



**TORONTO**  
**NEIGHBOURHOOD**  
**CENTRES**

# Dismantling White Supremacy & Reclaiming our Humanity: Moving Courageous Conversations into Actions

Participant's Manual

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This handbook and associated workshop series and materials were developed by Anke Heiser and Kaydeen Bankasingh for Toronto Neighbourhood Centres (TNC).

You are free to use/adapt the materials as long as they are credited to: Anke Heiser, Kaydeen Bankasingh and Toronto Neighbourhood Centres.

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*Anke Heiser* is a white, queer, settler and immigrant from Germany. They have worked as an educator, project manager, and filmmaker in the field of Anti-Oppression, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion since 2001. Anke has extensive experience in designing and facilitating training on race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and conflict resolution since 2001. Since immigrating to Toronto in 2014, Anke has followed their passion to create respectful spaces to have courageous conversation with focus on race, white supremacy, colonialism, and white privilege in community, union, non-profit, and educational settings.

*Kaydeen Bankasingh* is a mother, grassroots community organizer and facilitator. She works in community development and engagement and has supported residents in their efforts towards building healthy communities in Toronto for over 15 years. A Jamaican born, Toronto raised student of African and Caribbean studies, she has a long relationship to the colonial, diasporic histories of Black people in the west. As a conflict resolution trainer and mediator, Kaydeen is passionate about transforming difficult conversations into opportunities for learning and growth.

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# Welcome!

We are Anke Heiser and Kaydeen Bankasingh and are honoured to facilitate this learning experience in collaboration with the Toronto Neighbourhood Centres for its members and partner agencies.

This Participants Manual introduces the upcoming sessions by equipping you with insights into Our Approach, Guiding our Work Together, Focus on Listening Circles and Weekly Themes. It also outlines ways to receive needed support through the TNC Care Team.

Please use the manual as a space for you to record your thoughts and reflections in preparation for group conversations meant to challenge you and increase your ability, resilience and understanding to continue your personal learning and work toward racial justice and equity.

We look forward to embarking on this journey with you.

## From the TNC Allies Affinity Group

As we ask ourselves what it means to be active allies in anti-oppressive work, the Aspiring Allies Affinity Group is pleased to have the opportunity to engage with our facilitators and TNC members on the Dismantling White Supremacy & Reclaiming our Humanity workshop series.

These conversations will encourage us to be brave in our vulnerability with one another – to recognize the ways in which white supremacy has impacted all of our lives and the communities we live and work in – and to take steps toward acting in more anti-oppressive ways. These listening circles will, we hope and believe, lead us to greater understanding of the impact on each other living in a society that has been shaped by white supremacy.

It will ensure that we as allies take on some of the labour of doing anti-oppression work with our colleagues who have been living and breathing it since long before we knew we should be, too. Our mutual liberation from white supremacy requires nothing less.

There is a 500-year history of white supremacy and its reality is embedded in all areas of our society, relationships, and psyche.

This conversation series represents a small part of a life-long learning journey to dismantle white supremacy in our lives, organizations, relationships, minds, and hearts. You will be introduced to new tools and have the opportunity to be in conversation with each other.

We will work towards:

- Overcoming some misconceptions that prevent us from fully stepping into racial justice work
- Experiencing the power of truth telling and listening while in circle to recognize the importance of hearing all voices present
- Honing in on our ability to sit in discomfort with each other
- Raising our awareness to the depths and complexities of histories, experiences, and emotions present
- Practicing to acknowledge what is 'in the room' while continuing our work

## **Our Approach to the Work**

### **Restorative Justice and Interconnectedness**

Interconnectedness, healing and strengthening relationships are foundational principles of Restorative Justice and integral to our approach to this work. Restorative and transformative justice is a vision to heal harm and make things right on an individual, communal, and global level.

The principles and practices of the Western restorative justice originate to a large extent in Indigenous traditions and belief systems. The philosophy of interconnectedness - at the root of restorative justice - is deeply rooted and guides all areas of traditional Indigenous life.

Western dominated restorative justice principles remain rooted within a colonial logic, however combined with an anti-oppression and anti-racism framework it has a lot of potential for our work to dismantle white supremacy.

The principle of interconnectedness:

- Calls us to leave no one behind
- Asks us to centre those who have been and continue to be harmed most by White Supremacy
- Focuses on the needs of those harmed while considering the needs of all
- Asks about the obligations to 'make right', informed by the existing harms and needs. It clearly states whose responsibility those obligations are
- Calls on us not to cause further harm as we attempt to make things right and to heal
- Reminds us to move forward with respect, compassion, accountability
- Shifts away from the logic of punishment that 'others' and excludes and calls for a paradigm shift toward healing that demands responsibility, accountability, learning, and growth

## **Working Holistically**

We invite you to bring your whole self into the process. White supremacy lives in our heads and minds, in our bodies and physical sensations, in our unconscious reactions, and our emotions and feelings. Becoming more aware of our full selves is a critical step towards respectful relationships with self and with people around us.

This applies to this work toward racial justice. We need to recognize, acknowledge and overcome blocks and resistance that might lie hidden within our body to successfully step beyond them. We will include embodiment practices that include breathing and grounding techniques.

## Content in the Sessions

What content could we possibly address within four sessions that effectively explores the 500 year history of White Supremacy and its embedment in all areas of our society and lives? What could we hope to achieve?

We will focus the upcoming sessions on relationship building and inner work. We want to provide you with an experience of community building, community conversation in a structured and supportive space. We will offer you tools that support you to continue the work and to overcome potential roadblocks that might prevent you from stepping into this work toward racial justice more fully.

The content delivered at the beginning of each session serves as an introduction to the theme of the day, to inspire thoughts, overcome possible misconceptions, and help focus the conversation in the listening circle. The biggest part of the knowledge exchange in the sessions will come from your personal lived experience in a white supremacy culture.

We acknowledge that we will not focus on ‘traditional’ knowledge transfer or lecture content about the legacy of white supremacy in our daily lived experiences. We hope that you will leave the session series inspired and committed to continue this life long learning, work, and activism independently also.



# Guiding Our Work Together

## Group Values

We acknowledge that doing the work of dismantling White Supremacy is difficult and will require us to be conscientious about how we engage in these discussions together. The following group values have been compiled from the reflections of the Peer Facilitators.

### **Everyone Listens and Everyone Speaks**

Respect

Make space for everyone to speak

Reflective and Active listening; make sure we actually hear what others are saying

Room to come in and out of the conversation as we need to

### **Confidentiality**

We can talk about our learning outside of this workshop space - but not talk about "who said what" things

### **Speak from 'I'**

Talk about personal experience not "others" or generalized theories

Try to avoid making generalizations about "people" and "us/we"

### **Open Space for Vulnerability, Honesty and Non-Judgements**

Critique ideas or concepts not people

Approach each other with compassion and empathy

Knowing that everyone is being heard and not judged

### **We are all here to Listen, Learn and Heal**

Assuming that we are all learning and we are allowed to make mistakes

Receive and give correction in love

Taking care of each other and holding space for each other in times of need

Patience



# Focus on Listening Circles

## What is Circle?

Sitting, talking and listening in Circle is an old and new practice. It has its roots in native cultures around the world, including the First Nations, Inuit, and Metis here in Canada. Our ancestors gathered around fires and now we gather around kitchen tables, and zoom screens. The purpose of this circle is to provide an opportunity for people to express their thoughts and feelings about a specific issue or question and to listen to the thoughts and feelings of everyone else in the circle. It is a place where we build community, meet and get acquainted, address important issues and build understanding and trust. The focus of the circle lies on listening, storytelling, and connecting. It is not a discussion, nor is it a debate.

## Circle Process

The Listening Circle method that we will be working with has been developed by the International Institute for Restorative Justice (IIRP) and has its roots in the tradition of the Maori People of New Zealand. Circles are:

- Made up of 7 people including two peer facilitators
- Led by Facilitators who also participate in the sharing
- Guided by the group values, supported by the peer facilitators, and held by the whole group
- Spaces for sharing responding to a set of 3-4 questions asked and answered in order in 3-4 rounds
- A formal structure that ensures everyone is free to respond without being interrupted or asked to explain themselves
- Concluded by collecting the themes, gifts and wisdom shared within the circle and mutually deciding what is shared back to the whole group

The formal and scripted character of the circle allows its easy adaptation in your professional and private context.

## Preparing for the Circle

The listening circles themes for the coming four sessions will highlight our personal experiences and feelings around living, participating, and being impacted - in different ways - by white supremacy and a racist system. These are difficult conversations that are very rare, especially in interracial settings. The circles are a practicing field for all of us to learn to sit in discomfort as we are having these conversations. Self-awareness can support us in challenging situations. You can prepare yourself for the listening circle by reflecting on the following questions:

- Am I prepared to listen deeply to those I may not agree with?
- Am I prepared to share my experience and perspective, even if others disagree with me?
- Am I prepared to sit in discomfort?
- Do I have an apprehension about attending? If so, can I share it with someone?
- Will I be able to address the apprehension and still participate?
- Do I have support if I am unable to continue with the process?

## Circle Themes and Questions

We will inform you about the circle theme and circle questions ahead of each session. This is an opportunity for you to reflect on the questions ahead of time. There is no need to plan what you want to say, however, some of you might feel more comfortable knowing what you are stepping into ahead of each session. The following are our general themes for the coming weeks.

- Week 1: What is in the room?
- Week 2: Breaking free from perpetuating white supremacy culture
- Week 3: Doing our inner work
- Week 4: Moving to the organization
- Week 5: Evaluating and what happens next?

## Circle Values

The following are group agreements specific to leading a the virtual Listening Circle:

1. Share what you feel comfortable sharing and stretch yourself.
2. You can pass at any time.
3. Be mindful of time.
4. Stay muted when not talking.
5. Respect the privacy of those sharing.
6. Speak from the “I” perspective.



# Weekly Sessions, Themes and Questions

## General Session Outline

Each of the four circle sessions will follow a similar flow and will combine sharing Knowledge and Content followed by the small group Listening Circles and will conclude with a Reflections period for sharing and capturing individual and group reflections. A general agenda outline is included for your reference.

Time	Agenda Activities
2:30-3:30pm	Welcome and Icebreaker activity TNC Land Acknowledgement Content and Knowledge Exchange Break
3:30-4:30pm	Grounding and Embodiment exercise Small group Listening Circles (7 people including 2 peer facilitators) Compiling reflections for the full group share back
4:30-5:00pm	Full group share back Space for individual reflections captured through Mentimeter and Open dialogue for circle reflections and experiences
5:00-5:30pm	Optional Space for non-facilitated debrief, discussion and support if needed

## **Session 1:**

**Wednesday, May 5 2:30-5:00pm**

**Theme: What is in the room?**

**Reflecting on the impact of racism and white supremacy on our daily lives.**

### **Circle questions:**

1. What is your name/what pronouns do you use, which organization? What brought you to join these sessions?
2. What have you been thinking and feeling about the impact of white supremacy and racism in your life?
3. What is the hardest part for you?
4. What is the most important thing for you to do moving forward? What do you need after today's listening circle?



## **Session 2:**

**Wednesday, May 19 2:30-5:00pm**

**Theme: Breaking free from perpetuating white supremacy culture.**

**Communication approaches to de-centre whiteness and re-centre blackness**

### **Circle questions:**

1. What is your name, What pronouns do you use, Which organization do you come from? How do you feel stepping into this conversation right now?
2. Which ineffective strategies have I used? Why did I choose to use those at that moment?
3. What do I feel when I use/experience these ineffective strategies in conversation around race and white supremacy?
4. What will I do/try differently going forward?



**Session 3:**  
**Wednesday, May 26 2:30-5:00pm**

**Theme: Doing our Inner Work**  
**Exploring our unintentional biases and microaggressions**

**Circle questions:** please consider your role and position of power as you understand these questions.

1. What is your name, what pronouns do you use, which organization do you come from?
- 2a. How do you need your colleagues (with racial privilege) to step up in this work? How will you know that they care and are stepping up for you and racial justice work?
- 2b. If you are in a position of racial privilege, what can you share with your colleagues so that they can see and feel that you care about them, their experiences and racial justice?
3. What do you feel hearing all that has been shared?
4. Is there anything else that you would like to share?



## **Session 4:**

**Wednesday, June 9 2:30-5:00pm**

**Theme: Moving to the Organization: Addressing and Transforming Power, Privilege and Rank**

### **Circle questions:**

1. What is your name, what pronouns do you use, which organization do you come from?
2. Do the different rank and power positions and the dilemmas it can create for racial justice work resonate with you? How does this show up in your experience in the workplace / organization? Please share an example.
3. What is an area of high rank that you have (global, local/positional, psychological and or spiritual)? How can you utilize this high rank to further racial equity work in your workplace / organization?
4. How can we support each other and have each other's backs? What needs to change so that we can do this work together in a collaborative and equitable way?





**Session 5:**  
**Wednesday, June 23 3:00-5:00pm**

**Theme: Evaluating and What happens next?**  
**Collecting experiences, reflections and questions to continue this work**

1. Reflecting on the listening circles, What has worked?
2. How would you adapt the circle in order for it to work better?
3. What else do you need to be comfortable taking circle (conversation about race) back into your work environments?



## **Your Care Team is here for You!**

We (Sree, Ingrid and Rob) are here to support if needed. To reach out to any one of us during or between workshops please just text or call us at:

**Sree:** [Sree@neighbourhoodcentres.ca](mailto:Sree@neighbourhoodcentres.ca)

**Ingrid:** [Ingrid@neighbourhoodcentres.ca](mailto:Ingrid@neighbourhoodcentres.ca)

**Rob:** [Rob@neighbourhoodcentres.ca](mailto:Rob@neighbourhoodcentres.ca)

### **During our workshop and circle sessions:**

We are going to talk about difficult topics and you may experience some unexpected strong reactions. We will invite you to sit through some discomfort and will try to hold space for each other in the circle. Please make sure to take care of yourself. Your well-being is paramount. There is a member of a care-team available at any point of the session. You can reach out to us if you need someone to talk to.

If you just need a quiet space, you can also leave the breakout session and return to the main meeting room.



### **Staying connected between workshop sessions:**

The circle Peer Facilitators have shared their email addresses with each other in an effort to stay connected between sessions. If you are a workshop participant and would also like this, please let us know and we will share the email addresses of participants who are interested.

Additionally, feel free to just reach out to Rob, Sree or Ingrid at any time, and we will keep you company and offer a supportive ear.

**Debriefing:**

Circle facilitators are welcome to attend an optional drop-in debrief session for half an hour at the end of each workshop.

There will also be a non-facilitated breakout room for workshop participants as well if you wish to debrief informally with others.

**Let us know how else we can support you:**

Please reach out to us via email anytime with suggestions for other ways that we could care for you or others and we will do our best to set up those supports.

Thank you! - Sree, Ingrid and Rob

## Notes



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