



St Luke's
Innovative
Resources

w: innovativeresources.org

STRENGTHS IN CIRCLES

42 DIGITAL CARDS FOR BUILDING GROUPS
THAT FLOURISH AND FLY

By Sue Roffey and Russell Deal

DIGITAL BOOKLET

Adapted by Karen Bedford

WELCOME TO THE DIGITAL VERSION OF STRENGTHS IN CIRCLES!

Strengths in Circles is an invaluable resource for creating strengths-based guidelines for groups or teams. Each of the 42 digital cards is a reminder of behaviours that foster genuine collaboration, fairness, safety, respect, honest communication and inclusion. They are building blocks for putting Circles work into practice—in schools, organisations and communities.

First published (and still available) as a hard copy card set packaged in a polypropylene box, this set of 42 cards is now available in this interactive, user-friendly, digital version.

Each of the 42 digital cards is a reminder of behaviours that foster genuine collaboration, fairness, safety, respect, honest communication and inclusion.



You can:

- swipe through the 42 digital cards, one at a time
- swipe through a row of thumbnail images at the bottom of the screen
- bookmark/tag images
- add and drag notes anywhere on the images
- write, scribble or draw on the digital cards—you may want to circle a relevant statement or scribble notes as a card is discussed
- highlight, draw and write in multiple colours
- take a screen shot and access the image in your photo gallery (you can't print directly from the digital images).

WHAT IS 'CIRCLES' WORK?

A Circles approach to working with groups aims to maximise participation by creating safe spaces for participants to talk honestly and listen respectfully. When Circles are working well everyone in the group participates, learns and finds solutions collaboratively.

Co-author of this resource, Sue Roffey, has developed 'Circle Solutions'—a philosophy and pedagogy to help ensure that Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) happens in a safe space. Participants think and talk together about issues not incidents. Very little takes place with individuals; activities are almost all in pairs, small groups or the whole circle. Discussions often use the third person and no one is expected to disclose personal information unless they choose to do so. No one is put on the spot where a response is demanded and all participants are given multiple opportunities to contribute. Many Circles activities are based on games, promoting positive connections with others and opportunities to solve whole class issues from a constructive and solution-focused perspective.

Circles practitioners believe that this is a more effective way of promoting pro-social behaviour than 'anti-bullying' strategies as it gives responsibility to everyone for the emotional climate of their class. Circles grow 'solutionaries'—people with answers to things that matter.

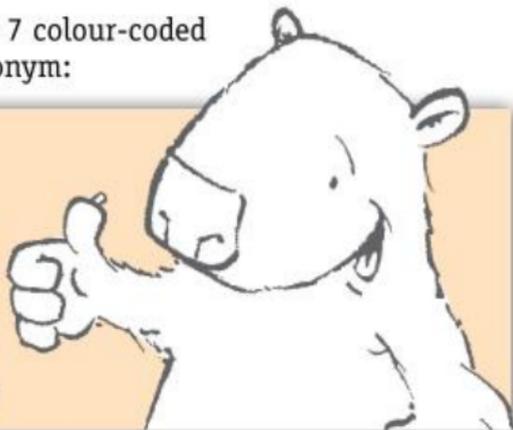
WHO IS THIS RESOURCE FOR?

This resource is for teachers and schools who are running Circles in their classrooms and in other parts of school life. It is also for group facilitators, trainers, managers, human service workers, team leaders, community groups, sporting clubs and anyone who works or plays in groups or teams. It can also be used to support Circles work in restorative justice programs, in mediation, within Indigenous communities and in a diverse array of group facilitation processes. More recently this resource has been used in family violence programs to build conversations about what constitutes respectful behaviour. *Strengths in Circles* aims to maximise full participation in finding solutions and making decisions that are respectful, strengths-based and optimistic.

HOW MANY CARDS ARE IN THE DIGITAL SET AND HOW ARE THEY ARRANGED?

The 42 cards are arranged into 7 colour-coded suits based on the ASPIRE acronym:

- A**GENCY (green)
- S**AFETY (red)
- P**OSITIVITY (yellow)
- I**NCLUSION (pink)
- R**ESPECT (brown)
- E**QUITY (orange)



Each suit contains 7 cards featuring a statement beginning with 'We'. This statement describes behaviours a Circle group values and aspires to, for example, 'We look out for each other' or 'We challenge stereotypes'.

WHAT SHOULD I CONSIDER BEFORE USING THIS RESOURCE WITH OTHERS?

People bring their previous experiences of groups with them, consciously or unconsciously. They may also be sitting with emotions (and quite possibly trauma) from other events in their lives. Sometimes, there are pre-existing interpersonal dynamics between group members that bring added tension to the mix. People also have differing levels of confidence and comfort in expressing their opinions, suggestions or feedback. For these and many other reasons, conversations in groups can take unexpected pathways.

As with all resources, please consider how you will support people's safety if sensitive topics or strong emotions arise. It is useful to consider such things as the timing, the setting, literacy levels, cultural relevance and privacy. It is important that everybody has a chance to be heard but that nobody feels 'pressured' to speak if they do not wish to. Please see our free video called 'Tips for Creating Safe Conversations in Groups' on our website:

www.innovativeresources.org

HOW DO I USE THE DIGITAL CARDS?

There are countless ways to explore the ASPIRE principles and the concepts on each of the 42 digital cards. This exploration can take place in many settings including small groups and pairs who then report their findings to the whole Circle. This can be done in a wide variety of creative ways including using sentence starters where each member of the small group or pair is asked to complete a sentence. Alternatively, one person can be nominated to feed back to the whole group, or post-it-notes can be placed on the wall for others to read, or people can use the scribble tool to write directly on the digital cards.

It is a good idea when creating Circle conversations in a classroom or within a team, to mix people up so they talk with others from outside their usual social circles or tight friendships, giving fresh perspectives each time.

In this section you will find many ideas for using the digital cards. We hope they will spark your imagination for many more.

Often a logical (yet optional) place to start is to give the group some time to get to know the cards:

- The facilitator can project the images onto a screen and scroll through so everyone can see. Or the group can scroll through together.
- Point out the suits that make up the ASPIRE acronym, together with their signature colours.
- Discuss the meaning of the word ASPIRE, and the meaning of each of the suit names. Does everyone know what 'Agency' means, for example?
- Scroll through the 7 cards in each suit
- Point out the thumbnails at the bottom
- Show them some of the features such as the scribble and text tools.

There is no need to take too long for the group to 'get to know' the cards, because in using them this learning will happen naturally. For this reason, many facilitators choose to simply dive in with either a deliberate or random selection method of choosing cards. The facilitator can then follow with a range of questions to get the conversation and reflection rolling.



DELIBERATE SELECTION

- As you scroll through the cards, invite participants to work in pairs to pick cards that jump out at them for any reason. Perhaps it is the suit or the statement that catches their attention, or even the little wombat characters.

RANDOM SELECTION

An alternate way of getting activities started is to select images randomly, for example:

- Ask each participant to randomly select a number from 1—42 (there are 42 cards). The facilitator or participants can then swipe through the images, counting each image as they go. Stop at each image that corresponds with each participant's random number.
- Or you can ask each person, in turn, to close their eyes (or turn their back) and randomly say, 'Stop!' as the facilitator swipes through the images.
- Or use the timer on your phone set to a chosen interval—5 seconds, 10 seconds, etc. Stop on the image that is on screen when the timer dings.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION

Whether you use a deliberate or random selection method, you can then build the conversation by asking each person to read the statement on their card aloud. (Please take care; it may be inappropriate to ask a person to read aloud due to literacy, language, speech or anxiety issues.) Facilitators can then ask pairs or groups to discuss questions such as:

- What does this card mean to you?
- Have you thought about the topic on the card in relation to groups before?
- On a scale of 1-10 how important do you think your card is in a group?
- Can you think of a time when this card was particularly relevant to a group, community or team you were/are part of?
What happened?
- Is the behaviour featured on this card something you find easy or challenging to do when you are in a group?
- When this behaviour is happening in a group, what is the effect?

Whether you use a deliberate or random selection method, you can then build the conversation by asking each person to read the statement on their card aloud.

- When this behaviour is not happening, what is the effect on everyone?
- What gets in the way of groups doing this behaviour well?
- How important do you think this behaviour is/will be for this group?
- Do you know anyone who is really good at doing this behaviour?
- What do they do?
- What is one simple thing you could do today or tomorrow to do this as well?
- How will you notice the effects? (Some people ask for feedback, and others prefer to notice carefully how it feels inside themselves and what the effect is on others.)

STRENGTHS-BASED GUIDELINES AND REMINDERS

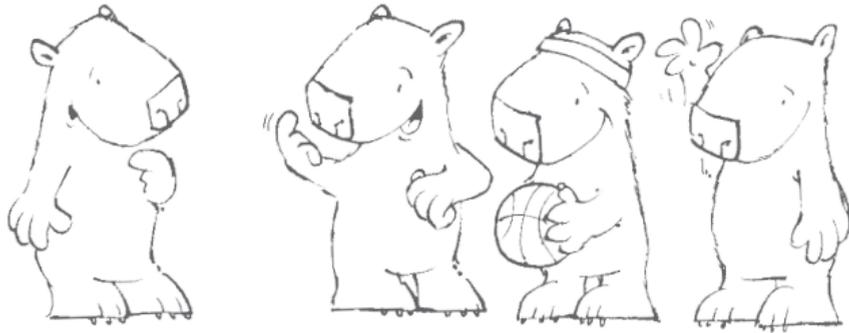
Strengths in Circles is a wonderful tool for establishing 'behavioural agreements' or guidelines within a group or team. When the whole group participates in developing its guidelines together, there is a collective commitment to a set of parameters that will help keep the conversation on course. These agreements create an important foundation for the group to work in a cohesive and respectful way. They become the standard of behaviour to which the group agrees to hold itself accountable.

For this reason, Circles may find it very useful to discuss some, or all, of the cards right at the beginning when the group is being established. You could record these group guidelines on a whiteboard, sheet of paper, sticky notes or electronically. It is valuable for people to work in small groups first and then feed back to the larger group. Here are some possible activities:

- Think of a group you have been part of that worked well. One in which everyone felt safe, respected and included. (Or imagine that experience in a group.)
- What do you think helped to create that great experience for everyone?
- Was there a particular person who demonstrated or exemplified those values?
- In what situations do you find it easiest to live out those values?
- What is already happening in your class/school/community group/family that you could build on even more?
- Which additional cards do you think would make the most positive difference in your group, team, or class now?
- Either in pairs or as a whole group, select 1-2 cards from each suit that you think are crucial to this group's safety and success.
- Can the group use these to identify its guidelines?
- Do you want to word your guidelines differently to the statements on the cards?
- Is anything important missing? Is there another guideline that needs to be included?
- Will someone agree to type these up and distribute them, or stick them up on a wall or noticeboard?

One of the key tenants of strengths-based, solution-focused practice is that it focusses on strengths and where the group is heading, rather than focusing on deficits and getting stuck in problems. With this in mind, returning to the guidelines regularly helps keep the focus on what the group aspires to most:

- Will you agree right from the beginning to pause the activity of the group at regular intervals to reorient the group to its guidelines? If so, how often?



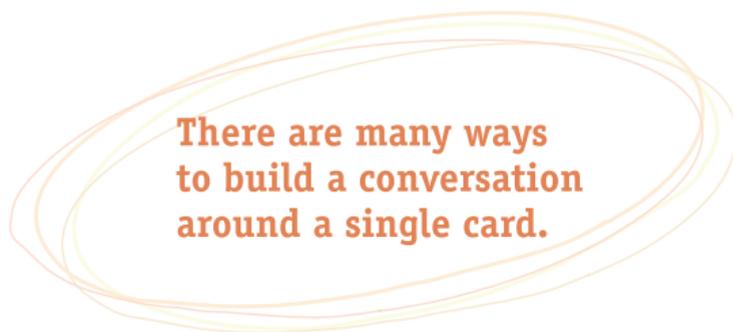
- Will you build this into every meeting of the group? For example, at the start of each session one card or ASPIRE suit could be chosen and briefly discussed to provide a reminder of the group's values and agreements.
- Perhaps a different participant each meeting can choose a card to highlight?
- How will the group return to the guidelines if someone in the group feels unsafe or that something has gone astray?
- How will someone raise this and what will the group agree to do in response?

In these ways, the cards can provide a group ritual or container that helps keep the agreed Circles values at the forefront of participants' thinking.

FOCUSSING ON A SINGLE CARD

There are many ways to build a conversation around a single card. The card may be chosen by the facilitator, a participant or the whole group based on which concept they think is most relevant to the group at this time. (If this is set up at the formation of the group as something that will happen, it is less likely that someone will perceive this as a 'message' directed at them.) If the card from the Respect suit, 'We do not put anyone down' is chosen, useful questions for the group to discuss might include:

- What do you think constitutes a 'put down'?
- Why do you think 'no put downs' is one of the guidelines for Circles?
- When might an attempt at humour be experienced as derogatory?
- How might someone feel if they are subject to a put down?
- What do you think the consequences of a put down might be? In the short-term? In the long-term?
- Who should decide if something is a put down?
- What is your responsibility if you hear a put down that is directed at you?



**There are many ways
to build a conversation
around a single card.**

- What if it is directed at someone else?
- What options do you have in responding?
- Can you think of an example of someone who has responded to a put down very appropriately?
- What is the opposite of a put down?

If put downs are an important issue for the group, sufficient time needs to be allocated to the conversation so that all viewpoints can be explored.

A further example might be the card 'We share what we have' from the Equity suit:

- What are the benefits of sharing?
- What might be shared in a classroom?
- What might be shared in a relationship?
- Are there times when sharing is not a good idea? (When someone has food allergies, for instance.)
- What does it feel like to share with others?
- What does it feel like when others are generous?
- What are your responsibilities if someone shares with you?

FOCUSSING ON A SINGLE SUIT

Many activities can also be built around a single suit. For example, each person can select one of the seven cards in that suit, pair up with another group member, research and report back on that concept. Research topics could include:

- Find a series of quotes with a key word from your card in them
- Find dictionary definitions of key words in your card

- Find synonyms and antonyms for key words on your card
- Find song titles or book titles with key words from your card
- Tell/write an anecdote from your own experience where you learnt something about the concept on your card.

CREATING ACRONYM POEMS

These simple yet meaningful poems can be created by writing down related words or phrases beginning with each letter of an ASPIRE principle. For instance, RESPECT could be:

Reaching out

Empathy

Sincerity

Practising kindness

Engaging with interest

Collaboration

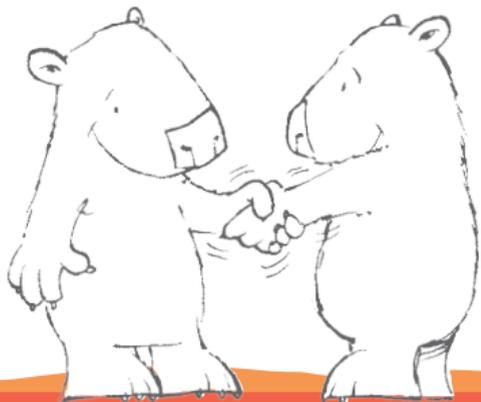
Trust.



EXPLORING WITH 'Y' CHARTS

In pairs, students choose a card and the focus of the activity is 'What would you see, feel and hear if this was happening?' A context is chosen—in your class, in your school, in your family, in your community, at your place of work.

- Students place a word or phrase in the centre of the Y and for each spur of the Y, the pair discusses and writes down what they think they would see, hear and imagine people would be feeling if this was happening.



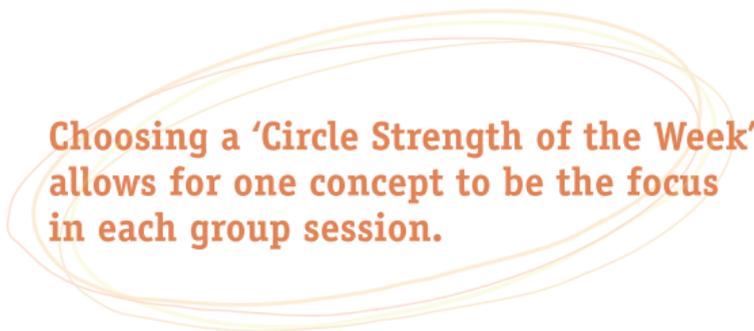
- Sometimes the Y chart becomes an X chart with the extra spur relating to what people might be thinking if this was happening.
- You might also like to invite participants to discuss what they would see, hear, feel and think if this was NOT happening. The comparison can be powerful and remind people why they would choose to promote this.
- What would you notice if this concept walked into your classroom? What would be different? This is a similar activity to the one above, but adds a different dimension.
- Create a collage that represents the words on the card.
- Form a group statue that demonstrates what the card means. This, of course, entails a good deal of discussion in the group.
- Create a collaborative story, poem or cartoon that illustrates the value of this statement.
- Create debates on what this means for individuals, schools, communities, families and society in general.

CIRCLE STRENGTH OF THE WEEK

Some of the concepts and words in *Strengths in Circles* are quite sophisticated and complex (even for adults!). However, with simple explanations and fun activities these concepts can be readily understood by most children—even very young ones. Most children have an innate sense of what is fair, and they (like anyone) feel very deeply the injustices and exclusions that occur in their own lives, whether at home or at school. Inviting them to put themselves in others' shoes is an essential part of developing empathy and caring for the feelings of others. Choosing a 'Circle Strength of the Week' allows for one concept to be the focus in each group session. In pairs, participants can be invited to:

- provide, in their own words, a definition of what the concept means
- give examples of when they have seen people they know putting that concept into practice
- notice throughout the day when this concept is being practised well in the classroom (or there can be a discussion at the end of the day)

- use the wombat characters from the cards as examples to draw their own pictures of wombats (or other characters) enacting the various concepts on the cards.
- post their drawings on a wall or draw them directly into a 'Circles Journal'. A Circles Journal can be made by a group, a pair or by each child individually to chart the meaning and significance of their experience in the circle group. It might include some writing, drawing, painting, collage, stickers, colouring-in or other paper-based activities.



Choosing a 'Circle Strength of the Week' allows for one concept to be the focus in each group session.

BALL OF WOOL

Choose the card 'We are all unique' from the Respect suit:

- Using numbered pegs, each student picks a peg from the bucket.
- Number 1 starts with a ball of wool and passes to Number 2.
As they do this, they identify something they have in common.
- Continue until everyone has had a turn and the wool is passed back to Number 1.
- Highlight the strengths of the group that reside in their similarities.
- Then highlight the additional strengths of the group that reside in their differences.
- Invite students to have a conversation with the person they passed the wool to and find two differences between them (for example, interests/food).
- Repeat passing the wool activity, this time sharing differences to link the group.

TALKING STICK

Choose the card 'We are kind in what we say and do' from the Safety suit:

- Using a talking stick, invite each student to complete the sentence 'Someone is kind when ...'
- Using the ideas generated by the group, play 'Swap places if you have seen someone in our class ...'
- Invite students to be on the look-out for these kinds of behaviours over the next week (in other lessons, in the playground, between classes).
- In future lessons, invite students to give examples of the kindness behaviours they have been noticing.
- Create a visual display, for example, a kindness wall.

GRATITUDE ACTIVITY

This activity can work well with even very young students. Choose the card 'We show gratitude' from the Positivity suit:

- Everyone is asked to talk in pairs about things that others do for them that they might be thankful for.
- What do people at home (parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, others) do?
- What do people at school (teachers, cleaners, those in the office, others) do?
- What do people in the community (shopkeepers, bus drivers, others) do?
- What do other students in this class do?
- What are the different ways of showing gratitude to someone?
- Mix everyone up so that they are next to someone different. Going round the Circle, each person turns to the person on their right and finishes this sentence stem: 'I would like to thank you for...' Give students a moment or two to think of something to say. If they get lost for words ask others in the Circle to help out with ideas.
- Other gratitude activities can be thank you letters from the class to the person who cleans the classroom or to the person who takes care of the school yard.



THE COMPLETE ARRAY OF CARDS

There are 42 cards in the *Strengths in Circles* set. These are arranged in 6 suits based on the ASPIRE acronym, with 7 cards per suit. Here is the full set of cards.



AGENCY

1. We can change
2. We give things a go
3. We make a difference
4. We look for our own solutions
5. We think things through
6. We use our strengths
7. We have choices



SAFETY

1. We are kind in what we say and do
2. We build trust with each other
3. We look out for each other
4. We can get help
5. We forgive each other
6. We are reliable and honest
7. We learn from our mistakes



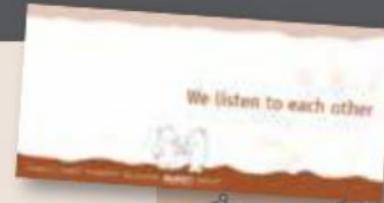
POSITIVITY

1. We notice what we have achieved
2. We laugh together
3. We are optimistic
4. We celebrate together
5. We show gratitude
6. We want the best for each other
7. We explore possibilities



RESPECT

1. We listen to each other
2. We value differences
3. We are all unique
4. We hear each other's stories
5. We do not put anyone down
6. We give and receive feedback respectfully
7. We show interest in each other



INCLUSION

1. We believe everyone has something to offer
2. We welcome everyone
3. We invite contributions
4. We work with everyone
5. We accept each other
6. We have goodwill towards each other
7. We challenge stereotypes



EQUITY

1. We stand up for what is fair
2. We are equals
3. We each have a voice
4. We are strong together
5. We share what we have
6. We can all participate
7. We all have rights and responsibilities





62 Collins Street Kangaroo Flat
Victoria 3555 Australia
p: + 61 3 5446 0500 f: +61 3 5447 2099
e: info@innovativeresources.org
w: innovativeresources.org

ABN: 97 397 067 466
Anglicare Victoria trading as St Luke's Innovative Resources

First published as a card set in 2015. Digital version published in 2020.

© St Luke's Innovative Resources & Sue Roffey 2020

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise), without the prior written permission of the publisher.

ISBN: 978-1-925657-20-3

Editor: Karen Bedford
Designer: Mat Jones

St Luke's Innovative Resources is a not-for-profit publisher.
All sales support the services of Anglicare Victoria.

STRENGTHS CIRCLES

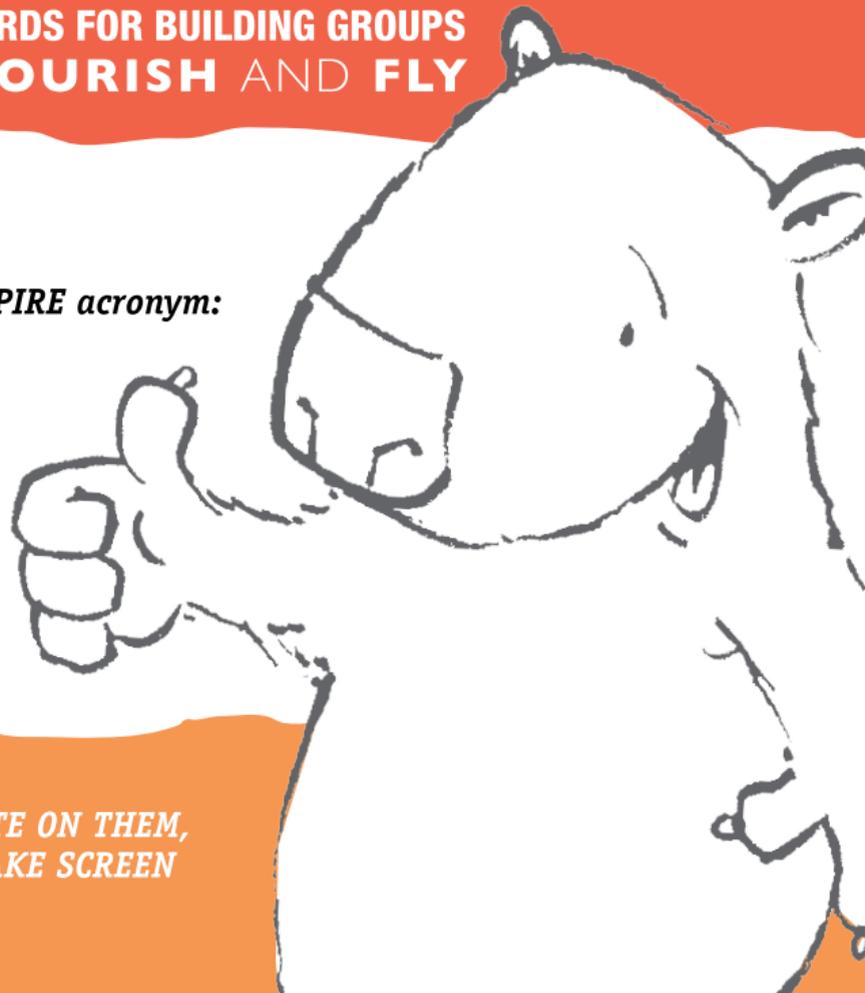
42 DIGITAL CARDS FOR BUILDING GROUPS
THAT FLOURISH AND FLY

NOW AVAILABLE DIGITALLY!

Discover what many Indigenous communities have known forever: sitting in a circle with others and establishing simple, respectful guidelines for communicating might just be the most useful solution-finding technique ever invented! The Circles approach to groups and teams is safe, respectful, democratic, inclusive and strengths-based. Each *Strengths in Circles* card contains a building block for putting Circles into practice—in schools, teams, organisations and communities.

Based on the ASPIRE acronym:

AGENCY
SAFETY
POSITIVITY
INCLUSION
RESPECT
EQUITY



***SWIPE THROUGH THE 42 DIGITAL CARDS—WRITE ON THEM,
DRAW ON THEM, HIGHLIGHT AND TAG THEM, TAKE SCREEN
SHOTS AND SAVE THEM IN YOUR GALLERY.***



w: innovativeresources.org