

Circles of Care

Creating women's circles

with a special focus on mothers of young children

This booklet is dedicated with gratitude to all the courageous mothers who participated in the Reviving the Wild Woman training course.
Your honesty, wisdom, and the ideas you shared became part of something greater — something that can now be carried onward and gently rooted in other communities.

May this booklet inspire all the women who find the courage to create a women's circle in their own local community.

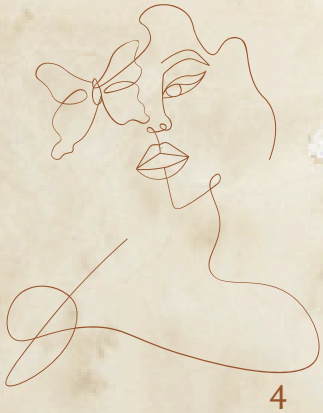


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About this booklet

This booklet was created within the Mamas Who Run with the Wolves Erasmus+ project, which was designed to support mothers with small children.

The idea for this booklet grew from a deep need many women carry inside them — the need for a tribe, for a circle, for a pack where they can belong, share authentically, and feel safe to be fully themselves.
It was deeply inspired by our gatherings during this Erasmus+ journey, where throughout the year an international group of women from Slovakia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic came together to explore their own wild and authentic nature. Guided by carefully chosen stories, folk tales, and the work of Clarissa Pinkola Estés, especially her book Women Who Run with the Wolves, we entered spaces of deep reflection, courage, and reconnection.

The women — the mamas who ran with the wolves — were profoundly touched by this experience. The trainings were based on experiential learning, non-formal education, artistic expression, and time in nature. They offered space for self-expression and for meeting many layers of our inner lives: pain, sorrow, joy, love, trust, and the wounds we carry. For many of us, it became a healing process, and a powerful inspiration to keep growing and not lose touch with this wild side within us.

This booklet was born to support women who feel called to create their own tribe — a place where they, too, can run freely, whether in imagination or in real life. It is a practical guide, offering a little background on women's circles and why they matter, but focusing mainly on practical questions: how to create a circle, how to hold a warm and authentic space, and especially how to stay mindful of the needs of mothers raising small children.

We hope this booklet will support you in creating spaces where women can feel nourished, welcomed, and a true sense of belonging.
We wish you a beautiful journey if you choose to step onto this path and create your own circle. If you need support, please do not hesitate to reach out — we will be happy to support you.

With love,

The creators of the Mamas Who Run with the Wolves project





PART I — FOUNDATIONS

Chapter 1

The Roots of Women's Circles: Remembering Collective Wisdom

Purpose of This Chapter

This chapter helps facilitators understand the deep historical and cultural roots of women's circles across the world. Throughout human history, women have gathered in communal settings to support each other emotionally, practically, and spiritually. These spaces provided informal care systems during key life transitions such as pregnancy, childbirth, mourning, seasonal labour cycles, and community change. By exploring concrete traditions from different cultures, facilitators can recognise that women's circles are a universal human response to vulnerability and transformation. Reconnecting with these traditions can strengthen the relevance and authenticity of modern circles for maternal mental health and collective resilience.

Key Principles

- **Women's circles existed in structured community traditions.**

In rural Hungary and other Central-European regions, women gathered in the fonó (spinning house) during winter evenings. While spinning wool or flax, they exchanged stories, songs, advice about marriage, childbirth, and household survival. These gatherings functioned as informal emotional support systems and intergenerational learning spaces.

- **Domestic and seasonal work created natural circle environments.**

In England and Scotland, women historically met during collective baking days, apple-pressing gatherings, or textile work. These moments were not only practical but also served as spaces to share concerns, grief, humour, and local wisdom.

- **Ritualised female gatherings marked life transitions.**

In Mexico, traditions linked to Día de los Muertos often involve women preparing altars together, cooking symbolic foods, and sharing memories of ancestors. These communal rituals allow emotional processing of loss and continuity of identity through shared storytelling.

- **Embodied cultural practices strengthened belonging.**

In Japan, neighbourhood women's groups historically gathered during seasonal festivals such as rice planting rituals or preparation for Obon, when ancestral spirits are welcomed. Collective preparation, lantern-making, and dance rehearsals created safe spaces for mutual support.

- **Circle structures were embedded in indigenous communal life.**

Among Andean communities, women gather during planting or weaving activities in small groups, exchanging knowledge about motherhood, herbal medicine, and emotional challenges. Similar patterns exist in West African compound systems where elder women guide younger mothers through daily communal interaction.

- **Maternal well-being was understood as a shared responsibility.**

In many traditional societies, the postpartum period was marked by structured female support. For example, in parts of Southeast Europe and Anatolia, women visited new mothers daily, bringing food, care, and companionship to reduce isolation.

Practical Guidance

Modern women's circles can draw inspiration from these traditions by integrating simple shared activities into gatherings. Facilitators may include seasonal rituals such as lighting candles at winter solstice, preparing symbolic foods in autumn, or walking together in spring nature. These practices help participants feel connected to rhythms larger than individual stress cycles.

Creating opportunities for embodied interaction is especially important. Activities such as crafting, cooking, gardening, or gentle movement can make emotional sharing more natural and less intimidating. This reflects the historical reality that women rarely gathered solely to "talk"; conversation emerged organically through doing things together.

Facilitators should also acknowledge the profound shift from extended family structures to nuclear households in modern societies.

Many mothers today experience early parenthood in relative isolation, often without consistent female support. Circles can therefore serve as intentional communities where emotional regulation happens through presence, shared listening, and validation rather than advice-giving.

Respectful cultural referencing can enrich circle facilitation. For example, introducing storytelling inspired by Hungarian fonó traditions, gratitude rituals influenced by Mexican ancestor remembrance, or seasonal reflection inspired by Japanese festival cycles can deepen meaning without appropriating specific religious practices.

Ultimately, the goal is not to recreate historical forms but to restore their function: strengthening relational safety, continuity between generations, and collective resilience in times of transition.

Reflection Questions for Facilitators

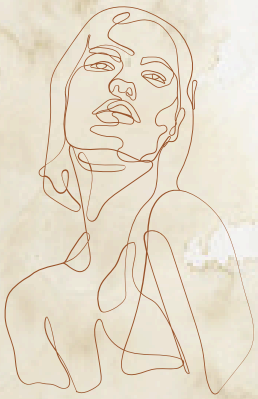
- Which cultural traditions of women gathering exist in my region or family history?
- How can shared activity support emotional openness in my circle?
- In what ways can the circle respond to the isolation often experienced in early motherhood?

Summary Points

- Women's circles have historically existed in concrete cultural forms such as 'fonó', seasonal rituals, and communal labour gatherings.
- Shared tasks created natural environments for emotional support.
- Ritual calendars structured collective resilience and belonging.
- Modern motherhood often lacks informal care networks.
- Women's circles can intentionally restore community-based emotional regulation.



Chapter 2



Women's Circles in Modern Times: Navigating Change and Re-Finding Inner Ground

Purpose of This Chapter

This chapter helps facilitators understand why women's circles are increasingly relevant in contemporary European and global societies. Many mothers today experience identity transitions in rapidly changing cultural, economic, and technological environments. Traditional role systems that once provided orientation and stability are dissolving, while new structures are still emerging. This chapter supports facilitators in recognising women's circles as safe spaces where participants can explore change, strengthen inner resources, and reconnect with forms of wisdom that remain supportive beyond ideology, religion, or social expectations. It highlights the role of circles in promoting maternal mental health through shared reflection, intuition, and collective meaning-making.

Key Principles

- **Modern societies are experiencing an unprecedented transformation.**

The industrial revolution and the development of general welfare systems reduced many existential threats such as widespread famine, extreme poverty, and high child mortality. While this represents a historic achievement, it also weakened the traditional structures that once shaped identity and community belonging.

- **Identity uncertainty is a central psychological challenge of our time.**

Many women and mothers navigate conflicting expectations: professional self-realisation, caregiving responsibilities, emotional availability, social participation, and personal fulfilment. The absence of clear social narratives can lead to inner fragmentation and self-doubt.

- **The questioning of inherited traditions can be both liberating and destabilising.**

Some societal discourses describe this shift as "decadence." However, from another perspective, it reflects a unique historical moment in which individuals can consciously re-evaluate inherited norms and create new ways of living.

- **Technological change accelerates emotional pressure.**

The emerging artificial intelligence revolution introduces new uncertainties about work, relationships, learning, and human identity. While technology may offer unprecedented support and opportunity, it can also intensify anxiety and disconnection if inner resources are not cultivated.

- **Embodied intuition remains a stable human compass.**

Across cultures and centuries, women have relied on bodily awareness, emotional sensitivity, and relational intelligence to navigate uncertainty. Women's circles can help participants reconnect with these quieter forms of knowledge that are often overshadowed by external demands.

Practical Guidance

Facilitators can frame women's circles as spaces of exploration rather than instruction. Participants are not expected to "solve" societal change but to develop the capacity to live consciously within it. Opening conversations about identity, role expectations, and generational differences can help mothers recognise that their struggles are not personal failures but reflections of broader social transformation.

In circle settings, it can be helpful to alternate reflective dialogue with grounding practices such as breathing exercises, creative expression, gentle movement, or time in nature. These activities support nervous system regulation and help participants shift from cognitive overload toward embodied awareness.

Facilitators may also introduce the concept of balancing inherited wisdom with contemporary possibilities. Participants can be invited to reflect on what traditions or values from their family or cultural background still feel nourishing, and which expectations no longer serve their well-being.

Special attention should be given to the pressures created by digital culture and constant connectivity. Circles can offer rare opportunities for slow presence, deep listening, and authentic sharing. These experiences contribute to informal mental health promotion by strengthening peer support and reducing feelings of isolation.

Ultimately, women's circles can become laboratories of cultural renewal: places where mothers collectively reinterpret what strength, care, leadership, and community mean in a world shaped by both historical continuity and technological acceleration.

Reflection Questions for Facilitators

- What identity tensions do mothers in my context most frequently express?
- How can circle activities support trust in intuition and bodily awareness?
- In what ways can the circle help participants integrate old values with new realities?
-

Summary Points

- Rapid social and technological change increases emotional uncertainty.
- Traditional role structures no longer provide clear guidance.
- Women's circles support collective reflection and resilience.
- Intuition and embodied knowledge are valuable resources.
- Circles can function as spaces of informal mental health promotion and cultural renewal.



PART II — BUILDING A CIRCLE



Chapter 3

How to Form a Circle in Your Community

Purpose of This Chapter

This chapter supports facilitators who feel called to create a women's circle in their own community, especially for mothers with small children. It offers gentle guidance on how to begin — even if you do not yet have experience as a facilitator.

Forming a circle does not begin with perfect planning or professional expertise. It begins with a genuine intention to create a safe and authentic space where mothers can gather, share, and support one another.
This chapter highlights practical considerations such as building trust in the community, creating an accessible environment for mothers, choosing a welcoming space, and inviting participants in a thoughtful way. The goal is to help facilitators take the first steps with confidence and clarity.

Key Principles

When forming a circle for mothers, several simple principles can help create a strong foundation:

- **Start from authentic intention**

You do not need to be an experienced facilitator to begin. What matters most is your genuine motivation to create a supportive space for women.

- **Trust grows through relationships**

If you already have connections in your community — through friends, parenting groups, kindergartens, or local activities — these relationships can naturally support the formation of the circle.

- **Accessibility matters for mothers**

Mothers with small children often need practical support in order to participate. Consider timing, childcare arrangements, and the emotional challenges of leaving a baby for the first time.

- **Inclusivity enriches the circle**

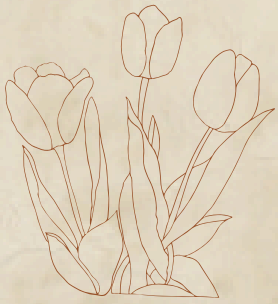
Women from different cultures, languages, and generations bring valuable perspectives. A welcoming and respectful environment helps everyone feel included.

Practical Guidance

Creating a women's circle often begins very simply — with a small group of women who feel the need to connect and support one another.

If you already belong to a community, you may start by reaching out to people who know you and trust you. These might include:

- friends from the playground
- parents from kindergarten or school
- yoga teachers or wellness practitioners
- mothers from sport or craft activities
- neighbours or members of local parenting groups



Trust is often easier to build when the first participants already share some connection with you.

If you do not yet have such a network, consider organising a small community event to introduce the idea of the circle. For example, you might host a simple Mother's Day gathering, a small workshop, or a seasonal celebration in collaboration with a local café, library, or community centre. These events can help you meet other mothers and share your vision for creating a circle.

Choosing a Space

The physical environment plays an important role in creating a sense of safety. The space does not need to be perfect. What matters most is that it feels calm, welcoming, and private enough for open conversations.

Possible locations include:

- a community centre or local library
- a quiet café outside opening hours
- a yoga or movement studio
- a private home or shared community space

When choosing the space, consider comfort, accessibility, and whether participants can speak freely without interruptions. You can read more about setting up your space later on.

Choosing the Time and Rhythm

For many mothers, evenings are the easiest time to arrange childcare. Others may prefer weekend mornings when partners or family members can spend time with the children.

You may choose to meet:

- once a month
- twice a month
- or in seasonal cycles



The duration of the circle can also vary. A simple sharing circle may last around 1.5–2 hours, while sessions involving creative or artistic activities may benefit from a longer format, such as a half-day gathering.

Consistency is often more important than frequency. A regular rhythm helps participants feel committed and safe.

Accessibility for Mothers with Babies

Because this project focuses on mothers with young children, it is important to consider accessibility for mothers whose babies are still very small.
In many cases, mothers appreciate the opportunity to attend a circle without children present. This allows them to focus on themselves and connect deeply with others.

However, there may be situations where a mother with a very young baby needs to bring the child with her, especially if breastfeeding is frequent.
Each facilitator may decide how to approach this. Some circles remain child-free, while others allow babies under a certain age. What matters most is that expectations are communicated clearly in advance so that all participants understand the format of the circle.

Welcoming Multilingual Participants

Many communities today include mothers who come from different countries or cultural backgrounds. For these women, a circle can become an especially meaningful source of connection and belonging.

You might consider:

- allowing participants to speak in more than one language
- occasionally summarising key ideas for those who may not understand everything
- creating a supportive atmosphere where imperfect language is welcomed
- translating everything with the support of the participants
-

Even when language skills are limited, the shared experience of motherhood can create a strong sense of connection.

Practical Arrangements



Facilitators may also consider practical questions such as:

- whether the circle is donation-based or has a set contribution
- whether materials or space rental need to be covered
- whether facilitation time should be compensated

There is no single correct model. Some circles remain informal gatherings, while others operate with a small participation fee to support the facilitator's time and the cost of materials.

What matters most is transparency and kindness when communicating these details.

Reflection Questions for Facilitators

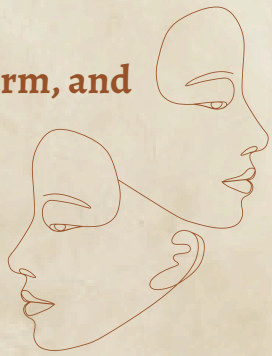
- What personal motivation inspires me to create a women's circle in my community?
- Which people or groups in my local environment might resonate with this idea?
- What kind of space and rhythm would best support mothers in my community?

Summary Points

- Women's circles begin with intention, not expertise.
- Community trust and relationships support the formation of a circle.
- Clear communication about expectations helps participants feel safe.
- Accessibility and understanding of mothers' needs are essential.
- A welcoming and inclusive environment strengthens the circle.

Chapter 4

Essential Facilities & Setup — Making the Space Feel Safe, Warm, and Human



Purpose of This Chapter

This chapter helps facilitators create a space where real-life mothers — tired, busy, emotional, or running on coffee and crumbs — can finally exhale. Many women arrive unsure, overstimulated, or carrying guilt for taking time for themselves. A thoughtful setup sends a powerful message before anyone even speaks: *You are welcome. You don't have to perform here.* This topic matters because mothers rarely get environments designed for their comfort — most spaces expect them to adapt. When the room feels calm, private, and kind, trust grows faster, conversations go deeper, and nobody has to pretend they slept eight hours. A well-prepared space makes the circle feel less like a meeting and more like a refuge.

Key Principles

- **Safety beats perfection**

No one needs Instagram-worthy décor. Mothers need to feel they won't be judged for crying, venting, or admitting they hid in the bathroom for five minutes of silence.

- **The room speaks before you do**

Bright office lights and rows of chairs say "staff training." Soft light, a circle, and a blanket say "you can relax now."

- **Everyone is equal here**

A circle (not classroom style) quietly says: no experts, no gold stars, no "best mum" competition. Just humans raising small humans.

- **What's said here stays here**

Mothers share things they might not even tell their partners or best friends. Knowing it won't become playground gossip is essential.

- **Boundaries are kindness, not strictness**

Clear start times, gentle turn-taking, and permission to pass actually make people feel safer — not controlled. Think of it as a container, not a cage.

Practical Guidance

Choose a space where people won't be interrupted every five minutes by someone looking for spare chairs, or their lost keys. Privacy helps mothers speak honestly instead of whispering like they're plotting a crime.

Lighting matters more than you think. If possible, avoid harsh ceiling lights that make everyone look like they're at a dentist appointment. Lamps or candles (safely placed) instantly soften the mood and nervous systems.

Arrange seats in a proper circle. No tables in between, no "front." Provide options: chairs for those whose backs say "absolutely not" to the floor, cushions or mats for those who like to curl up. Blankets are pure gold — many mothers are cold simply because they're exhausted.

Have water, tea, and tissues available. Someone will cry. Someone will spill tea. Someone will need both.

Keep the room simple. You don't need themed decorations for every season. A small centerpiece — a candle, flowers, or a few natural objects — is enough to make the space feel intentional rather than accidental.

At the beginning, explain confidentiality in plain language:
"What's shared here stays here. You can share your own experience later, but not someone else's story." No legal jargon needed — just clarity.

Make it clear that sharing is optional. Passing is allowed. Silence is allowed. Sometimes the bravest thing a mother can do is sit quietly and not hold it all together for once.

Start and end on time as much as possible. Mothers often negotiate complicated logistics to be there. Finishing when promised helps them trust they won't pay for self-care with chaos later.

If emotions run high, resist the urge to fix everything. People usually don't need solutions — they need witnesses. A simple *"That sounds really hard"* goes further than a ten-step plan.

Close gently. A quick check-out, a deep breath together, or a simple *"Thank you for being here"* helps everyone transition back to real life — laundry, emails, bedtime negotiations, and all.

Reflection Questions for Facilitators

- If I walked into this room exhausted and overwhelmed, would I feel safe here?
- Am I trying to make the space impressive — or comforting?
- How do I respond when someone cries: panic, problem-solving, or calm presence?

Summary Points

- Comfort matters more than perfection
- Privacy allows honesty
- Clear boundaries reduce stress
- Participation is always voluntary
- A warm welcome can change everything





PART III — FACILITATION

Chapter 5

Guidance on Facilitating a Circle — Leading with Warmth

Purpose of This Chapter

This chapter is here to reassure you that facilitating a women's circle is not about being perfect, ultra-wise, or having a color-coded master plan. It's about creating a space where women can arrive tired, emotional, funny, overwhelmed — and feel completely okay about it. Most mothers are not looking for a lecture; they are looking for relief, understanding, and real connection. Your role is to gently guide the flow, not dominate it. With a simple theme, a safe atmosphere, and a clear but flexible structure, the circle becomes a place where mothers can stop performing and start being human again.

Key Principles

- **You're a guide, not the main attraction**

Think "kind host," not "expert on stage." You hold the space so others can speak, feel, and breathe.

- **The theme is a starting spark**

A guiding metaphor or topic opens the conversation, but the most meaningful moments often happen somewhere unexpected.

- **Experience beats lecturing**

We remember how we felt, not what we were told. Create moments, not presentations.

- **Safety makes honesty possible**

Privacy, respect, listening, and non-judgement allow mothers to say the real things — not just the polite ones.

- **Flexible but intentional structure**

A loose plan prevents chaos, while flexibility allows real life (and real emotions) to exist.

Practical Guidance

A helpful way to think about facilitating is through four simple pillars:
Theme — Facilitator — Safe Space — Structure

Theme — The Guiding Metaphor

Choose one gentle focus for the session. It could be rest, boundaries, identity, seasons of motherhood, or simply "how we're really doing at present." The theme is not a school subject — it's a doorway.

You might introduce it with a short story, image, question, or object. For example:
"Tonight I was thinking about what feels heavy lately..."
No deep explanation needed. The group will fill it with meaning.

Facilitator — Holds Space, Not Direction

Your job is not to fix, teach, or impress. Your job is to keep the emotional temperature safe.

Listen more than you speak. Notice who hasn't had space yet. Gently guide if someone talks for a very long time, but without shaming. If conversation drifts, softly bring it back. If it flows, trust it.

You don't need a "facilitator voice." Being warm, calm, and human is enough.

Safe Space — What Makes It Feel Safe

A circle feels safe when expectations are clear and kindness is the default.

This usually includes:

- Privacy — what's shared stays in the room
- Deep listening (not waiting for your turn to talk)
- Respect for different parenting styles and life situations
- Non-judgement — no unsolicited fixing or comparing
- Valuing differences instead of trying to agree on everything





- Welcoming difficult feelings, not only positive ones
- Allowing respectful disagreement or tension
- Honouring personal cycles, energy levels, and limits
- Shared ownership — not leader vs audience
- A sense that this time is meaningful and protected

Structure — Flexible but Intentional

Structure is what keeps the circle from turning into random chatting or, on the other extreme, a rigid workshop. Think of it as the frame that holds the picture.

A simple, mother-friendly flow might look like this:

1. Arrival & Awareness
Time to land. Tea, settling in, maybe a short grounding moment or check-in. People arrive from very different kinds of days.

2. Framing & Metaphor
Brief introduction of the theme. A few sentences are enough.

3. Activity (Optional)
Something gentle and non-threatening — drawing, writing, working with natural objects, simple creative exploration. Hands-busy activities help people open up without pressure.

4. Storytelling / Sharing Round
Voices shared in turn (with permission to pass). This is often the heart of the circle.

5. Closing
A soft ending — one word, gratitude, insight, or a collective breath. This helps participants transition back to real life without emotional whiplash.
This structure should feel flexible but intentional, not strict. If a powerful conversation is unfolding, you don't need to interrupt it to "finish the plan."

Emotional Containment — Holding Big Feelings

Feelings will show up. Tears, frustration, nervous laughter, long silences — all normal.

Your calm presence tells the group:
"Nothing is broken. We can handle this."

Simple supportive phrases are often enough:
"Take your time."
"Thank you for sharing that."
"You're not alone. We are here for you."

You don't need to solve problems or provide perfect advice. Witnessing is powerful.

Reflection Questions for Facilitators

- Am I trying to control the experience, or hold it?
- Does my structure support connection — or overwhelm it?
- How do I react when things become emotional, quiet, or unpredictable?

Summary Points

- Lead gently — don't perform
- A simple theme opens the door
- Safety comes from clarity and kindness
- Structure should hold, not restrict
- Your calm presence is the most powerful tool



Chapter 6

Recommended Structure for Women's Circles - Using the DONNA Method

Purpose of This Chapter

This chapter helps facilitators understand how to create a safe, meaningful and emotionally supportive women's circle using the DONNA method which was created by our partner organisations in another Erasmus+ project. It introduces a simple but powerful session structure that supports mothers in sharing experiences, regulating emotions and reconnecting with inner resources. The chapter explains how thoughtful facilitation, reflective dialogue and ritual elements contribute to psychological safety and group cohesion. By understanding the phases of a circle, facilitators can guide processes with greater confidence and sensitivity.

Key Principles

- **Creating a safe emotional container**

The DONNA method emphasises the importance of psychological safety. Participants must feel that their experiences can be shared without judgement, comparison or pressure. The facilitator's presence, tone and consistency are essential in building trust.

- **Process-orientation rather than problem-solving**

Women's circles are not therapy sessions or coaching spaces focused on fixing issues. Instead, they provide space for awareness, reflection and emotional integration. Listening and witnessing are often more transformative than giving advice.

- **Embodied awareness and intuition**

The method encourages participants to reconnect with bodily sensations, emotional signals and intuitive responses. Mothers carry strong internal wisdom that often becomes accessible through slowing down and sharing in a supportive environment.

- **Shared leadership and peer support**

Although the facilitator guides the structure, the circle itself is co-created by participants. Mutual support and recognition strengthen group resilience and reduce feelings of isolation

- **Ritual and rhythm as stabilising elements**

Simple opening and closing rituals provide continuity and emotional grounding. Regular structure helps participants feel secure even when difficult topics emerge.

Practical Guidance

The DONNA method proposes a structured yet flexible flow that helps facilitators create emotional safety, continuity and meaningful reflection. A typical women's circle session can be organised into five interconnected phases

1. Introduction and Awareness of the Present Moment

The facilitator supports participants in transitioning from everyday responsibilities into the shared circle space. This phase focuses on reconnecting with the body, emotions and the present moment. Simple grounding exercises such as conscious breathing, short silence, gentle stretching or a brief emotional check-in can help mothers slow down and arrive fully. Establishing awareness at the beginning helps regulate stress and prepares participants for deeper sharing.

2. Creation of a Framework through a Transversal Metaphor

At the beginning of the session, the facilitator introduces a symbolic theme or metaphor that accompanies the entire meeting. This metaphor may be connected to nature, seasonal rhythms, elements, or life transitions in motherhood. For example, themes such as "roots and branches," "flowing water," or "inner fire" can help participants explore personal experiences in an indirect yet emotionally safe way. The metaphor creates coherence and offers a shared language for reflection.

3. Activity Between Art and Nature

Participants engage in a practical experience inspired by the DONNA collection of techniques. Activities may include drawing emotions, creating simple natural objects, guided movement, journaling, or sensory exercises outdoors.

The aim is not artistic performance but emotional expression and embodied awareness. Through creative engagement, mothers can access intuitive knowledge and release accumulated tension in a gentle and supportive way.

4. Storytelling Moment

After the activity, participants are invited to share personal stories, reflections or insights that emerged during the process. Storytelling takes place in turns, allowing each woman to be listened to without interruption or judgement. This phase strengthens peer connection, validates lived experiences and supports emotional regulation. The facilitator may use reflective questions or a talking object to maintain respectful dialogue.

5. Conclusion and Integration of Feelings

The session ends with a closing phase that supports integration of individual and collective experiences. Participants may share one word describing their current emotional state or one intention to carry into daily life. A simple ritual such as extinguishing a candle together or expressing gratitude to the group helps mark the transition back to everyday roles. This conclusion reinforces continuity and strengthens the sense of belonging created during the circle.

The transversal nature of the metaphor and the structured rhythm of the session help participants feel held even when difficult emotions arise. Over time, this predictable yet creative framework fosters trust, resilience and deeper self-awareness within the group.

Reflection Questions for Facilitators

- How do I recognise when the group needs more structure or more openness?
- Which communication tools help participants feel heard and respected?
- How can I maintain emotional safety while allowing authentic expression?

Summary Points

- The DONNA method provides a clear yet flexible structure for women's circles.
- Ritual elements support safety, continuity and emotional grounding.
- Reflective dialogue strengthens peer connection and emotional regulation.
- Facilitators guide the process rather than offering solutions.
- Integration and closing practices help participants return to daily life with clarity.

PART IV — SPECIAL FOCUS: MOTHERS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Chapter 7



Supporting Mothers in Creating Child-Free Time

Purpose of This Chapter

Women's circles can offer a powerful space for mothers to reconnect with themselves, reflect, and receive support from other women. Yet for mothers with small children, especially babies, attending such gatherings can sometimes feel difficult or even impossible.

This chapter focuses on how facilitators can support mothers in making space for this time. It explores practical and emotional aspects such as shared caregiving, community support, breastfeeding needs, and the emotional challenges that often accompany time apart from a young child.

By understanding the realities of early motherhood, facilitators can help create circles that are compassionate, inclusive, and supportive of mothers during this sensitive period of life.

You might find our *Balancing Love and Space - A Gentle Guide for Preparing Time Apart* useful to support mothers prioritising their self-care time. You can find that among the *Resources*.

Key Principles

When working with mothers of small children, several guiding principles can help facilitators create a supportive environment:

- **Honour both the needs of the child and the needs of the mother**

Babies require care, closeness, and responsiveness. At the same time, mothers also need rest, emotional support, and time to reconnect with themselves.

- **Self-care strengthens motherhood**

Time away from daily caregiving responsibilities can help mothers restore their energy and emotional balance, which ultimately benefits both mother and child.

- **Community support matters**

When mothers support one another — for example through babysitting exchanges or shared childcare — it becomes easier for everyone to participate.

- **Gentleness and flexibility are key**

Each family's situation is unique. Facilitators should create an atmosphere that allows mothers to find solutions that work for their own circumstances.

Practical Guidance

For many mothers, especially in the early years of parenting, taking time for themselves can feel both deeply needed and emotionally challenging.

Women's circles can become a meaningful opportunity for mothers to pause, breathe, and reconnect with themselves. However, practical and emotional barriers often make participation difficult.

Recognising the Needs of Both Mother and Baby

Babies and young children naturally require a great deal of care and closeness. Mothers often respond to these needs continuously throughout the day.

At the same time, mothers also have emotional and physical needs of their own. Moments of rest, reflection, and supportive connection with other adults are essential for well-being.

Women's circles can offer a small but meaningful space where mothers are seen not only as caregivers, but also as women with their own inner lives and needs.

Asking Partners for Shared Caregiving

For many mothers, the first step toward attending a circle is asking their partner to take responsibility for childcare during that time.

This conversation may feel simple for some families and more challenging for others. Facilitators can gently encourage mothers to communicate their needs openly and respectfully.

Participating in a circle may become an opportunity for partners to deepen their own relationship with the child and develop new caregiving routines together.

Involving Grandparents or Extended Family

In some families, grandparents or other relatives can provide valuable support during circle gatherings.

Even occasional help — once a month, for example — can make participation possible. For many families, involving extended family also strengthens the child's sense of belonging within a wider network of care.

Babysitting Exchanges Within the Community

Some circles choose to organise informal childcare exchanges among participants.

For example, one mother may look after several children while others attend the circle, and the arrangement rotates during future gatherings. In some communities, participants organise parallel childcare nearby, allowing mothers to remain close to their children while still enjoying uninterrupted circle time.

These creative solutions often grow naturally when mothers begin supporting one another.

Breastfeeding and Very Young Babies

Some mothers may still be breastfeeding very young babies. In these cases, facilitators may consider whether babies under a certain age can be present in the circle when necessary.

If this is the case, it is helpful to communicate this clearly to all participants in advance so expectations are shared. Short breaks can also allow mothers to breastfeed while maintaining a mostly child-free space for reflection.

Realistic Expectations

It is important to acknowledge that attending regularly may not always be possible for every mother.

Illness, sleep disruptions, family responsibilities, or emotional exhaustion are all part of early parenthood. Facilitators can help create an atmosphere where mothers feel welcome even if they cannot attend every gathering.

Circles become stronger when participation is grounded in compassion rather than pressure.

Emotional Vulnerability in Early Postpartum

The months following childbirth can be a time of great emotional sensitivity. Mothers may feel joyful, overwhelmed, exhausted, or uncertain — sometimes all at once.

Women's circles can become an important space where these feelings are welcomed and shared without judgement. Simply being heard and understood by other mothers can bring relief and a sense of belonging.

When facilitators approach this period with empathy and patience, the circle can become a place of genuine support.

Reflection Questions for Facilitators

- What practical or emotional barriers might prevent mothers in my community from attending a circle?
- How can I make participation easier or more accessible for mothers with young children?
- How can the circle encourage a culture of mutual support among participants?

Summary Points

- Mothers of young children often need extra support to attend circles.
- Shared caregiving within families makes participation possible.

- Community childcare solutions can support multiple mothers.
- Facilitators should create compassionate and flexible expectations.
- Women's circles can offer an important space for emotional support in early motherhood.



Chapter 8

Practical Tips & Notes for Facilitators

Supporting Tired Mothers

Mothers who attend women's circles often arrive carrying invisible burdens — interrupted sleep, emotional exhaustion, and the constant responsibility of caring for young children. This section helps facilitators recognise and gently respond to these realities.

The aim is not to solve mothers' challenges, but to create a space where tiredness is acknowledged with compassion and where participants feel safe to slow down, rest, and reconnect with themselves.

When facilitators understand the physical and emotional demands of early motherhood, they can shape the environment of the circle in ways that offer genuine support and care.

Facilitators can support tired mothers both through the physical environment of the circle and through the emotional tone they create.

Creating a Comfortable Environment

Simple details can make a circle feel welcoming and restorative. Consider providing:

- pillows or cushions for comfortable seating
- soft blankets for warmth and relaxation
- herbal tea or warm drinks
- soft lighting or candlelight
- calming aromas such as gentle essential oils

These elements help participants transition from the busy rhythm of daily life into a calmer, more reflective space.

Allowing Moments of Rest

Sometimes mothers arrive at a circle already exhausted. Facilitators can gently acknowledge this and offer moments of quiet during the gathering.

Short grounding practices may include:

- a brief breathing exercise
- a short guided visualisation
- a few minutes of silent reflection
- soft music or quiet rest

In some circles, mothers may even close their eyes or rest briefly. This should be welcomed as a natural response to tiredness rather than something to feel embarrassed about.

Opening Conversations About Rest

Women's circles can also become a place where mothers reflect on how they care for themselves outside the circle.

Facilitators may gently invite reflections such as:

- When was the last time you allowed yourself to truly rest?
- What kind of support would help you feel less tired?
- Is there someone in your life who could help you create a small moment of rest?

Sometimes hearing other mothers speak honestly about their tiredness and their need for support can help participants feel less alone and more confident in asking for help within their families.

Reflection Questions for Facilitators

- How can I make the physical environment of the circle more restful and welcoming?
- How can I acknowledge mothers' tiredness without making them feel self-conscious?
- What small practices could help participants slow down and reconnect with themselves?

Practical Scenario Example

During one gathering, the facilitator notices that several mothers mention sleepless nights and exhaustion.

Instead of continuing immediately with the planned activity, the facilitator gently invites the group to take a few minutes to rest. She guides a short breathing exercise and allows a quiet pause in the circle.

Some mothers close their eyes, while others simply sit quietly holding a warm cup of tea. After this short moment of rest, the atmosphere becomes calmer and participants begin sharing their experiences more openly.

Sometimes the most supportive action a facilitator can take is simply allowing space for rest.

Summary Points

- Many mothers arrive in circles physically and emotionally tired.
- Comfortable environments help participants relax and feel safe.
- Moments of rest can be a meaningful part of the circle.
- Honest conversations about tiredness can strengthen connection.
- Small gestures of care communicate welcome and support.



Managing Emotional Overwhelm

Women's circles can become deeply meaningful spaces. At the same time, they may also awaken strong emotions, especially when participants carry stress, grief, trauma, shame, or long periods of emotional suppression. This does not mean something is "going wrong." It often means the circle has become safe enough for feelings to surface.

The facilitator's role is not to become a therapist, but to respond in a calm, grounded and trauma-informed way that protects both the individual and the group.

A trauma-informed starting point

A trauma-informed approach means we assume that some participants may carry experiences of fear, violence, neglect, loss, or chronic overwhelm, even if they never name them directly.

The facilitator therefore prioritises:

- safety over depth
- regulation over interpretation
- choice over pressure
- presence over advice
- dignity over control.
-

The goal is not to "open people up," but to help them stay connected to themselves while participating in the circle.

Step-by-step response when someone becomes overwhelmed

1. First regulate yourself

Before doing anything, slow your own breathing and soften your voice.

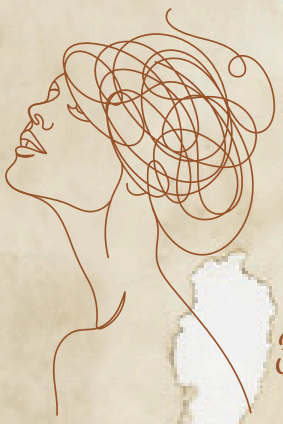
Participants often unconsciously take cues from the facilitator's nervous system. If you become anxious, rushed or overly intense, the person may feel even less safe.

Helpful inner reminder:
"I do not need to fix this immediately. I need to help create safety."

2. Notice the signs early

Emotional overwhelm does not always begin with tears. It may show up as:

- sudden silence or freezing
- rapid breathing
- restless body movements
- shaking hands
- dissociation or a blank stare
- apologising excessively
- laughing while distressed



- saying “I’m fine” while clearly not fine
- abruptly leaving the room.

The earlier you notice these signs, the easier it is to prevent escalation.

3. Reduce pressure, do not intensify
Do not ask the person to explain everything.
Do not invite deeper storytelling in that moment.
Do not analyse what is happening in front of the group.

Instead, gently reduce stimulation.

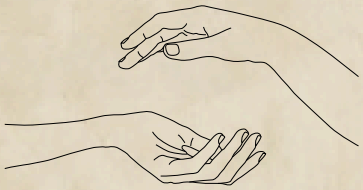
You can say:

- *“You do not need to say more right now.”*
- *“You are safe here.”*
- *“Let’s slow down together.”*
- *“Would it help to take a breath or step outside for a moment?”*
- *“You can choose what feels right for you now.”*

4. Reconnect the person with the present moment
When someone becomes flooded, help them return to the here and now through simple grounding.

Possible grounding options:

- feel both feet on the floor
- notice the chair supporting the body
- hold a cup of tea or a grounding object
- name 3 things they can see in the room
- take one slow inhale and one longer exhale
- place a hand on the heart or belly, if that feels safe.



Keep language simple. Do not overload the person with instructions.

Example:
“Can you feel the ground under your feet?”
“Would you like to hold this cup for a moment?”
“Let’s just notice the room together.”

5. Offer choice
Trauma-informed facilitation always brings the person back to agency.

Offer simple choices:

- stay in the circle quietly
- step outside with support
- sit nearer the door
- drink water
- skip the sharing round
- rejoin later or not at all.

Even small choices reduce helplessness.

6. Protect the group container
If one participant becomes very distressed, the whole group may feel activated. The facilitator needs to support both the individual and the circle.

You might say to the group:
"Let's take a quiet breath together."
"Strong emotions are welcome here, and we will go gently."
"We will pause for a moment and take care of what is happening."

This normalises emotion without turning the overwhelmed participant into the centre of unwanted attention.

7. Do not force eye contact, touch, or disclosure
Some people calm down through closeness; others need space.
Never assume.

Always ask before suggesting contact:

- *"Would you like me to sit near you?"*
- *"Would it help if we stepped outside?"*
- *"Would you prefer some space?"*

Avoid:

- hugging without consent
- touching shoulders or hands automatically

- saying “tell us what happened”
- insisting they continue the process.

8. Know your role and your limits

A women’s circle is not therapy, crisis intervention, or trauma treatment. If a participant regularly becomes highly dysregulated, or discloses ongoing violence, self-harm risk, or severe mental health distress, the facilitator should gently encourage professional support.

You can say:
“Thank you for trusting the space with this.”
“This sounds important and also bigger than what the circle alone can hold.”
“Would it be okay if we think together about what additional support could help you?”

It is helpful to have a prepared list of local support contacts before the programme begins.

Practical communication tools for difficult moments

Helpful phrases:

- *“Take your time.”*
- *“You do not have to continue.”*
- *“You are not alone in this moment.”*
- *“Let’s stay with what helps you feel safe right now.”*
- *“Would you like support, space, or silence?”*
- *“We can slow this down.”*



Less helpful phrases:

- *“Calm down.”*
- *“Don’t cry.”*
- *“It’s okay, be strong.”*
- *“Why is this triggering you?”*
- *“Others have it worse.”*
- *“You need to let it all out now.”*

If the person leaves the circle

Sometimes leaving the room is the healthiest immediate choice. Do not interpret it as rejection or failure.

A simple trauma-informed response:

1. Pause the group briefly.
2. If possible, a co-facilitator or designated support person checks on them.
3. Approach calmly, without pressure.
4. Ask what they need right now.
5. Respect if they do not want to talk.
6. Offer a way to return with dignity — or permission not to return that day.

Helpful sentence:
"You do not have to come back in before you are ready. We just want to make sure you are okay and not alone."

Example scenario 1: Unstoppable crying

A mother begins to cry during the storytelling round. At first the crying is quiet, but it becomes difficult for her to speak, and she starts apologising repeatedly.

Possible facilitator response

The facilitator softens their voice and says:
"You do not need to apologise."
"We can slow down."
"Would you like to sit quietly for a moment, or would you prefer to step outside with me?"

The facilitator offers water and invites the mother to feel her feet on the ground. The group is gently told:
"Let's take a breath together and allow some space."

If the mother wants to stay, she is not asked to continue speaking. The facilitator may say:
"Your presence is enough. Words can come later, or not at all today."

After the session, the facilitator checks in privately:
"Thank you for staying with what came up. How are you now? Is there anything you need before you leave?"

Example scenario 2: Panic symptoms

During a movement exercise, a participant suddenly says she cannot breathe properly, her hands are shaking, and she looks frightened.

Possible facilitator response

The facilitator immediately lowers the stimulation and speaks slowly:
"Let's pause."
"You are here with us."
"Can you look around the room and name one thing you see?"
"Try not to force a deep breath — just let the exhale become a little longer."

The participant is offered the choice to sit by the door, hold a grounding object, or step outside with support. The facilitator avoids crowding her or asking for an explanation in the moment.

Later, when the participant is calmer, the facilitator may say:
"Thank you for letting us know what was happening. Would you like to share anything about what helps in moments like this, or would you rather leave it here for today?"

Example scenario 3: A participant leaves the circle

A participant quietly stands up during a sharing round and leaves the room. She looks upset and avoids eye contact.

Possible facilitator response

If there is a co-facilitator, they follow after a minute and gently check in:
"I just wanted to see how you are."
"You do not need to explain."
"Would you like company, or would you prefer space?"
"You are welcome to return later, but there is no pressure."

If there is no co-facilitator, the main facilitator may briefly ground the group, then check in during a pause if appropriate and safe.

The most important thing is that if the participant returns, she is welcomed naturally, without making her explain herself in front of everyone.

A simple phrase is enough:
"Welcome back."

Summary points

- Emotional overwhelm is not failure; it is often a sign that something meaningful has surfaced.
- The facilitator's first task is to create safety, not interpretation.
- Grounding, slowing down and offering choice are key trauma-informed tools.
- Never force sharing, touch or eye contact.
- Know when the circle can hold something, and when outside support is needed.

Family System Dynamics & Participation — Why Getting There Is Half the Work

A mother never arrives alone — she arrives as part of a whole family system. Her ability to attend, participate, relax, or speak is shaped by what is happening at home: childcare arrangements, partner support, sleep levels, guilt, logistics, and emotional load. Recognizing these dynamics prevents misinterpretation (*"She's not engaged"*) and replaces it with compassion (*"She's carrying a lot"*). When facilitators acknowledge real-life constraints, mothers feel understood rather than judged, which increases trust, attendance, and meaningful participation.

- **Participation starts at home, not in the circle**

If bedtime was chaotic or childcare uncertain, a mother may arrive already depleted.

- **Guilt is a common companion**

Many women feel uneasy leaving children, even when they know it's healthy.

- **Presence looks different each time**

A mother may be talkative one week and silent the next — both are valid.

- **Showing up is already a success**

Getting out the door can require planning, negotiation, and emotional effort.

Assume variability. Attendance may be irregular, arrivals may be late, and energy levels will fluctuate. Instead of strict expectations, offer flexibility and warmth.

Welcome mothers as they are that day. Avoid comments that highlight lateness or absence. A simple *"We're glad you're here"* is enough.

Normalize real-life challenges. You might occasionally acknowledge them openly:
"Getting time away from home isn't always easy — the fact that you're here matters."

Avoid interpreting quietness as lack of interest. A mother may simply be exhausted, preoccupied, or processing. Give permission to participate in different ways — speaking, listening, or just being present.

Keep start and end times predictable. Reliability helps families plan and builds trust with partners or caregivers at home.

If possible, encourage continuity without pressure. Missing sessions should not feel like failure. A welcoming atmosphere makes it easier for mothers to return.

Remember that emotional capacity is linked to physical reality. Hunger, sleep deprivation, and stress all influence how someone engages. Compassion goes a long way.

Reflection Questions for Facilitators

- Do I interpret attendance or silence personally, or with curiosity?
- How can I make returning after being absent feel easy and shame-free?
- What signals do I send about flexibility and understanding?

Practical Scenario Example

A mother who attended regularly suddenly misses two sessions, then returns looking apologetic and flustered. Instead of asking for explanations, the facilitator greets her warmly and says, *"It's good to see you."* The mother relaxes, sits down, and later shares that childcare fell through and she almost didn't come back because she felt embarrassed. The simple, non-judging welcome allowed her to rejoin without shame.

Summary Points

- Mothers participate within real family constraints
- Attendance and energy will vary
- Guilt and logistics are normal challenges
- Welcome without judgement or pressure
- Showing up is already meaningful



Boundaries & Sharing — How to Be Real Without Feeling Exposed

You create a circle where mothers can speak honestly without worrying they will be judged, interrupted, or exposed. Many women are not used to being listened to without advice or commentary. Clear boundaries make the space feel safe instead of risky — especially when everyone is tired, emotional, or unsure what to expect. When mothers know they can share at their own pace and will be met with not judging and listening without commenting, they relax. And when people relax, real connection can happen.

- **Sharing is an invitation, not a duty**

No one has to speak. Listening quietly is real participation.

- **Not judging**

Different experiences and parenting styles are welcomed, not evaluated.

- **Speak from your own experience**

"I feel..." is helpful. *"You should..."* usually isn't.

- **Confidentiality builds trust**

Personal stories stay in the circle.

What do "boundaries" actually mean here?

In this context, boundaries are simply the gentle rules that make the space feel safe — like the walls of a cozy room. They are not about being strict or distant. They mean you don't have to share more than you want, nobody interrupts or judges you, no one tells you what you "should" do, and your story won't be repeated outside. Boundaries also protect you from feeling responsible for fixing everyone else. In short: you can relax, be yourself, and know the space will hold you.

Name these boundaries clearly at the start. Not in a formal way — just calmly and warmly. For example:
"Share as much or as little as you want. Passing is always okay. We practice not judging and listening without commenting, and what's shared here stays here."

This simple container prevents many uncomfortable situations before they happen.

Encourage healthy sharing rather than emotional dumping. It's okay for feelings to be big, but the circle should not become overwhelming for the speaker or the listeners. If someone goes very deep for a long time, gently slow things down:

"Thank you for trusting us with that. Let's pause for a breath."

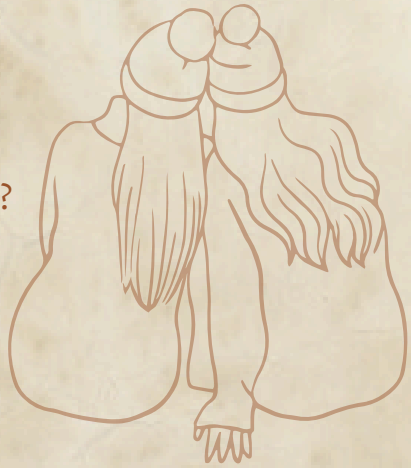
Protect speaking space. Interruptions, side conversations, or "me too but worse" stories can make people shut down. A talking object or simple turn-taking can help maintain respectful listening.

Model boundaries yourself. Don't overshare personal details just to be relatable, and don't disappear emotionally either. Balanced sharing shows what "safe openness" looks like.

Respect personal boundaries around touch and advice. Some mothers want hugs; others don't. Some want suggestions; others just need empathy. Ask or observe rather than assume.

Keep time boundaries too. If one person takes most of the session, others may leave feeling unseen. Gentle facilitation keeps the space fair.

Protect your own role. You are not a therapist, emergency hotline, or problem-solver. If someone needs more support than the circle can offer, it's okay to acknowledge that and suggest additional help.
Remember: strong boundaries actually allow deeper connection. When the edges are clear, people feel safer opening up.



Reflection Questions for Facilitators

- Do I truly allow people to pass without pressure?
- How do I respond when advice or commentary starts?
- Am I modeling not judging and attentive listening?

Practical Scenario Example

A mother shares that she feels overwhelmed and unsure of herself. The group stays quiet and simply listens — no interruptions, no quick fixes. After a moment she says, *"It feels strange, but really good that no one is telling me what to do."* She continues, visibly relieved. Being heard without judgement created safety.

Summary Points

- Sharing is optional; listening counts
- Practice not judging
- Listen without commenting
- Confidentiality keeps the space safe
- Kind boundaries allow real honesty

Gentle Communication in the Circle

Women's circles are spaces where participants can speak honestly about their experiences and feel deeply heard. Gentle communication plays a key role in creating this atmosphere of trust and authenticity.

You can cultivate a style of communication that encourages openness, compassion, and respect for different perspectives. Rather than offering advice or solutions, facilitators help create conversations where participants feel accepted and valued.

Such communication allows the circle to become a place where meaningful and heartfelt exchanges can emerge.

- **Create a non-judgmental atmosphere**

Participants should feel safe expressing their experiences without fear of criticism or correction.

- **Listening is more important than advising**

Women's circles are not spaces for solving problems but for witnessing and supporting one another.

- **Speak from personal experience**

Encouraging participants to use *"I statements"* helps maintain authenticity and prevents misunderstandings.

- **Respect diverse perspectives**

Every participant brings unique experiences, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds.

- **Allow the heart to speak**

Women's circles invite participants to move beyond analytical thinking and reconnect with emotional presence.

Facilitators play an important role in shaping the tone of communication within the circle.

Encouraging Authentic Sharing

Participants may initially hesitate to speak openly, especially if they are not used to sharing personal experiences in a group.

Facilitators can support authentic conversation by modelling gentle listening and appreciation. Simple responses such as:

- *"Thank you for sharing that."*
- *"I hear how important this is for you."*
- *"That sounds like it has been challenging."*

can help participants feel acknowledged and understood.

Using "I Statements"

Encouraging participants to speak from their own experiences helps create respectful dialogue. For example:

"I have felt something similar when..."

rather than

"You should try..."

This approach allows participants to share insights without imposing advice.

Avoiding Immediate Advice

When someone shares a difficulty, it can be tempting for others to offer solutions. However, advice can sometimes make participants feel misunderstood or judged.

Facilitators may gently remind the group that the purpose of the circle is to listen and witness rather than fix.

If appropriate, facilitators may offer resources or suggestions later, such as books, articles, or community resources that participants can explore on their own.

Bringing Inspiration Through Stories and Literature

Sometimes conversations can be supported through poems, fairy tales, folk stories, or passages from meaningful books.

Stories often open the heart and invite reflection without directly instructing participants what to think or do.

Facilitators may also share curated resources — such as recommended books or articles — that participants can explore after the gathering. You will find useful books in the Resources.

Nonviolent Communication

Some facilitators draw inspiration from the principles of Nonviolent Communication (Marshall Rosenberg), which emphasises speaking with honesty while remaining compassionate toward others.

This approach encourages people to express their feelings and needs clearly while listening respectfully to the experiences of others.

When communication in the circle reflects this spirit of acceptance and curiosity, trust within the group naturally grows.

Reflection Questions for Facilitators

- How can I model gentle and respectful communication during the circle?
- How can I encourage listening without immediately offering advice?
- What practices could help participants feel safe sharing openly?

Practical Scenario Example

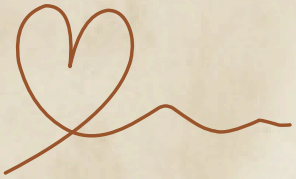
During a circle, one mother shares that she feels overwhelmed by the constant demands of caring for her toddler.

Another participant immediately begins suggesting different parenting strategies. The facilitator gently intervenes and reminds the group that the purpose of the circle is first to listen and acknowledge each other's experiences. She invites the group to simply thank the mother for sharing and allows space for her feelings to be heard.

Later in the conversation, the facilitator may mention that resources on parenting support are available for those who wish to explore them.

Summary Points

- Gentle communication creates safety and trust in the circle.
- Listening is more important than offering advice.
- "I statements" encourage respectful dialogue.
- Stories and literature can support meaningful reflection.
- A compassionate atmosphere allows authentic conversations to grow.



RESOURCES AND INSPIRATION

This booklet has been shaped by many streams of wisdom: nonformal training courses, self-developmental work, women's circles, story, moon wisdom, trauma-informed practice, family systems thinking, artistic processes, and lived experience in circle spaces.

Among the books and authors that inspired this work are:

Clarissa Pinkola Estés — Women Who Run with the Wolves
A powerful exploration of myth, instinct, story, and the Wild Woman archetype, inviting women to reconnect with their inner knowing, courage, and soul life.

Oriah Mountain Dreamer — The Invitation
An inspiration for authenticity, depth, and the courage to live from the heart. Her work reminds us to create spaces where women can show up truthfully and be received with tenderness.

Lucy AitkenRead — Moon Circle: Rediscover intuition, wildness and sisterhood
A gentle and inspiring resource for women's circles, weaving together practical guidance, story, and lived experience to support reconnection with intuition, wildness, and sisterhood.

Kirsty Gallagher — Lunar Living
A source of inspiration for living in relationship with lunar rhythm, inner seasons, and the quiet guidance of cyclical awareness.

Book List and Online Resources — you can find a carefully curated list of Books and Online Resources at our websites: gentlenest.cz or theorigoworkshop.com or familyexpert.eu

This booklet has also been nourished by:

The DONNA method - please find it among our online Resources at www.gentlenest.cz

The council approach — the practice of deep listening, speaking from lived experience, and creating a circle where each voice is welcomed with respect.

Virginia Satir's family approach and family systems thinking — especially the understanding that healing and growth happen in relationship, and that honest, compassionate presence can open space for change.

Trauma-informed workshops and training experiences — which helped shape our sensitivity to safety, pacing, nervous system awareness, boundaries, and the importance of choice in any group process.

Our artistic and experiential practice — including storytelling, seasonal rituals, visual art, movement, silence, reflection, and shared creativity as pathways into deeper connection.

Gentle, kind, honest, and authentic presence — perhaps the most important thread of all. More than any single method, this booklet grows from the lived experience of holding spaces where women can arrive as they are, be seen without judgment, and slowly reconnect with themselves and one another.



Acknowledgement

This booklet was created within the Erasmus+ project "Mamas Who Run with the Wolves", co-funded by the European Union. The project focused on supporting mothers with small children in reconnecting with their own needs, strengthening their well-being, and building nurturing communities for families.

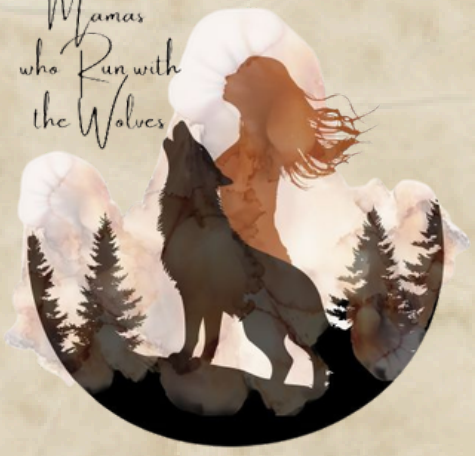
The Creators of this Booklet are the participating organisations:

GentleNest

FAMILY EXPERT

ORIGO WORKSHOP

Mamas who Run with the Wolves



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