

## SESSION THREE

# My Family *Gakina Indinawemaaganag*

### SUMMARY:

In this session, we are going to explore ways in which a talking circle can bring family members together to learn, discuss, and make decisions in a way that helps each member of the family communicate their thoughts and concerns. Together, we will review effective strategies for communicating in respectful and positive ways. Participants will hold a practice talking circle to promote traditional values of cooperation.

### SESSION OVERVIEW

- **FAMILY: Group Activity**  
Talking Circle Etiquette  
Traditional Family Story  
Practice Family Talking Circle
- **YOUTH: Individual Activity**  
Family Portrait
- **PARENT: Individual & Group Activity**  
Skills for Living

### OBJECTIVES

**By the end of the session, we hope participants will:**

1. Know what it means to "listen from the heart."
2. Understand how to conduct a talking circle with their family.
3. Know the Four Sacred Plants and what they are used for.
4. Understand how to use "I statements" when communicating with others.

### MATERIALS:

- Extra Talking Circle Symbols
- \_\_\_\_\_

### PREPARATION CHECKLIST:

- Before the session starts, ask the Guest Elder to review the Traditional Anishinabe Family story on **page 11** of the Adult Workbook.
- Gather extra talking circle symbols for the session.  
Symbols can include traditional items like a feather, pipe, or stone.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## As the Families Arrive

**15 min**



Welcome each family as they arrive. Ask any new family members to fill out a name tag and put them on. If the adult who attended last week is not in attendance, they can use the lanyard from the family folder. Give each returning family their workbooks and lanyards as they check in. Have all participants sign the "Session Sign In and Photo Consent" form. Ask the kids to put a sticker on the family Attendance Chart. Hand out an attendance raffle ticket to each child as they sign in. Write their name on the ticket we keep and put it into the Raffle Jar.

*While we are waiting for all the families to arrive, kids can take a few minutes and look at the pages in the back of your workbook – we are building pages for the scrapbook we will make in Session 13, so if you want to use crayons or colored pencils, you can work on some of those activities.*

## Meal

**30 min**

Once all of the families have arrived, introduce the Guest Elder to the group and thank them for attending. Present tobacco (asemaa) to the Guest Elder and invite him/her to perform an opening prayer and a blessing of the food. After the prayer is complete, let families know where plates, silverware, and beverages may be found and where the garbage cans are located. Remind families to throw away their items and clean up their area after the meal.

Mingle with the families during the meal. Please spread out and sit with the families. After people have finished eating, make sure that the area is cleaned up, and ask others to help if necessary. Set aside any leftover food and redirect the group to their seats.

## Welcome

**15 min**

Introduce yourself to the group, if needed. Welcome families to the session. Reinforce to the families how important their participation is.

*We are happy to have you here for another session. If this is your first session with us, we are excited to have you here and look forward to getting to know one another better over the course of the program.*

Ask if there are any questions from last session or if any of the youth want to share what word their family chose for their picture homework. Ask how the Take Home Activity for last session went.

*Did everyone bring their special symbols to tonight's session?  
Would anyone like to share what their family chose for their symbol and why?*



Give raffle tickets to the youth who completed their Take Home Activity. Write their name on the ticket we keep and put it into the Raffle Jar.

## Talking Circle Discussion

25 min

Ask families about their prior experiences with using talking circles.

*After we review more about what a talking circle is, we will focus on how this traditional activity can be used to hold family meetings and increase positive communication among family members. If some of you already use talking circles, this may be a review.*

*The circle represents a continuing cycle of Anishinabe life. The talking circle is a time to share and be respectful to others by listening with all of our senses. Eyes are windows to the soul and can communicate our feelings. Our eyes also help us observe how others are feeling. Our ears, of course, are used to listen to what others are saying. Our nose is used to smell the aromas around us including sage, sweet grass, cedar, and tobacco (asemaa) the four sacred plants of the Anishinabe people. Touch is used when someone may need a hug. Lastly, our sense of taste may also be used when a meal is shared with our loved ones.*

*Our Elders remind us that we communicate on several different levels. Parents who listen with their hearts can "hear" what a child is feeling as well as what the child is saying. Also, when parents listen with their hearts, children feel respected. This behavior is something we can model for our children. It is important for them to learn to listen to their parents and other family members with their hearts.*

*The talking circle is said to have originated as a form of legal process and eventually spread to our communities where people got together for face-to-face discussions when they wanted to address issues, increase unity and harmony, teach in a nurturing way, and engage in a circle of healing. The family talking circle can be used as a family meeting based on these principles. Family members can come together with a purpose to share information, give encouragement, make plans and solve problems.*

*There are many advantages to this style of family meeting. For example, adults get an opportunity to teach children the value of sharing thoughts, feelings, concerns, and communicating in respectful ways. Children gain an understanding that what they have to say is valued, and to value what others have to share. Each person also has an opportunity to have the entire family's undivided attention while they speak.*

*What have been your experiences with talking circles in the past? Has anyone incorporated traditional activities into talking circles, maybe offering tobacco (asemaa) or smudging?*

Have families turn to the "**Talking Circle Guidelines**" pages in their Workbooks (**page 10** for youth and **page 10** for parents). This page lists six essential features of a successful family talking circle which will be assigned as a Take Home Activity. Remind families they may want to change or add things that meet their family's needs. Use this time to review the features of a talking circle.

**1. Plan the circle together, with a fun activity afterwards.** *Children and adults can plan the meeting together and decide on a fun activity afterwards. An activity does not have to cost much or take up a lot of time. It could include a favorite snack or game. Consider special needs and interests of family members to build into activities.*

**2. Select a time that is convenient for all.** *If people are feeling rushed they probably won't be very responsive.*

**3. Create an agenda for topics to be addressed.** *You may want to have a pad of paper or memo board set up so that family members can write down topics that they want to bring up at a family meeting. This list then becomes part of the talking circle agenda.*

**4. Choose a facilitator each week.** *The facilitator's role is to help the group follow the guidelines that the family sets up for its talking circle. They might give a signal when someone needs to be reminded of a rule. Remember to rotate the facilitator.*

**5. Elect a note taker each week.** *Taking just a few notes will help keep track of important information and decisions. Even children too young to write could draw pictures.*

**6. Establish talking circle guidelines for your family.** *There are some basic guidelines that are followed in all talking circles, such as every person has an opportunity to speak and it's your turn to speak when you are holding the special symbol. Your family may wish to add other rules to your talking circle.*

Continue going over the talking circle guidelines on the worksheet.

*Let's continue going over the talking circle guidelines on the worksheet.*

**Every person has the opportunity to speak.** *It is important that every person has the opportunity to say what is on their mind and be heard during the talking circle.*

**It is your turn to speak when you are holding the special symbol.** *Use "I" statements. Often using "you" statements can cause negative reactions. Instead, talk about your own thoughts and feelings by saying, "I feel....."*

**Others must listen to the speaker holding the symbol.** *Be an active listener. Part of your family's talking circle rules may allow a different person to bring a special symbol to each meeting of the circle. Some traditional symbols include a feather, a pipe, a talking stick, or a stone.*

**Each person has the right to be respected.** *Listen and do not be judgmental. This is not the time for personal conflicts. Of course family problems should be discussed, but issues that single out one family member or that might embarrass or threaten others should be avoided. It is best to use sincere comments and avoid sarcasm.*

**Everyone may share their own thoughts and feelings about each topic.** *When others disagree with us, it's a bit natural to feel defensive, even if the other person's intentions are not to hurt us. Unfortunately, reacting defensively can interfere with sharing and learning. If we feel defensive about what another person is saying, we probably should make an extra effort to focus on showing our understanding of the person talking and giving information when asked.*

**Family decisions are made by consensus. Except some decisions are reserved for parents and caretakers.** As often as possible, follow the "group conscience" model. Decisions need discussion. Decisions should be based on reason and understanding. If adults always issue commands, children won't get a chance to learn how to solve problems. There are exceptions to consensus or majority rule. Because of their role as providers and caretakers, parents need to take responsibility for some decisions. Still, children deserve explanations for these decisions, too.

**Use one, some, or all of the four sacred plants before and/or after each talking circle.** Families may agree to offer tobacco (asemaa) together before or after the talking circle; to smudge with cedar, sweet grass, or sage before the talking circle to purify the participants and the home; and possibly deciding to start the talking circle with a prayer. You can make it as traditional or as informal as you wish.

**Your family may want to add other rules for your family talking circles.** It is best if the rules don't conflict with common talking circle guiding principles. Can you think of other possible rules? One example might be that the family meeting will end with a group hug.

Give families time to talk about what other rules they might want to add to their family's talking circle guidelines.



## **Family Activity: Traditional Family Story**

**10 min**

Introduce the family talking circle activity and explain what we would like each of the families to do.

*We want you to take this opportunity to practice using the family talking circle format. Please move your chairs to form a circle and everyone facing inside. So that everyone can see someone else directly in front of you. Please turn to **page 11** in your Youth Workbooks and **page 11** in the Adult Workbooks for "**The Traditional Anishinabe Family**" story. Please follow along while we read the story and then we will have a short family talking circle to discuss how tradition can be used in our lives.*

*A long time ago, our family's goal was to live by Minobimaadiziwin, the good way of life. We followed many family rituals that promoted harmony and balance within our families and the world around us. Our families not only included our moms, dads, and the aabinoojii (the child) but also our grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and other extended relatives. We all lived closely and formed a strong bond with each other.*

*From the time of conception of the aabinoojii, the entire family was affected. The female relatives helped the mother prepare for the birth and the life of her child, and the male relatives helped the father prepare. It was also believed that when the mother is pregnant, so is the father. Therefore, the father was to conduct himself as if he were carrying a child.*

*The aabinoojii is believed to be a gift or a loan from the creator and therefore should be*

*treated with much love and respect. We are all gifts of the creator, Gizhe Manido. From the time of conception, the aabinoojii has a spirit and begins to learn from its parents and the people around him/her. If the aabinoojii is surrounded by love, the baby will be born happy and full of love for those around him/her.*

*The baby was always surrounded by family members. Even in the summer, while picking strawberries, chokecherries, gooseberries, and other types of berries; and in the fall when harvesting corn, squash, and pumpkin beans. The baby was always close by watching his/her family.*

*As aabinoojii got older, the boys would go with their father, uncles, and grandfathers; hunting, trapping, and fishing. Girls would always be with mother, aunts, and grandmothers; cooking, taking care of the young children, and taking care of the camp. This was how boys and girls learned their roles as men and women.*

*As they became adolescents, before their bodies started to change, the boys and girls would go through rituals to signify that they soon would be men and women. A young boy would go on a vision quest and when he had his first kill, usually of a deer, a feast was held in his honor. The meat from his first kill would be given to Elders and other significant people in his life. This taught him the value of giving. A girl would also go through a ritual at the time of her "first moon." This would signify that she was now a woman. (The young woman did not have to go on a vision quest because it was believed that understanding of her being came naturally at the time of her first moon.)*

*The young boys and girls would eventually have families of their own and the cycle of life would continue. All of the rituals and traditions that the traditional Anishinabe family followed helped them live the Minobimaadiziwin.*

## **Family Talking Circle**

**15 min**



After the story is read, the families will hold a talking circle to discuss the ways that tradition operates in their lives. Before they begin, families should decide whether to have a facilitator, note taker, set an agenda, and so forth. Use this time to ask the Guest Elder to smudge the families as they begin their talking circle.

*Thinking about the story we just read, here are some questions that you may use as topics for your sharing in your talking circle:*

- *Do we currently live like the Anishinabe families in the story?*
- *How are our lives different? How are they similar?*
- *Who can we ask to learn about our heritage?*
- *How can we bring tradition back to our lives?*
- *What traditions can we try to practice in our family?*
- *What is the meaning of A Good Way of Life (Minobimaadiziwin)?*



Watch how the discussions are going, answer questions, and offer guidance to those who want it. This may be a good time to take a few pictures for the scrapbooks. Allow the families to practice the talking circle. Make positive comments about involvement of families. When appropriate, make positive suggestions.

## Family Talking Circle Discussion

**10 min**

After the families have had time to share in theirs, ask them to move to a horseshoe seating arrangement for a large group discussion about their talking circle practice session. Write families' key ideas on a whiteboard, chalkboard, or chart tablet where every family member can see the list.

- *Did you select a facilitator? How did you decide?*
- *Did you select a note taker? How did that work?*
- *Did you add any special rules for your talking circle?*
- *What are some topics you might want to focus on within your own family?*

Prompts could include: 1) whether to get a pet, 2) how to get members to different activities on the same night, 3) family member wants to dance at a particular pow-wow, or 4) getting the house ready for company.

## Parent and Youth Breakout Activities - 15 Minutes Total Time

Ask parents to split out into a separate group from their children. Direct them to their individual meetings spaces. Let parents and youth know where they will be moving to and how much time they will be splitting up for, we recommend two adjacent rooms so you can easily check on the other group's progress. One facilitator should be with each group. Ask the Guest Elder to go with the parents for this activity. Adults should move to a different area for the breakout activity.

### YOUTH

#### Youth Journal Activity

**15 min**



Direct youth to **page 12** of their Workbooks and explain the journal activity is "**Family Portrait.**" This would be a great time to take pictures of each child with their drawing for the scrapbooks!

*You are going to draw a picture of yourself with your family. This can be extended family like your Grandmother, Grandfather, Aunts, Uncles, and cousins, or it could be two families. You can also draw yourself and the members of your family who live together. Feel free to include anybody who is important to you, including pets or animals. Make sure you write names under each picture. You can add dialogue bubbles, similar to cartoons, for each person and have them say something about themselves, if you'd like.*

# PARENTS

## Skills for Living Discussion

**15 min**

Lead a discussion about teaching and helping children to develop skills for living. Refer parents to **page 12** of their Workbooks "**Skills for Living.**" Remind parents to be non-judgmental and respectful of others' comments.

*Sometimes we get caught in the day-to-day tasks of being a parent and forget that someday soon our sons and daughters will mature into adults themselves. Take a moment and think about the dreams and ambitions your children have for the future. As parents, it is important for us to help our children develop the skills they need to achieve their goals. We affect the type of people our children will become along the journey into adulthood. What kind of a person do you want your child to be?*

*Children who grow up in two or more cultures need skills from each culture to be successful in daily life. Anishinabe children need to develop survival skills in two major cultures in order to identify with both Native American and non-Native American adults.*

Give parents time to brainstorm some thoughts in their workbooks. Then ask them to talk, share, and reflect on skills for living, and how we can teach our children the values, skills and qualities that will help them have a good way of life as adults.

## Group Gathering

**5 min**

Gather your families back together for the session closing, announcements, and reminders.

## Announcement and Reminders

**5 min**



Remind families to fill out the **Take Home Activity** on "**Talking Circles**" on **page 3** of the youth and **page 4** in the adult **Take Home** booklets.

Ask them to complete the "**My Family Genogram**" **Take Home Activity** on **page 4** in the youth and **page 5** in the adult **Take Home** booklet. Encourage parents to help their child in completing their family genogram.

*We have two take home activities this week. The first is to hold a family talking circle. Pick a simple topic for discussion and try to observe the guidelines we have discussed:*

- *Use the talking circle symbol your family has selected.*
- *Allow everyone to have an opportunity to speak.*
- *Listen respectfully to the person with the talking circle symbol.*
- *If possible, reach consensus as a family on the topic.*

*Also, you will work on your family genogram. We hope you will work on this together. If Elders, Grandparents, or older family members are available you could ask for their help, too. You can fill out your family history as far back as you want and include extended family members by drawing more boxes. You can also write in the siblings of your ancestors if you wish. Try to find out what clan they come from. Tribal enrollment offices*

*may also have family histories on file. This is meant to be fun, not disappointing, so don't feel bad if your family history doesn't go back as far as someone else's.*

Remind families about the "keepsake" scrapbook using materials from throughout the program. Encourage families to take pictures related to this week's topic.

*For this coming week's pictures, bring your favorite pictures from a family reunion or photos from your family doing something with extended family members.*

Remind the youth to bring their take home assignment back next session:

*Remember to bring your **Take Home** booklets back with you next session so you can get the raffle ticket for completing your assignment!*

## **Closing**

**5 min**

Tell the families that you appreciate their participation. You may want to ask a family member or Guest Elder to give a closing prayer before ending.

*I just want to tell you how much we appreciate your participation and how excited we will be to have everyone back here next session.*

*We want to especially thank our Guest Elder (Elder's name) \_\_\_\_\_ for being with us!*

*Please be sure to put your workbooks and lanyards in your family folders.*

*Be sure to get your gift cards and sign your receipts!*

*If you can help straighten up the supplies and the room before you leave, we would really appreciate it.*

As people are preparing to leave, be sure to collect the lanyards and the Parent and Youth Workbooks or ask them to put them in their family folder in the plastic facilitator tote.

Have one adult from each family sign the \$20 visa gift card receipt (purple paper) and give them their gift card envelope. Have each eligible child sign the \$10 visa gift card receipt (blue paper) and give them their gift card envelope. Ask the Guest Elder to sign the \$50 visa gift card receipt (white paper) and give them their gift card envelope. Thank participants for their attendance and participation this week.

Complete the brief one-page 'Weekly Session Evaluation' form for your records. Remember to go online to the online fidelity survey <https://tinyurl.com/bzddddeval> to complete the overall weekly session evaluation BEFORE your next session.

Check to make sure that you have picked up all your supplies before leaving. Be sure that the area is clean and tidy. Check all bathrooms and eating areas to be sure that we aren't leaving any messes behind. Turn off lights and locks doors as directed by the facility.