

NEAFAST Book Group “Circle Way” Guidelines
Me and White Supremacy by Layla F Saad

INTENTION

NEAFAST is creating a year-long book group to take the first steps toward recognizing unconscious racial bias and addressing systemic racism in our personal and professional lives. We will read *Me and White Supremacy* by Layla Saad.

By beginning the journey of self-inquiry of our own white fragility, internal and external biases, and the many forms of privilege we as mental health practitioners experience, we will be better informed about how we can change our own behaviors and take action towards significant structural change in our communities, professional relationships, and the economic and political systems we influence.

We open the space for strengthening relationships with each other, building deeper alignment between other therapists, and learning the Circle Way process - a facilitation style that is central to equity, inclusion, and diversity work.

The first eleven meetings will focus on personal reflections from the journaling work and chapters of the book. The twelfth and final meeting will focus on generating ideas and suggestions to inform NEAFAST's vision and work to build alignment with members and partners committed to dismantling systems of oppression.

3 CIRCLE WAY PRINCIPLES

1. Leadership rotates among all circle members.
2. Responsibility is shared for the quality of experience.
3. Reliance is on wholeness, rather than on any personal agenda.

3 CIRCLE WAY PRACTICES

1. Speak with intention: noting what has relevance to the conversation in the moment.
2. Listen with attention: respectful of the learning process for all members of the group.
3. Tend to the well-being of the circle: remaining aware of the impact of our contributions.

NEAFAST BOOK GROUPS

A total of 12 meetings will be held, each 90 minutes long. Meetings will be scheduled by the group's "host." Facilitation will be by the group's "guardian," a role which will rotate throughout the group as described below.

The Circle Groups designed to accompany *Me and White Supremacy* meet once per month. We will meet twelve times, on the third Friday of each month, from 12-1:30 pm.

February 19: White Privilege and White Fragility
March 19: Tone Policing and White Silence
April 16: White Superiority and White Exceptionalism
May 21: Color-Blindness and Anti-Blackness
June 18: Racist Stereotypes and Cultural Appropriation
July 16: White Apathy and White Centering
August 20: Tokenism and White Saviorism
September 17: Optical Allyship and Being Called Out/In
October 15: Friends and Family
November 19: Losing Privilege
December 17: Values and Your Commitments
January 21 (2022): Review and Conclusion

ROLES

HOST

The group host will schedule the group's meetings and host the Zoom meeting using NEAFAST's Zoom account. They will also communicate any logistical details, and determine who will serve as the guardian for each meeting. For ease of coordination, this role will be filled by Jennifer and Jeremiah.

GUARDIAN

The single most important tool for aiding self-governance and bringing the circle back to intention is the role of guardian. One member volunteers for each meeting so that every member of the group holds the role of guardian once. The guardian's role is to watch and safeguard group energy and observe the circle's process. The guardian usually employs a gentle noisemaker, such as a chime, bell, or rattle, that signals to everyone to stop action, take a breath, rest in a space of silence. The guardian makes this signal again and speaks to why they called the pause. Any member may call for a pause. The guardian also uses this sound signal to help monitor speaking time for equitable dialogue in the agenda.

SETTING THE CENTER

The center of a circle is like the hub of a wheel: all energies pass through it, and it holds the rim together. To help people remember how the hub helps the group, the center of a circle usually holds objects that represent the intention of the circle. Any symbol that fits this purpose or adds beauty will serve: flowers, a bowl or basket, a candle.

This may be tricky given that we are using virtual technology - we invite groups to be creative - perhaps the guardian for each week can offer something to visualize as the center or each member can bring a sacred item to place near their computer and can share during the check-in. This is also an opportunity to offer a breathing practice to ground people into the space.

CHECK-IN

Check-in helps people arrive into the space and settle into a frame of mind, reminding everyone of their commitment to the expressed intention. It ensures that people are truly present. In virtual circle it is easiest if check-in starts with the guardian and follows a circle order the guardian identifies at the beginning of the meeting. The guardian signals the noise when the time is up during check-ins for whoever is speaking to bring their share to a close - this is followed throughout circle to help monitor speaking time.

MEETING AGENDA (90 minutes)

- Welcome [5 minutes]
 - Setting center
 - Reminder of the intention and agreements
- Check-in [10 minutes]
 - 2-minute share of how people are arriving in the space, where people are in the book, and a reflection of how the journaling process feels.
 - Guardian starts and prompts the circle order for the meeting.
- Share [25 minutes]
 - 5-minute share where each person offers a response they had to a journaling question of their personal choice from the sections set for the meeting, taking turns in a circle.
 - Allow each person their full five minutes, even if there is silence. - This time is for personal share only, not for conversation.
- Conversation [30 minutes]
 - Open up the circle for conversation – allowing each other to reflect on the comments others have made and respectfully holding each other accountable to the circle agreements.

- Learning [15 minutes]
 - 3-minute share where each person offers a behavior, belief, or value they intend to change as a result of the work thus far, taking turns in the circle.
- Closing [5 minutes]
 - Check-out words offered by guardian - circle back to what was “set in the center”, a breathing practice, inspirational words, a poem, or just reflective thoughts from the guardian.

VBSR CIRCLE AGREEMENTS:

1. To be fully present in the group, with no multi-tasking in any other communications.
2. To hold a mirror to ourselves and be honest by speaking the truth from our hearts of how white supremacy manifests in our personal behaviors, values, and beliefs.
3. To hold the space where we can all feel safe to share by listening generously to each other with compassion and curiosity.
4. To practice confidentiality by holding all stories or personal materials within the group.
5. To speak on behalf of ourselves only - not a business or any other person or group of people.
6. To ask for what we need and offer what we can without giving advice, offering opinions, and reflecting judgement.
7. To both serve as and respect the guardian to watch our timing and energy.
8. To pause at a signal when we feel the need to pause.
9. To keep each other accountable and name white fragility, white exceptionalism, white apathy, white saviorism, and other defensive responses respectfully and keep in mind we are all here to learn.
10. To not derail any of the conversation away from the agreements above. We all share responsibility for keeping to these agreements.

These guidelines were prepared by Jennifer Driscoll, Jeremiah Gibson, and Rae Carter from the Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility. These guidelines follow author Layla F Saad's guidelines for book group discussions.