregivers are better equipped to meet the complex needs of unaccompanied children. Ultimately, listening circles are a meaningful and impactful practice for strengthening guardian communities and improving the quality of care for unaccompanied children (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017).

## PART B - Listening Circles and Guardians of Unaccompanied Children

### Introduction

Listening circles provide a structured and supportive environment where participants can share their thoughts and experiences in a respectful and non-judgmental manner. For guardians of unaccompanied children, these circles are especially important as they offer a safe space to discuss challenges, exchange strategies, and build a sense of community. The dynamics of listening circles align with **culturally sensitive** and **trauma-informed practices**, which are essential for addressing the specific needs of unaccompanied minors (UAMs) and their guardians (Kohli, 2006; Segall et al., 1999).

Unaccompanied children often carry **trauma** and **secrets from their past** that can deeply impact their adjustment and well-being in a new environment (Kohli, 2006). Guardians play a crucial role in supporting these children, but their own well-being and understanding must also be prioritized. Listening circles enable caregivers to process their experiences, reduce feelings of isolation, and develop effective care strategies. They emphasize the importance of **shared reflection** and **mutual support**, helping participants better understand and manage the **cultural** and **psychological complexities** of their caregiving roles (Segall et al., 1999).

### The Importance of Culturally Sensitive Approaches

Facilitators of listening circles must adopt **culturally sensitive approaches**, recognizing the diverse backgrounds of both caregivers and the children they support. According to Segall et al. (1999), cultural frameworks significantly shape behaviors and interactions. Facilitators should therefore adopt an **adaptive** and **inclusive approach** that respects cultural norms and values while encouraging open dialogue. This ensures that participants feel comfortable and respected, fostering an environment conducive to meaningful sharing and understanding.

### Psychological Support Through Listening Circles

Listening circles are more than just forums for dialogue; they also serve as spaces for **healing** and **psychological support**. Guardians often face significant emotional distress in their caregiving roles, which can be alleviated through the sharing of stories and collective reflection. Incorporating

**trauma-informed practices** into these circles enables participants to address emotional challenges in a supportive environment while reducing the risk of re-traumatization (Kohli, 2006).

## Implementation of Listening Circles

The successful implementation of listening circles requires careful planning and adherence to best practices:

### 1. Preparation

- Facilitators should identify topics that are relevant to caregivers' experiences, such as coping with trauma, managing stress, or navigating cultural adjustment.
- These topics should be tailored to meet the unique needs of the participants.

#### ***Practical Tips for Identifying Relevant Topics:***

- Use **anonymous forms** before the first session to allow participants to suggest topics without pressure.
- Conduct a **brainstorming session** during the first listening circle, where participants can openly share concerns and interests.
- Observe **recurring themes** in conversations to identify issues that resonate with the group.
- Consult with **social workers or support organizations** who may already have insight into pressing concerns.

### 2. Safe Spaces

- Both **physical** and **emotional safety** must be prioritized.
- Establish clear guidelines to foster trust and respect, ensuring participants feel secure enough to share their thoughts and emotions openly.

### 3. Structured Feedback

- Techniques such as the **Situation-Behavior-Impact (SBI)** model can be employed to provide constructive feedback in a way that maintains a supportive and non-judgmental atmosphere (Listening Circles Toolkit, 2018).
- This approach encourages meaningful discussions and actionable insights.

## Challenges and Considerations

Implementing listening circles for guardians of unaccompanied children comes with several challenges, including:

### 1. Cultural Barriers

- Participants may come from diverse cultural backgrounds with varying communication styles and norms.
- Facilitators must adopt **culturally sensitive approaches** to ensure inclusivity and respect for different perspectives.

### 2. Emotional Sensitivity

- Discussing deeply personal or traumatic experiences can evoke strong emotions.
- Skilled facilitation is crucial to managing these emotions while maintaining the circle's supportive and safe environment.

### 3. Logistical Issues

- Organizing consistent and accessible sessions for all participants can be challenging, especially when accounting for different schedules, locations, and resource availability.

## Conclusion

Listening circles are an invaluable tool for supporting guardians of unaccompanied children. By providing a **safe and structured space** for dialogue and reflection, these circles foster **understanding, resilience, and cooperation**. Facilitators play a critical role in ensuring the success of these sessions by prioritizing **cultural sensitivity** and **psychological safety**.

When implemented thoughtfully, listening circles can enhance caregivers' capacity to support children while addressing their own emotional and cultural challenges. These circles not only strengthen the caregiving community but also empower guardians to provide more effective and compassionate care for the children they support.

## PART C - Facilitator Guidelines for Listening Circles with Guardians of Unaccompanied Children

### Introduction

Unaccompanied children face numerous challenges, including the effects of migration, separation from family, and the complexities of integrating into new environments. These children require specialized care and support, and the guardians responsible for their well-being play a crucial role in providing stability, security, and guidance. This section offers practical guidelines for facilitators of listening circles designed for guardians of unaccompanied children. Recognizing the unique stressors and rewards associated with this caregiving role, listening circles aim to create a supportive space where guardians can share experiences, build relationships, and develop strategies to enhance the children's well-being.

Listening circles provide a **structured yet informal setting** where caregivers can connect with peers, share experiences, and learn from one another. These circles foster a **sense of community** and **mutual support**, which can be especially valuable for guardians who may feel isolated or overwhelmed by the challenges of caregiving. By offering a platform for **open dialogue** and **collaborative problem-solving**, listening circles empower caregivers to develop effective strategies for navigating the complexities of their roles. This section equips facilitators with tools and techniques to create and maintain a safe, supportive, and productive environment for these critical conversations.

### Developing and Facilitating Listening Circles for Guardians of Unaccompanied Children

This guide provides practical steps and strategies to help facilitators organize, lead, and sustain effective listening circles. It covers essential aspects such as choosing the location, managing interpreters, taking notes, and structuring discussions, with a focus on fostering an inclusive and safe environment.

### Organizing and Guiding Listening Circles

#### Choosing the Location

#### Key Considerations:

- **Accessibility:** Select a venue that is easy to reach for all participants, including those with mobility needs. Ensure proximity to public transport and provide clear directions.
- **Physical Space:** Choose a room that comfortably accommodates 6–10 participants and facilitators. Arrange seating in a circle to promote inclusivity, avoiding barriers like tables or podiums. Ensure warm lighting and good acoustics for clear communication.
- **Alternative Online Setting:** If an in-person gathering is not possible, listening circles can be conducted online. Use a **video conferencing platform** that allows participants to see and hear each other clearly. Encourage the use of **headphones and stable internet connections** to improve sound quality. Facilitators should establish **online etiquette**, such as taking turns to speak and using virtual hand-raising features to ensure smooth interaction. Creating a **safe and respectful digital environment** is just as important as in a physical space.
- **Privacy:** Select a private space to maintain confidentiality. Use signage to prevent interruptions.
- **Atmosphere:** Create a welcoming environment with comfortable seating, culturally respectful decorations, and refreshments.
- **Amenities:** Provide essentials such as clean restrooms, drinking water, and culturally appropriate snacks.

#### **Best Practices:**

- Conduct a pre-session walkthrough to identify potential issues, such as noise or inadequate seating.
- Have a backup location prepared in case of unforeseen problems.

#### **Setting Up the Room**

- **Physical Setup:** Arrange chairs in a circle to symbolize equality and inclusivity. Avoid barriers like tables or podiums. Provide cushions for added comfort and creative materials (e.g., paper, markers) for non-verbal expression.

- **Décor and Materials:** Place a focal point in the center of the circle, such as a candle or a culturally significant object, to guide discussions. Have tissues available for emotional moments.

## Facilitating the Circle

### Preparation and Opening the Circle

- Ensure the space is physically and emotionally safe, with clear guidelines on respect and confidentiality.
- Begin with an **opening ritual**, such as a moment of silence, a grounding exercise, or a brief group introduction.
- Introduce the **talking piece**, a tool to ensure equitable participation.

### Suggested Phrases:

- “Welcome, and thank you for joining. Let’s take a moment to center ourselves.”
- “This is a safe space for sharing and listening. What is said here stays here.”
- “We will use a talking piece to ensure everyone has the opportunity to speak.”

## During the Session

- **Encourage Sharing and Active Listening:** Use open-ended questions and creative methods, such as storytelling or drawing, to help participants share their experiences.
- **Address Emotional Sensitivity:** Acknowledge distress, provide reassurances, and allow breaks if needed. Participation should always be voluntary.
- **Maintain Structure:** Ensure balanced participation, and gently redirect discussions if they stray off-topic.

### Suggested Phrases:

- “Would anyone like to begin? Take your time—there’s no rush.”
- “Thank you for sharing. Your words are valued, and we deeply appreciate your openness.”

## Role of the Note-Taker



- **Responsibilities:** Focus on capturing key themes without recording identifiable details. Maintain confidentiality and ensure notes are securely stored.
- **Positioning:** Sit slightly outside the circle to remain unobtrusive while documenting discreetly.
- **Post-Session Use:** Summarized notes can be shared with facilitators to improve future sessions while respecting participants' privacy.

### Managing Interpreters

- **Pre-Session:** Brief interpreters on the circle's purpose and structure, emphasizing neutrality, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity.
- **During the Session:** Position interpreters beside participants requiring translation. Use first-person phrasing to maintain personal connections.
- **Post-Session:** Conduct debriefs with interpreters to identify potential language or cultural barriers.

### Timing and Scheduling

- **Session Length:** Listening circles should last 60–90 minutes, with an additional 15–30 minutes allocated for reflection and follow-up.
- **Scheduling:** Accommodate participants' responsibilities by selecting convenient times, such as evenings or breaks from caregiving duties.

### Closing the Circle

- Conclude with a **reflection round**, inviting participants to share final thoughts or feelings.
- Provide information about follow-up support or resources.

### Suggested Phrases:

- "As we close, is there a thought or feeling you'd like to take away?"
- "Thank you for your courage and trust. Each voice here has added value."

### Follow-Up Support

- **Immediate Support:** Offer access to counselors, legal advisors, or relevant services after the session.
- **Summaries:** Provide anonymous summaries of key themes discussed, ensuring cultural sensitivity.
- **Ongoing Engagement:** Share details about future sessions or initiatives to keep participants connected.

## Guest Speakers: Enhancing Listening Circles Through Expert Insights

Incorporating guest speakers into listening circles can significantly enrich discussions by providing valuable perspectives, specialized knowledge, and fresh inspiration. A well-chosen guest speaker can not only engage participants but also address specific challenges faced by guardians, offering practical tools and empowering insights.

### Selecting Guest Speakers

When inviting guest speakers, consider the following factors to ensure they align with the circle's objectives:

1. **Relevance**
  - Select speakers with expertise directly related to the challenges faced by guardians.
  - Examples include psychologists specializing in trauma, legal advisors on child protection laws, or former guardians with lived experience who can share practical insights.
2. **Cultural Sensitivity**
  - Choose speakers who understand and respect the diverse cultural backgrounds of the participants.
  - Ensure they are aware of the potential sensitivities of the group, particularly when discussing emotionally charged topics.
3. **Communication Skills**
  - Opt for speakers who are skilled at engaging with audiences and presenting complex topics in an accessible and clear manner.
  - Their ability to connect with participants is crucial to the session's success.

## Benefits of Guest Speakers

Bringing in guest speakers offers several advantages:

### 1. Expert Knowledge

- Speakers can introduce new insights, such as **trauma-informed care strategies** or **legal frameworks** for child protection (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017).
- Their expertise complements the shared experiences of participants by offering evidence-based practices and professional perspectives.

### 2. Motivation

- Inspirational stories of success and resilience from experienced professionals or former guardians can empower participants.
- These narratives demonstrate practical solutions and foster a sense of hope.

### 3. Skill Development

- Interactive sessions with guest speakers encourage practical learning and the development of specific skills, such as conflict resolution, cultural adaptation, or self-care techniques.

## Planning and Integration

To maximize the impact of guest speakers, facilitators should:

### 1. Coordinate in Advance

- Communicate the objectives of the session and provide the guest speaker with an overview of participants' profiles and expectations.
- This ensures the content aligns with the listening circle's focus and addresses the participants' needs.

### 2. Facilitate Interaction

- Allocate time for participants to ask questions, share reflections, or discuss the topics raised by the speaker.
- Encourage an open and dynamic dialogue to maintain participant engagement and ensure the session remains participant-centered.

### 3. Evaluate Impact

- Gather feedback from participants to assess the value added by the speaker's contribution.

- Use this feedback to refine the integration of guest speakers in future circles.

## Example Applications

Guest speakers can address various topics relevant to guardians of unaccompanied children, such as:

### 1. Trauma and Coping

- A psychologist explaining **emotional resilience techniques** and providing guidance on recognizing and responding to signs of trauma.

### 2. Cultural Adaptation

- Experts discussing strategies for bridging **cultural gaps** in caregiving, helping guardians navigate the complexities of supporting children from diverse cultural backgrounds.

### 3. Legal Rights and Responsibilities

- Lawyers offering clarity on **guardians' responsibilities** and the **rights of the children** in their care, helping participants better understand legal frameworks.

## Conclusion

By thoughtfully integrating guest speakers, listening circles can provide participants with enriched learning opportunities and deeper engagement with essential topics. Guest speakers bring professional expertise, practical solutions, and motivational stories that empower guardians to approach their caregiving roles with greater confidence and effectiveness.

## Confidentiality Action Plan: Protecting Sensitive Information in Listening Circles

Confidentiality is essential when guardians of unaccompanied children share personal and sensitive information during listening circles. A clear confidentiality plan helps create a safe, respectful, and trusting space for participants.

### The Importance of Confidentiality

Listening circles often involve the sharing of deeply personal experiences, which makes confidentiality a cornerstone of these discussions. Similar to other professions, such as nursing, confidentiality requires professionals to protect private information unless there is legal or ethical justification to disclose it. For example, the nursing code emphasizes that registered nurses must

“respect confidential information obtained in the course of professional practice and refrain from disclosing such information without the consent of the patient/client, or a person entitled to act on their behalf, except where disclosure is required by law, a court order, or is necessary in the public interest” (Cain, 1999).

Confidentiality is not just a guideline—it is a guarantee of fairness and trust. Breaking this trust can damage the integrity of the process and undermine the support system created within the listening circle (Kottow, 1986). Participants must feel confident that what they share will remain private to foster open and honest dialogue.

### **Risks of Breaching Confidentiality**

When confidentiality is breached, it can erode trust between participants and facilitators, weakening the effectiveness of the listening circle. Guardians may hesitate to share their struggles or seek support, which can hinder the group’s purpose and limit the benefits of the session (Cain, 1999). Protecting participants' sensitive information is therefore a critical responsibility for facilitators.

### **Developing a Confidentiality Action Plan**

A comprehensive confidentiality action plan ensures that sensitive information is properly handled and safeguarded. This plan should include:

#### **1. Clear Guidelines**

- Establish and communicate clear rules on how confidential information will be managed.
- Define the limits of confidentiality, including situations where disclosure may be required (e.g., legal obligations or protecting a minor’s welfare).

#### **2. Informed Consent**

- Obtain written or verbal consent from participants, explaining how their information will be protected and under what circumstances it might need to be shared (Taylor & Adelman, 1998).

#### **3. Secure Handling and Storage**

- Ensure all records, notes, or documentation are stored securely and are only accessible to authorized personnel.

#### **4. Balancing Ethical Dilemmas**

- Address situations where confidentiality might conflict with other ethical responsibilities, such as safeguarding the welfare of minors. Facilitators must be

prepared to make decisions that balance confidentiality with the need to protect vulnerable individuals (Taylor & Adelman, 1998).

### **Benefits of a Confidentiality Action Plan**

Implementing a robust confidentiality action plan helps facilitators:

- Demonstrate their commitment to protecting sensitive information shared by participants.
- Foster a safe and trustworthy environment that encourages honest and meaningful dialogue.
- Ensure compliance with ethical and legal standards for confidentiality.

By following these guidelines, listening circle facilitators can build a supportive space that respects participants' privacy and trust, promoting open communication and effective support (Cain, 1999; Milne, 1995; Lamb et al., 2001; Taylor & Adelman, 1998).

# Part D - Step-by-Step Guidelines for Facilitators of Listening Circles for Guardians of Unaccompanied Children

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## I. Pre-Circle Preparation

### 1. Define Objectives

Clearly outline the specific goals of the listening circle. What outcomes do you hope guardians will achieve? Examples include:

- Gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges and rewards of guardianship.
- Strengthening support networks among guardians.
- Developing coping strategies for stress and emotional well-being.
- Improving communication skills and techniques.

### 2. Select Participants

Identify guardians who would benefit from and contribute to the circle. Consider factors such as cultural background, length of time as a guardian, and the age of the children in their care. Ensure that all participants are committed to engaging in **respectful dialogue** and maintaining **confidentiality**.

### 3. Choose a Suitable Location

Find a quiet, comfortable, and private space where participants feel safe and encouraged to speak openly. Consider offering **refreshments** and **childcare** to accommodate participants' needs.

**Alternative Online Setting:** If an in-person location is not feasible, a **secure and user-friendly video conferencing platform** can be used instead. Encourage participants to join from a **quiet and private space** where they feel comfortable sharing. Facilitators should set **clear guidelines** for respectful online interaction and consider using features like **breakout rooms** for smaller discussions. Ensuring accessibility, such as offering technical support or flexibility in scheduling, can further enhance the online experience.

### 4. Develop an Agenda

Create a flexible agenda that includes:

- An opening ritual.
- An icebreaker activity.
- Guided discussion prompts.
- A closing activity.

The agenda should be adaptable to accommodate the needs and interests of the group.

#### 5. **Prepare Materials**

Gather all necessary materials, such as name tags, markers, paper, handouts, and any creative tools for optional activities (e.g., drawing or journaling).

## II. Opening the Circle (15–20 Minutes)

### 1. **Welcome and Introductions**

Begin by greeting participants warmly to establish a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. Explain what listening circles are, the purpose of the meeting and invite each person to introduce themselves and share a brief personal detail or expectation for the circle.

### 2. **Establish Ground Rules**

Collaboratively develop ground rules to guide respectful communication and participation.

Examples include:

- **Confidentiality:** "What is shared in the circle stays in the circle."
- **Active Listening:** "Listen attentively without interrupting."
- **Respectful Communication:** "Speak from personal experience and avoid judgment."
- **Equal Speaking Time:** "Ensure everyone has an opportunity to share."

### 3. **Icebreaker Activity**

Facilitate a brief activity to help participants feel more comfortable and build a sense of community. Examples include:

- A simple sharing exercise, such as "Share one thing you're grateful for."
- A group game, such as "Two Truths and a Lie."

### 4. **Introduce the Topic**

Provide a concise explanation of the circle's purpose and focus. Outline the main theme and invite participants to reflect on its relevance to their roles as guardians.



### III. Facilitating the Dialogue (60–75 Minutes)

#### 1. Pose Open-Ended Questions

Use open-ended questions to encourage reflection and sharing. Examples include:

- "What are some of the joys and challenges you experience as a guardian?"
- "What support systems do you find most helpful?"
- "How do you navigate cultural differences with the child in your care?"

#### 2. Model Active Listening

Demonstrate active listening by paraphrasing, summarizing, and asking clarifying questions.

Encourage participants to adopt these techniques to foster mutual understanding.

#### 3. Respond with Empathy

Validate participants' feelings and experiences. Use phrases like:

- "That sounds really challenging—thank you for sharing."
- "It's clear how much thought you've given to this situation."

#### 4. Navigate Sensitive Discussions

Be prepared to address sensitive topics with empathy and respect. If the conversation becomes too intense, gently redirect or offer resources for additional support.

#### 5. Manage Time Effectively

Keep track of time to ensure everyone has the opportunity to contribute. If needed, guide the conversation back on topic to maintain focus.

### Special Subchapter. Introduce Peer-to-Peer Focused Activities

To maximize the impact of peer-to-peer learning, facilitators can design activities that leverage participants' shared experiences to address common challenges. Detailed examples include<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. Shared Stories

- **Purpose:** Encourage participants to share their experiences and successes, fostering mutual learning and inspiration.
- **How It Works:**

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF (2020) Supporto tra tutori volontari per minori stranieri non accompagnati: il peer to peer: <https://www.datocms-assets.com/30196/1607940514-unicefpeer-to-peerita.pdf>

- Begin by inviting volunteers to share a specific moment when they overcame a challenge as a guardian.
- Guide participants to reflect on what they learned from these experiences and how those lessons could apply to others.
- Use prompts such as:
  - "Can you share a moment when you felt you made a difference in a child's life?"
  - "What strategies have you used to overcome cultural or language barriers?"
- **Impact:** This activity helps participants feel valued and builds confidence by highlighting their successes.

## 2. Problem-Solving Groups

- **Purpose:** Encourage collaboration and practical problem-solving among participants.
- **How It Works:**
  - Divide participants into small groups and present a real-life scenario related to guardianship (e.g., managing a child's emotional distress or resolving cultural misunderstandings).
  - Ask each group to brainstorm solutions and share their strategies with the larger group.
  - Provide facilitators with a guide to offer additional resources or perspectives as needed.
- **Impact:** This activity fosters teamwork and equips participants with actionable strategies for their roles as guardians.

## 3. Role Reversals

- **Purpose:** Build empathy and deepen understanding by allowing participants to step into different roles.
- **How It Works:**
  - Assign participants to act out scenarios where they alternate roles between a guardian, a child, or a facilitator.

- Use guided scenarios such as:
  - A guardian helping a child adapt to a new cultural environment.
  - A facilitator guiding a group discussion on a sensitive topic.
- After each role-play, discuss the challenges and insights gained from each perspective.
  - **Impact:** This activity enhances empathy, improves communication skills, and helps participants better understand the dynamics of their roles.

### **Post-Circle Engagement**

#### **Create Peer-Led Subgroups and Follow-Ups**

- Encourage the formation of smaller, peer-led subgroups that continue discussions between sessions.
- Provide resources or platforms, such as messaging groups or online forums, to facilitate ongoing communication and support.
- Plan periodic follow-up meetings to check on participants' progress, share new insights, and strengthen peer-to-peer connections

## **IV. Closing the Circle (10–15 Minutes)**

### **1. Summarize Key Themes**

Briefly recap the main points discussed during the session to provide closure and reinforce shared insights.

### **2. Express Gratitude**

Thank participants for their openness and contributions, acknowledging the courage it takes to share personal experiences.

### **3. Facilitate a Closing Activity**

Choose a meaningful activity to conclude the session, such as:

- A group reflection: "What is one thing you're taking away from today?"
- A moment of silence or a collective expression of gratitude.

### **4. Provide Follow-Up Information**



Share details about relevant resources and support services. Offer information about future listening circles or other initiatives to keep participants engaged.

**Suggested Phrases:**

- "As we close, is there a thought or feeling you'd like to take away?"
- "Thank you for your courage and trust. Each voice here has added value to our circle."

## V. Post-Circle Reflection

**1. Evaluate the Circle**

Reflect on the effectiveness of the session. Consider what went well and identify areas for improvement.

**2. Incorporate Participant Feedback**

Gather feedback from participants through informal discussions or anonymous surveys. Use their input to refine future listening circles.

**3. Engage in Self-Care**

As a facilitator, take time to process your own emotions and experiences from the session. Engage in activities that help you recharge, such as mindfulness or journaling.

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## Annex I - Participant Information Letter

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in joining our Listening Circles. This letter provides important information about the purpose of the Listening Circles, the project under which they are implemented, and how your privacy and data will be managed.

- 1. About the Listening Circles.** Listening Circles are structured group discussions designed to create a safe and supportive environment where participants can share their thoughts, experiences, and emotions. The focus is on fostering mutual understanding, connection, and support among participants. These sessions are facilitated to ensure that everyone feels heard and valued.
- 2. Purpose of the Listening Circles.** The primary objectives of the Listening Circles are to:
  - Provide a safe space for open and respectful dialogue.
  - Facilitate emotional support and shared learning among participants.
  - Enhance understanding and community building.
  - Support participants in addressing challenges and exploring strategies for personal and professional growth.
- 3. About the Project.** These Listening Circles are part of the GUIDE Project, funded under the AMIF (Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund) program. The project's aim is to support guardians of unaccompanied children by offering tailored resources, training, and safe platforms for dialogue. The Listening Circles are a core activity of this initiative, designed to empower participants and improve their caregiving capacities.
- 4. Privacy and Confidentiality.** Your privacy and the confidentiality of your shared experiences are of utmost importance to us. Below are the key measures in place to protect your personal data:
  - **Confidentiality:** What is shared in the Circle stays within the Circle, except in cases where disclosure is legally required (e.g., safeguarding concerns).

- **Anonymity:** Any session notes or summaries will be anonymized to ensure participants cannot be identified.
  - **Data Handling:** Personal data collected during registration, including **name, surname, gender, and email**, will only be used for purposes directly related to the **Listening Circles and the GUIDE Project**. All data will be handled with strict confidentiality, ensuring compliance with privacy regulations and ethical guidelines.
  - **Data Security:** All personal data is securely stored and accessible only to authorized personnel.
5. **Your Rights as a Participant.** You have the following rights concerning your personal data:
- Access, correction, or deletion of your data.
  - Restriction or objection to certain types of data processing.
  - Withdrawal of your consent at any time.

To exercise these rights or for any inquiries, please contact us at:

- Email: [Email Address]

- Phone: [Phone Number]

6. **Safeguarding and Legal Obligations** Please note that in cases where safeguarding concerns arise, we may be required to share certain information with appropriate authorities to ensure the safety and well-being of individuals.

**7. Contact Information** For additional information or support, feel free to reach out:

- Facilitating Organization: [Name]

- Project Contact: [Name or Title]

- Address: [Address]

- Email: [Email Address]

- Phone: [Phone Number]





We are committed to creating a meaningful and respectful environment for all participants. Your participation is invaluable in achieving the goals of the GUIDE Project, and we look forward to your contributions in the Listening Circles.

Thank you for being part of this important initiative.

Warm regards,

[Facilitator's Name]

[Role/Title]

[Organization Name]

## Annex II: Note-Taker Form

### Listening Circle Session Details

- Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Time: \_\_\_\_\_
- Location/Platform: \_\_\_\_\_
- Facilitator(s): \_\_\_\_\_
- Note-Taker: \_\_\_\_\_

### Session Overview

- Total Participants: \_\_\_\_\_
- General Atmosphere (e.g., engaged, hesitant, emotional, relaxed): \_\_\_\_\_
- Key Themes Discussed:

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### Summary of Participant Contributions (*Ensure anonymity by summarizing key insights rather than direct quotes*)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Challenges or Sensitive Issues Raised

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Notable Emotional Reactions (*e.g., signs of distress, high engagement, positive responses*)

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Follow-Up Actions & Resources Shared

- GUIDE Service Maps referrals:  Yes  No

○ If yes, specify: \_\_\_\_\_

- **Other Support Resources Provided (e.g., counseling, legal aid):** \_\_\_\_\_
  - **Suggested Topics for Future Sessions:**
- 

### Facilitator & Note-Taker Reflections

*(Any observations on group dynamics, effectiveness of facilitation, and suggestions for improvement.)*

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Confidentiality & Data Protection

Personal data is anonymized in this report.

This form will be securely stored and used only for the purposes of the GUIDE Project.

**Signature of Note-Taker:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Facilitator:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_