



# WELCOME TO CIRCLING

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30 DAYS TO PRESENCE & CONNECTION



## Module 1

**What is Circling? What does this mean  
in practice?**

# INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS CIRCLING?

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*“Immersed in the wonder of the Tao (Now),  
you can deal with whatever life brings you,  
and when death comes, you are ready.”*

- Tao te Ching

IT'S ONLY WHEN WE WAKE UP THAT  
WE REALIZE SOMETHING WAS STRANGE



## We're glad you've joined us

This course will walk you through some of the basics of Circling as we see them at CirclingEurope. My hope is that by reading this we begin a dialogue, both between us and in the global practice community, where we consciously develop our culture.

Circling continually reveals a different way of relating to ourselves, others, and the world—one that is less fixed and changes as we change and apply our knowledge.

As a result, the guidance we provide is intended to bring clarity with powerful distinctions and to support a “stripping away” of concepts so that we can more fully trust the unknown. We invite you to notice your sense of what meditation and connection should be, and what you feel about diving into something new.

And, the best way to know Circling is to experience it—so consider signing up for a complimentary online intro session [here](#).

## In this Course

We will cover the following topics:

1. What is Circling?
2. The 5 Principles
3. What are the “rules?”
4. Getting Started Guide: Noticing
5. Getting Started Guide: Curiosity
6. Two Forms: Birthday Circles and Surrendered Leadership Circles
7. Trusting Our Alarming Emotions
8. The Elegance of Conflict
9. Reclaiming Our Shadow

# What is Circling?

Circling is a meditation practice in connection.

What does this mean?

Circling is a **meditation** in that we are paying exquisite attention to what's already here, without needing to get anywhere or change anything.

Circling is a practice in that we are actively relating, not theorizing about relating. It is also a practice in that we are always learning, growing, exploring, and discovering—there is no perfect Circle and we are never really “done”.

Circling is in **connection**—in that we're bringing awareness to the quality of being in relationship. What's between us? Our focus is on people, but at a basic level we're always exploring the connection between “I” and “not I”.

## What does this mean in practice?

We intend this list to guide our explorations without limiting the infinite mystery unfolding between us. Circling includes:

- Being open to not knowing and uncertainty.
  - Not expecting your direct experience to make sense quickly.
- A growing access and trust in the immediacy of the present moment.
  - Letting go of trying to make something happen.
  - Recognizing the sense of lack or emptiness in ourselves can be a blueprint to who we are.
  - Following the unique movement of what is arising and showing itself.
  - Being happy to rest in your presence and not feeling pressured to have to do something.
  - An increasing ability to be able to discern your experience and put meaning to it.

- Opening to the whole field of experience (gross, subtle, causal, non-dual).
  - Inviting full presence in your whole body.
  - Weakening the sense of separation between self and other—a sense of ecstatic co-arising.
- Seeing others as perfect where they are, including the things you want to change and your desire to change them.
  - Appreciating others even if the connection feels painful to you.
  - Co-exploring and checking in with others to check for shared reality.
  - Attuning to the deeper soul of others and becoming increasingly sensitive to the true expression coming through language.
  - An ability to penetrate into deeper truths.
- Openness to conflict and differences.
  - Exploring differences to see if it is you projecting, or offering a powerful insight.
  - Keeping it relational rather than discussions of right/wrong.



## Circling as a "Way of Being"

Some people hold Circling as a “skillset”—of communication, empathy, self-knowledge and group leadership. Others think of Circling as a community, or a movement spearheading a culture of greater authenticity and intimacy. (We've even categorized common ways of seeing Circling into [AQAL Integral Theory's developmental levels in this blog article](#)).

We love developing these skills and are passionate about the impact Circling has on culture. Yet our preference is to humbly regard Circling as a pointer to a better way of living. We have seen this “way of being”—put simply, presence in connection—consistently improve the lives of those who are willing to practice it. More essentially for us, it calls people to a more mystical/spiritual experience of life.

Thanks for joining us on this journey. We'll close with a question:

From what you've seen so far, are there any aspects of Circling you want to include more fully into your way of life?

With love,

**Jordan and the Circling Europe team**





## Module 2

**Evolving principles that guide us in presence and connection.**



# THE FIVE PRINCIPLES

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*“There are two ways to slide easily through life:  
to believe everything or to doubt everything;  
both ways save us from thinking.”*

- Alfred Korzybski



# The Five Principles

The practice of Circling encourages you to draw your own conclusions, while continuously allowing them to be re-drawn. The Five Principles can be lights on this path to presence with each other.

The following descriptions are not comprehensive—but they will give you enough to start testing out how you can deepen your presence both inside and outside of Circles. They are not rules; they are guidelines. They are not answers; they are questions to be lived. They are not static; they are evolving as we evolve.

We highly encourage you to explore in a live session—[an online intro](#) (complimentary for first timers), on [CircleAnywhere](#), or [in person](#).

## 1: Commitment to Connection

An invitation to stay in connection with whatever is arising between you and others. This includes revealing yourselves and being open to the impacts from—and on—others. This does not mean any forced sense of having to be open or vulnerable; it does mean we inquire deeply into the truth of what is here instead of habitually reacting or avoiding. We can just as easily share and explore the feelings of being guarded, distant, confused, or unknown with someone as we can the feelings of vulnerability, closeness, or appreciation.

*To get a feel for this principle, think of a time when you spoke something uncomfortable—maybe you stuck up for a friend being bullied, or named the elephant in the room at a family gathering. How'd it go?*

*Can you also remember not speaking up about something that seemed true and important to you but you did not voice it because you were afraid of others' reactions?*

*It is these types of situations and feelings that we meet in presence and therefore develop powerful and agile ways to go from conflict/pain into creating deeper win-win connection.*

*Now consider if there are any relationships in which there is a truth you are currently avoiding. Can you imagine speaking it, and being open to how it impacts the other person? Although this is not always easy and resolution is not guaranteed, Circling is an environment that really helps you to meet these challenges with others.*

## 2: Owning Your Experience

Getting to our deepest truth, our unarguable experience beyond our projections, encourages us to take responsibility for what is happening within us, and being open to that changing. Often this requires a letting go of outcomes and admitting feelings that challenge our sense of who we are. It involves the willingness to feel our body, the subtleties in our experience and our more challenging emotions. The highest level of this principle is feeling 100% responsible for all of our experience.

*To get a feel for this principle, consider some place in your life where you are blaming external circumstances, where something feels outside of your control. Now, can you simply name how it feels to be you?*

*E.g. Shifting from ‘my boss is unfairly victimizing me’ to ‘in the presence of my boss I feel tense and insecure’. The first statement is arguable, but the second statement you can know to be true in yourself and is more an owned experience.*

*Have you experienced someone that seemed to blame you for being who you are, compared to someone that was willing to be really honest about how they contribute to a challenge in the connection with you? The difference can be small and yet so powerful.*

## 3: Staying With the Level of Sensation

By including the subtle bodily sensations in our awareness and expression, we can share with more power, presence, and discover more truth. These sensations often contain the least interpretation and therefore can surprise us with connections outside of rational analysis. This is about alive embodied sensations and emotions—not ‘dry’ body sensation sharing.

*To get a feel for this, notice the act of your breathing. Can you sense the belly moving in and out? Can you feel the air brushing against the skin beneath your nostrils? What else do you notice in relation to me, the writer, and the content? Is there any sense of emotional reaction, or feelings of opening or tension?*

## 4: Trusting Experience

Invites us to honor the relative truth of any given experience inside of us, while discerning what is happening. It is often an invitation to trust the unknown, to include non-rational experiences, and points to something beyond our individual consciousness.

*To get a feel for this, find a self-judgement, especially one you want to get rid of. Now imagine the judgement spoken with compassion and wisdom... what is the gift it is offering you?*

*An example for me is that I often judge myself for taking care of others, when I'm really just uncomfortable with something in the connection. Listening to this discomfort underneath the caretaking, and then sharing it openly can bring a deeper care, and a greater sense of my own power. So instead of a tepid caretaking I'm able to bring a powerful love that embraces both of us.*

## 5: Be With The Other in Their World

By deeply appreciating the perfection of someone in each moment, we can get penetrating insight into the nuances of their way of being. See their inherent innocence, and assume nothing, and be willing to challenge assumptions in both of you (without any effort to change how someone or something is). This principle is a pointer to not just understand someone intellectually, but to surrender into being with them in that particular moment.

*To get a feel for this, think of a politician you do not like, or person in your life if that is more charged. Now imagine you are them, doing the exact things they are. But unlike them, you can inquire into your experience as it happens: what is it like in your body, how do you see others, what is causing you to feel that way, and do those things? Are you threatened, afraid, or yearning for anything? How does what you're doing make perfect sense to you?*

With love,

Jordan and the Circling Europe team

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## Module 3

What tends to work well in Circling,  
what doesn't, and what you might play  
with instead.

# WHAT ARE THE RULES?

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*“When you become comfortable with uncertainty,  
infinite possibilities open up in your life.”*

- Eckhart Tolle



## What are the "rules"?

People often ask us, “What are the “rules” of Circling?”

While this is an understandable and natural response when trying something new, we find it is not as useful a set of questions as:

- How am I relating with others right now?
- How do I feel?
- What do I want?
- What kind of direction is arising in me?
- Am I open to what’s happening?
- Can the five principles guide me to more fully embrace this moment?

You might even pause to contemplate these questions now.

## Welcoming Everything—including our desire for rules

Often in our interactions we are following a set of “rules” that we unconsciously agreed to decades ago and have long since outgrown. Specific rules about how to act are usually a mutual collusion to withhold inconvenient truths from each other so that we can feel more comfortable and safe.

Yet even these collusions are invited into the light of presence in Circling. They can be incredible guides to greater presence, connection, and self-knowledge if we are willing to explore them together.

*For example, the habit of shying away from speaking unflattering truths we see in each other, is intended to maintain a sense of comfort—an intention for intimacy. But the shying away limits intimacy, and ironically, the speaking of it can bring us deeper together.*

*More concretely (from Sean): For a while while leading together with John I would sometimes go very quiet and contemplative. John would support this presence. However, at closer look I was actually activated by him taking an energetic lead in the room, and that left me both uncomfortable with his leadership and triggered a deeper sense of unworthiness in me. With meeting each other more truthfully, we saw that I actually wanted to assert myself more as a leader and for him to own more of his uncertainty that compelled him to come forward so strongly. This led to a much greater sense of creativity and togetherness working together.*

Circling invites us to turn our attention inward to examine our deeper motivations for “following the rules” (or “doing it right,” which seems to stem from a similar motivation to avoid the discomfort of not-knowing). As a result we encounter the limits of these internalized expectations, and are often able to liberate ourselves from them in a way that gives us more freedom and aliveness.



Instead of rules, we firmly commit to a structure of inquiry and honest in-the-moment feedback, for ourselves and the people we practice with. Instead of presuming we can know, we open to a stance of humility. We offer the Five Principles as guides for this commitment, and encourage you to [try an online intro event](#), or a [CircleAnywhere session](#), to get continuous support for your own unique expression of the moment's wholeness.

## Helpful Hints (an in-depth look)

The following helpful hints take a more in-depth look at how the five principles can be applied in Circling. (Although none are necessary for you to enjoy Circling, and following too tightly can inhibit the transformative power of the practice)

- **Guiding, coaching, fixing, and helping someone** in a Circle are generally attempts to get someone “out of” rather than more fully “into” their experience. As such, even when the desire to help someone feels very genuine, it **usually comes from a desire to not feel discomfort in your own body**. The following are more skillful ways of engaging your relationship to some whose present-moment experience you want to change:

- **Surrender** more to the feeling in you that has you want to change them and share or reveal that feeling (instead of going straight for the guidance). (*Own your experience*)

- **Get curious** about how it is for them (dropping the unchecked assumption that they will be better off if they change). (*Be with them in their world*)

- For more on this topic, you can see the following articles:  
[Is Your Well Meaning Advice Accidentally Causing Shame?](#)  
and [The Problem with Trying to Fix Problems, and How to Fix It.](#)



- Telling “stories” about the past, sharing theories, and **mental analysis tend to place awareness away from the present** moment relationship (although they can be skillfully used).

- When you find yourself wanting to tell a story, ask yourself if there is some unwanted sensation you are trying to avoid (unwanted does not mean “negative”, as we can want to avoid feeling loved just as much as shamed). (*Stay with the level of sensation*)

- Stories are an important part of deep relating. We simply tell them with presence. If you do want to tell a story or include a context, see if you can step into the feeling of it and speak “from” a first person experiential perspective rather than “about” a third person perspective (You’ll notice the best storytellers, comedians, and movies do this). (*Own your experience*)

- For example, try describing a lemon out loud. Now imagine biting into a lemon, and describe your experience. Which one feels more alive? The description can be accurate and “authentic” either way, but the felt-experience almost always feels more satisfying and connective.

- Another example from comedian Louis C.K. [here](#).

- There is such a thing as intellectual intimacy; Circling welcomes this as well... it just seems that modern Western culture has overemphasized “mind” so we are making room for “heart” and “gut.” In the end, we hope they all have an equal opportunity to guide us into being. (*Trust your experience*)

- You can use this opportunity to shift your identity from solely mental processing, to a more integrated attunement with internal and external realities.

• In Circling we “Welcome Everything,” which will inherently lead to **welcoming seeming paradoxes**. (*Commitment to Connection*) For example:

- Welcoming not wanting to welcome.
- Feeling both happy and sad simultaneously.
- Feeling proud and ashamed of the exact same thing.
- Being simultaneously aware of yourself and others.
- Being “stuck in” a sensation and aware of your stuckness.
- [In this video I spend an hour going deeply into these paradoxes.](#)

• You are as welcome to be “closed” and “guarded” as you are “open” and “vulnerable.” (*Trust your experience*)

▫ **Presence has no preferences.**

▫ People in the group are welcome to share the impact your way of being has on them, which might include them wanting you to be more open. You need not do anything about it, even as you stay with how that shifts your relationship with them.

▫ Speaking for the collective tends to draw a lot of flak; not speaking up when something is alive in you also tends to draw a lot of attention.

▫ “Speaking for the collective” means saying stuff like “everyone’s mad at me,” or “We’re moving too fast”—which are unchecked assumptions that usually do not include the diversity of perspectives present.

▫ On rare occasions speaking for the collective can be the most authentic expression and really land for everyone.

• **There is no way to not act:** staying silent affects the group as does speaking up.

▫ In other words, there’s no way to not show up. Hide and you “show up” as hiding. (*Commitment to Connection*)

• Projections and judgements are a part of relationships like anything else. Sharing them with humility can be a way for someone to more deeply [own their experience](#) and discover something new, but holding on to them or assuming that they are infallible is likely to engender suffering and relationships full of strife.

▫ Self-inquiry into your 'projections' is also a key part of Circling.

- In Circling we are exploring the quality of connection—we hold that everyone and **everything is already connected.** (*Commitment to Connection*)

- Connection could feel like distance, mystery, non-knowing, ignorance, or emptiness.

- When you find yourself wanting to say that you feel “disconnected” we invite you to inquire more deeply into what the sense of that feeling is like at an embodied level.

- When you “don’t feel anything,” this is a good opportunity to bring more presence into what this feels like—an opportunity to feel into the void. (*Stay with the level of sensation*)

- You might find that “nothing” feels like “emptiness,” “spaciousness,” “numbness,” etc.

- Often by getting more clarity on what “nothing” feels like, you will discover something inside of the nothingness. This does not invalidate the nothing, it just means you are in a new moment with a new sensation as a result of bringing more awareness.



- The same goes with feeling “bored.” Upon examination, you might find that **underneath this boredom is a desire** or yearning for something more. (*Trusting and owning your experience*)

- Try acting upon this or sharing the desire rather than naming the boredom.
- Notice if your boredom is a complaint and a way to blame someone, and see if you can go to the motivation of the feeling instead.

- When wondering whether or not to share something, it helps to check with what’s most alive and surrender to what “wants to be shared through you”.

- This might look like pausing a moment, breathing, and checking for internal guidance.
- Or it could look like starting without knowing how you will finish.
- It can be helpful to check and see where the desire is coming from.
- Is the feeling still present, and is it in relationship with what’s arising? (*Be with them in their world*)
- If you have a tendency to speak a lot, you might experiment with observing more.
- If you have a tendency to hold back, you might experiment with speaking up more.

- Sometimes our most authentic expression cannot be expressed through words. Sometimes a movement or particular form or posture best expresses your state or a particular sound.

- We invite you to invite all forms of possible expression.

Enjoy your Circles (and [jump into an intro event](#) if you haven't had a chance to enjoy a Circle yet).

With love,

Jordan and the Circling Europe team



## Module 4

**Being more aware of what it's like to be you (and being aware of that awareness)**



# GETTING STARTED GUIDE: NOTICING

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*“The truth will not necessarily set you free,  
but truthfulness will.”*

- Ken Wilber,  
A Brief History of Everything



*Ceci n'est pas une pipe.*

(Image above: René Magritte's "The Treachery of Images," which says "this is not a pipe" in French below the image, gives viewers the experience of the limits of representation).

# Getting Started Guide: Awareness

A helpful way to develop more presence in relationship, is to practice being more aware of what it's like to be you. We can do this by simply noting what is occurring within our own body-mind in any particular moment.

Let's acknowledge that noticing—which invariably involves naming—inherently separates the thing named from the rest of reality, so it has the potential to actually take us into more abstraction.

Yet distinguishing what is occurring within our awareness can also bring us into a deeper relationship with what's present, and invite others to join us. It can open us to wonder at the mysterious experience that anything exists at all. And it is inherently loving in that it unconditionally accepts what's already happening.

Three common distinctions to notice are “physical sensations,” “emotions,” and “thought.” It's also nice to notice when your attention is internal (as in these examples) or external. We invite you to have some fun with “noticing” what's occurring for you... **now** as you read this email, especially with Circling, and maybe even with a friend ([these videos walk you through practices](#) that you can try out with someone).


## Noticing bodily sensation

- What do you feel physically?
- If you have trouble feeling, see if you can name the feeling of not-feeling. What is numbness like? What is cold and empty like?
- See if you can notice without judgement or interpretation. (Bodily sensation often contains the least interpretation).
- See if you can notice the noticing.
- Sensation can give you information about another just as easily as it can inform you about yourself.
- Caution: Just sharing bodily sensation can feel “dry” very quickly.

## Noticing emotion

- We find it helpful to share from an emotion, rather than about it. (remember the example of describing a lemon, versus expressing the feeling of biting into it?)
- We're not trying to pin an emotion down, so there's infinite room to explore.
  - For example, what's this happiness like? Is it a contentment or more joyful? Is it playful, or nostalgic?
  - Can we ever really know what a particular emotion is like, in ourselves or outside of ourselves?
- Take your time, and allow yourself to settle into a feeling even if it feels difficult to describe.
- You can allow your physical posture and reactions to inform your emotional awareness and bring you into deeper contact with your emotions. Does your current emotional state ask for movement or sound?



- Emotions seem to be transient.
  - I've never seen an emotion stick around for very long when it is fully embraced.
  - But when they are kept in the unconscious, they seem to never go away.
- In Circling, emotions are not inherently right or wrong.
  - As such they don't "deserve" to be felt or avoided.
  - We find that emotions are like bananas  : there's usually something good in there, it's usually covered in a peel you want to throw out, and if it's been ignored for too long it's probably almost rotten and only useful for smoothies.
- It is easy to confuse assessments with the emotions that accompany them.
  - Notice if you have a tendency to say "I feel like..." and then follow it with a projection, assumption, judgement or interpretation (rather than the feeling in you).
  - If you notice something about someone else you can always say "I sense."

## Noticing thought

- In sharing your thoughts, try sharing a "headline" of the thought, like a newspaper or blog heading.
  - This allows you to make your subjective experience of thinking an object in a larger awareness.
  - You can name that you're thinking about sensation, or emotion.
- See if the thought is connected with the body. Is there a sensation along with the thought?
- Thoughts that are spontaneous and are more about discovery than sharing preconceived ideas, are likely to be more enlivening and connecting.



- Look for analysis or “figuring out” as a way to avoid discomfort.
  - If you are noticing that avoidance, you can use thought to go more deeply into it.
  - Thus we cultivate and discern our thoughts to bring us more deeply into the now.
- If you find yourself judging, see if you can welcome that judgement and genuinely ask the question.
  - This can cut through the endless loops of judging judgement.
  - Another option is not acting from the judgement because you can sense there is a deeper vulnerability in you.
  - Some skepticism of interpretations seems healthy, and can only be accessed by allowing them.
  - For example—if you think your embodied experience isn’t as valuable as your mental, we invite you to closely examine this mental concept itself.





## Wrapping it Up

There are many additional ways to categorize experience—you can also notice desire, images, intuitions, your awareness itself (see how this relates to staying with the level of sensation in [this 7 min video](#) from me and my business partner Sean), your sense of others, your imaginations of others, the environment, etc.

Bringing these distinctions into Circling can give you a meta-noticing about what aspects of your experience are easier and more difficult for you to access. Which things do you tend to notice most often? Finally, you might ask your friend or practice partner to give you feedback about what they feel when they are with you, noticing you noticing.

All of these noticings can be wonderful additions to a Circle, and all of them can be shared in a way that is rote. Circling encourages us to get messy, keep trying, constantly open to feedback, and improve even as we acknowledge that a finite end-state or idea of perfection is an illusion.

An unexamined life isn't worth living, but an unlived life isn't worth examining. :)

With love,

Jordan and the Circling Europe team.



## Module 5

**What is a relationship? How do you know? Does it change?**

# GETTING STARTED GUIDE: CURIOSITY

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*“If you judge people, you have no time to love them.”*

- Mother Theresa



# Getting Started Guide: Curiosity

We invite you now to look very closely at the idea of relationship.

- What is it comprised of?
- When you look, who is the “I” doing the looking? What is it relating to?
- Is there any way to be “outside” of relationship with something in your awareness? What about things that aren’t in your awareness?
- Can you sense yourself and the other co-arising in the same space?

Circling suggests that who you are is an ever changing function of your relationships. For certain roles, this is obvious: a mother cannot exist without a child, and vice versa. If we extend this principle and consider that to a certain extent, we create the other and the other creates us simply by existing in relationship, we find a rich area of mutuality to explore. Our curiosity is on the quality of that creating, from the personal to the transpersonal, the individual to the collective.

It is often helpful to play with shifting your attention “in” and “out” in a Circle; i.e. shifting from a 1st person, interior perspective to a 3rd person exterior perspective.

*To get a feel for this, notice your current emotional state—this is a first person perspective.*

*Now notice the space where you are reading this email. What is the light like, what color is the ground? This is a third person perspective.*

*Now notice how the light and ground affects your inner world (back to first person), and then notice how your inner world affects what data you are drawn to in these space (third person).*

# The Magic of 2nd Person Perspective

There is a unique magic in opening to a 2nd person perspective—where we imagine what the interior of another person, or the group as a whole, might be like in this very moment. When we share that and see how it impacts the person we've projected upon, it often brings creative new insights and surprising reflections for everyone.

How do you get your data to form your impression of the other (2nd person)? Here are a few suggestions:

## Data about the Other, from the Other

- What is happening for them right now?
- What is it that is having them say the things they say? Imagine what would have had to happen for this person to be the way they are? How are they such that they say what they say, think what they think, do what they do, and conclude what they conclude? What is the perspective/"world" that they have? What is behind what they are saying?
- What is it like to be them? What's it like for them to be like that? e.g. asking what's that like for you?
- Do their words seem aligned with their expression so that you feel/believe what they say?
- Is there anything they are wanting?
- What else is arising in your experience in connection with them that you can share?
- How do they know they feel what they do?



## Data about the Other, From the Self

- How must it be for them right now? If you mirror them and step into their shoes, what happens in you? Feeling, this how do you sense what their experience is like?
- Do you have a shared reality with them? Do you fully get (and honour) their perspective?
- Is there something you are wanting from them?
- How close/intimate do you feel with them?
- How is it to be with this person? What is the impact they have on your feelings? What is their unique flavour?
- Where is your natural attention going? e.g. certain words, expressions or body language. Inquire into these.

## Data about the Other, From the Group

- What is the feedback of the group? Does what is happening in the group reflect them in any way?
- How might we be occurring to them?
- What's the vibe of the group?

## Beyond Being Seen?

This act of being willing to really **Be With Another in Their World** often gives people the feeling of "being seen"—sometimes for the first time. While we include this exciting feeling of being seen in our practice, it doesn't take center stage.

We consider the common conception of "being seen" to reinforce a limited and often false sense of autonomy—both from a Western, psychological development standpoint (in contrast to a more post-autonomous, 5th order capacity, more on that later) and from an Eastern, mystical state standpoint (of seeing the locus of self-identity inclusive of and beyond the dualistic, ego-centric perspective of a separate self).

As such, our Circles always include the possibility that any of us, participants and leaders, will feel deeply seen. We welcome reinforcing aspects of healthy ego development—particularly for those parts of ourselves that need to differentiate away from conventional structures.

But even in such "meetings" we'll always be opening the possibility to go beyond that as well—to challenge our self-identities, our own understanding of reality, and be re-invented as a result of the meeting.

This is an empirical claim—you can test it for yourself at a session on our global online transformational platform [CircleAnywhere](#), in our ten week [online course](#), or at a [live event](#) near you.

With love,

**Jordan and the Circling Europe team.**





## Module 6

Using free will to surrender  
to your destiny

# TWO FORMS OF CIRCLING

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*“The word “surrender” is often interpreted as giving up, as weakness, as admitting defeat. Although this is one way to use the word, we will use it in a different way. Surrendering means letting go of your resistance to the total openness of who you are.”*

- David Deida



On [CircleAnywhere](#), the two most common forms of the practice are the "Birthday Circle" and the "Surrendered Leadership Circle."

## The Birthday Circle

The **Birthday Circle** is the form of practice where we focus our attention on the relationship with one person, continuously directing our attention to being with them, for a set amount of time. We share and explore their world while sharing what it's like for us to be with them in it.

Meditators will recognize the practice of concentrating attention on a particular object, such as the breath or a mantra. In the Birthday Circle, the object of meditation is the relationship(s) with the Circlee (the person who is the focus of attention). Whenever attention seems to be moving elsewhere, the facilitator will guide it back to how it is to be the Circlee, and for the group to be with them.

This foundational practice is deeply powerful and important in its own right. It is also an essential element to Surrendered Leadership, both within Circling and as part of integrating Circling insights into everyday living. (You can hear about my first birthday Circle, as well as those of my two business partners, [in this video](#))

## Surrendered Leadership Circle

A **Surrendered Leadership Circle** emphasizes self-leadership, guided by surrender to the flow of the group. At best it becomes a symphony with everyone having their own individual role and being perfectly in sync with each other and the whole.

The surrender is into the truth of what is present between us, and in our willingness to connect and be open with each other. It involves a radical letting go and a trust that calls forth our inspiration and creativity, and opens us to the mystery and natural flow of what 'wants' to happen between us.



These Circles become a crucible of response-ability, with often immediate and continuous feedback loops to enable sensitivity, rich learning and group creativity. They are designed for the creation of a palpable and heightened collective field; an abundant space for emergence and release into the group intelligence.

As leaders we're responsible for setting the context and then we're also a part of that very same context ourselves. We're willing to reveal ourselves at all times. We're willing to not know what is going to emerge, and to surrender to the greater forces at play between us and beyond us. There's no hiding behind a role or a pre-determined plan, and the way we become part of the collective process is a refreshingly strong perspective shift for most participants.

[This article on Surrendered Leadership](#) and [this article on Circling and Surrendered Leadership](#) explore the paradox between self-leadership and connection, and provide more clarity on what this looks like in practice.



## A Cautionary Note About Trying to “Get” Someone

In both forms of Circling there can be a temptation to try to “get” someone—to fully understand someone else’s uniqueness.

In some ways, I see this as a futile attempt to put the mysterious, complex, and ever changing nature of being into a box. Yet like approaching God, eradicating poverty, or cleaning the house, the pursuit seems necessary and admirable even if we never reach it. I just encourage us to hold our desire lightly.

Why?

- Ironically, assuming that we could ever fully “get” a person can result in missing them.
- “Getting the other” can reify a separation and egotism that I haven’t found to be true (though of course our experience of a finite “I” needs to be acknowledged, no matter how true it may be that we’re in constant transformation).

The only danger here is missing out on the endless unfolding of life and beauty of beings in process, by assuming that things (and people) are finite and can be “known” (rather than an ongoing conversation with mystery).

## Other Kinds of Circles

You might hear people refer to Circles without a particular focus of attention as “Organic” or “Living Room” Circles. Some communities also practice “Hot Tub Circling,” which means there is no official leader or facilitator. While we recognize these are important names to others, we do not use them at Circling Europe. (We used to call Surrendered Leadership Circles “Leadership Development” Circles, but we found this under-emphasized the importance of the collective and our surrender to an intelligence that goes beyond our individual autonomy). You may also hear widely different views on what Circling actually is—we’ve [categorized some of the most common of these into a Ken Wilber, Integral Theory inspired chart](#) that you might enjoy.

There are many beautiful spiritual, self-development, and organizational practices that use some version of the term “circle.” There are also a variety of practices emerging that emphasize placing attention on relationship or the “we-space.” \*\*\* Some of these practices influenced the historical emergence of Circling (see our website for more on our Circling lineage), some are continuing to influence Circling, some bear resemblance to what we do, and others are completely unrelated. Again, we wish to honor the value of these practices to others while acknowledging that they are not what we do.

With love,

Jordan and the Circling Europe team.

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\*\*\* See *"Cohering the Integral We Space: Engaging Collective Emergence, Wisdom and Healing in Groups"* with a chapter from *CirclingEurope* for more on "we space".



## Module 7

Getting more intimate with our emotions  
reveals insights.

# TRUSTING OUR ALARMING EMOTIONS

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*"The dark does not destroy the light; it defines it.  
It's our fear of the dark that casts our joy into the shadows."*

- Brené Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection*





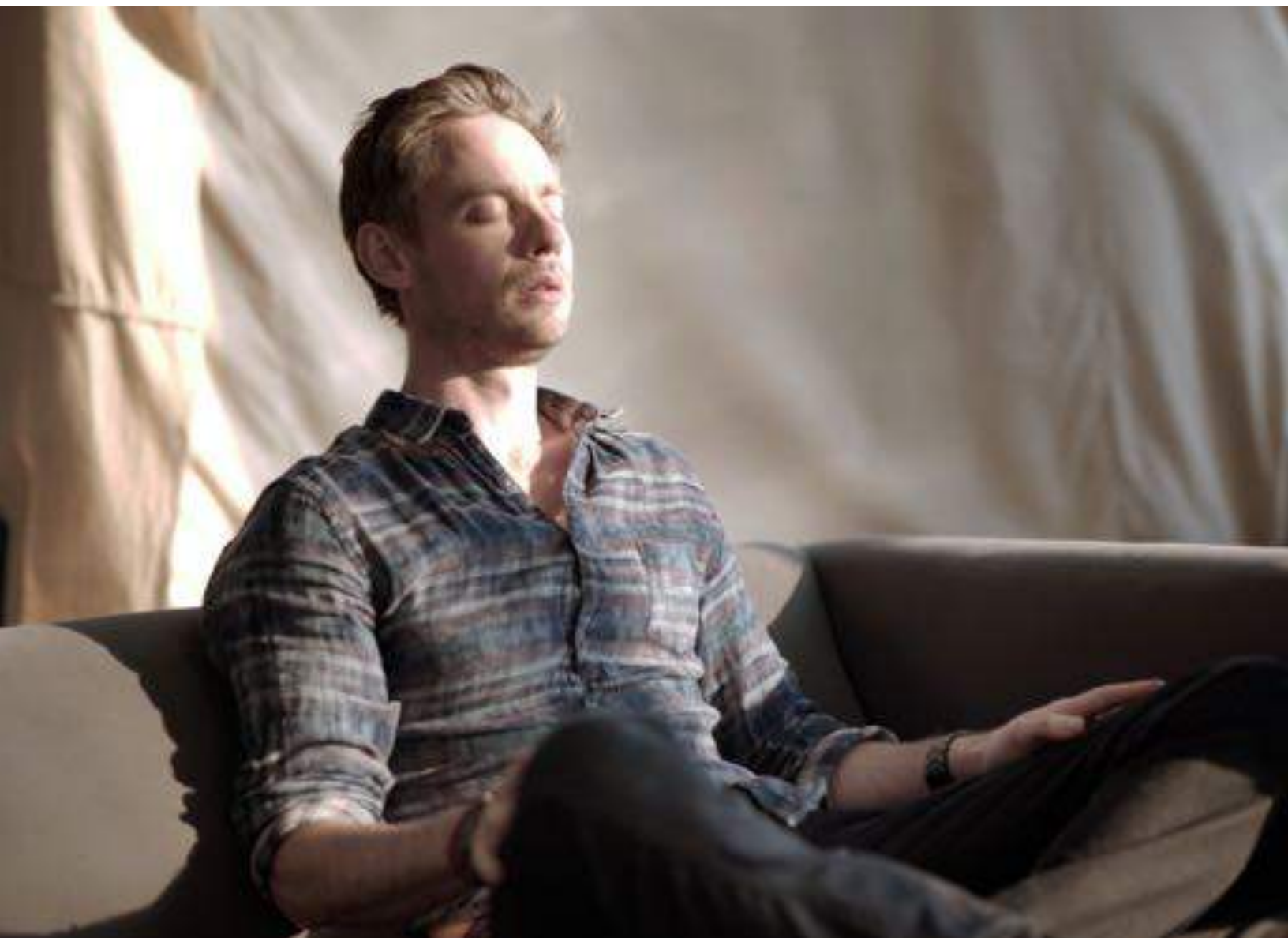
## Trusting our Alarming Emotions

Try this one out—Our emotions are like alarms.

The alarms themselves are neutral—they simply tell us to pay attention to something—but ignoring them can cause great harm.

Take a cooking timer for example. The message of the alarm is that a delicious meal is ready to eat. Not attending to the timer, however shrill and unpleasant its sound may be, and what was once tasty becomes inedible. Ignore the simple reminder for too long, and the inattention can even become a deadly fire.

No matter how much we like or dislike an alarm, our lives tend to be better when we're willing to listen to their message before we turn them off. Just like the cooking timer, or the often unpleasant alarm that wakes you up in the morning, you ignore your emotions at your own risk.



## Example: Trusting "Anger" on CircleAnywhere

The following anecdote demonstrates this:\*

*On a recent CircleAnywhere session, a woman spoke up but no one responded. Eventually she got the courage to speak up again, but once again the group seemed not to take any notice. She started sharing how lonely and isolated she felt, and then shared anger at not being heard. Finally she shouted—and still no one reacted! Suddenly she came to the realization that no one paid her attention because they couldn't hear her! So she sent a chat message, reloaded her video, and without delay she could be heard.*

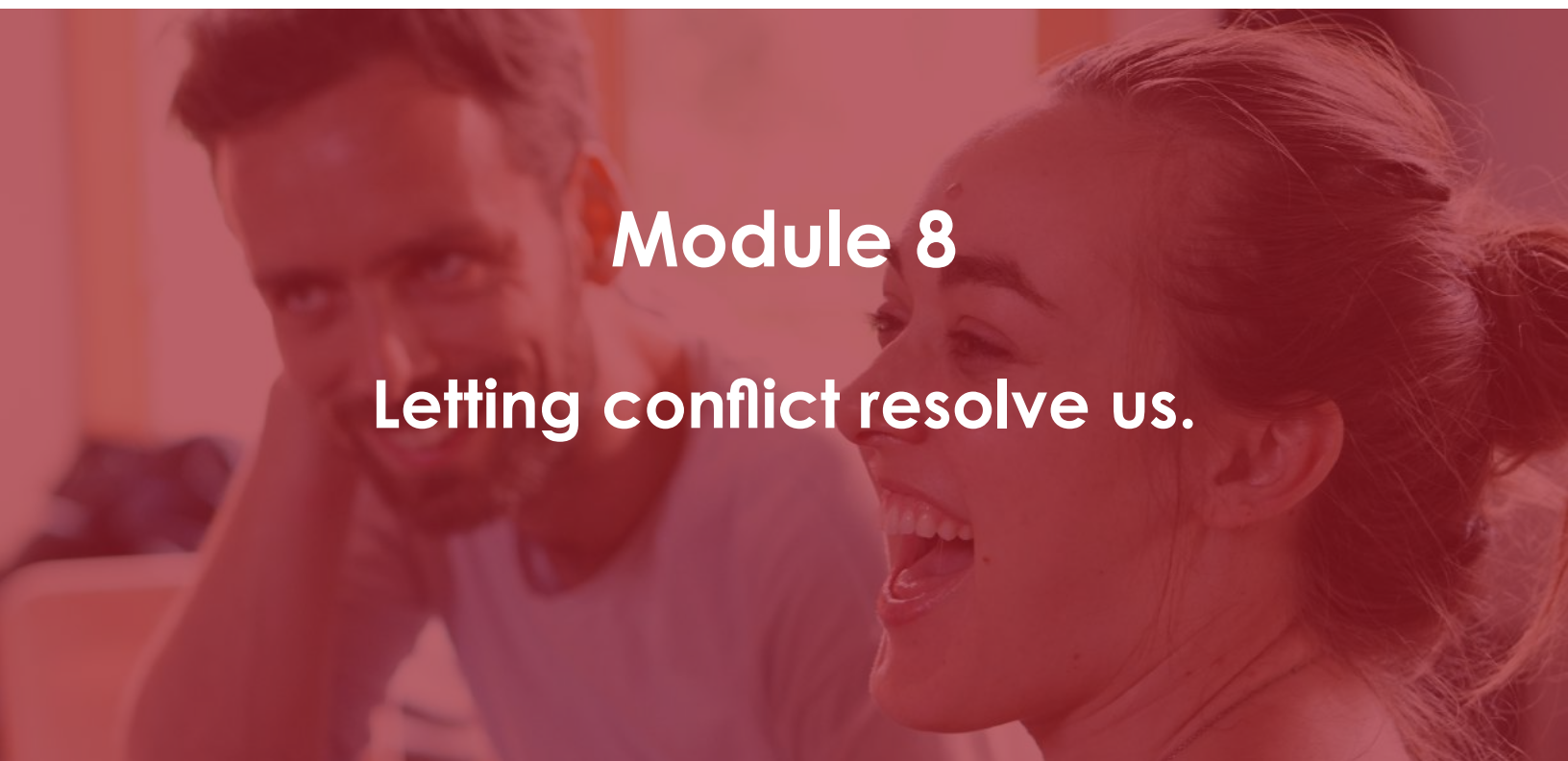
If the woman would have simply "reframed" her anger, instead of being willing to listen and share the alarming emotion, she never would have discovered the simple truth, and pragmatic solution, that it led her to.

This listening to the "alarms" can include many previously ignored and unappealing aspects of our being, such as judgements, in ways that enhance our relationships—if we can investigate and share them with openness and humility.

*\* This is also a great example of finding out that your interpretation of the moment was creating the emotion based on inadequate information on what was actually happening. A helpful distinction is that we are trusting our emotions, but not assuming they're right.*

With love,

Jordan and the Circling Europe team.



## Module 8

Letting conflict resolve us.

# THE ELEGANCE OF CONFLICT

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*“Trust conflict to transform you.”*

-Rob McNamara



# The Elegance of Conflict

There are many ways to understand conflict—in Circles and in our lives. Two of the most common:

1. Avoid conflict altogether because it threatens the relationship and therefore our identity. (The Socialized Mind)\*
2. Work with conflict in order to resolve it, and hopefully grow so we won't feel threatened again. (The Autonomous Mind)

But for the highest levels of human development, **conflict is not something to avoid or resolve**. Instead we surrender to conflict and let it resolve us. (The Self-Transforming Mind)

This is one way to understand the principle of "**Commitment to Connection**".

In Circling, we get to practice a more elegant way of being with conflicts. We also play with polarities, which can seem like conflicts but will never go away (like masculine and feminine energies, or saying yes and saying no). The next time you Circle, I encourage you to pay closer attention when there seem to be conflicts in the practice and lean into revealing how it impacts you. Being elegant in conflict is still incredibly difficult, but this attempt to welcome conflict seems to accelerate our learning and to reveal more goodness, truth, and beauty.

## Openness to Inquiry

One key component of letting conflict transform us is being open to change—being open to a deep self-inquiry, to changing our beliefs about ourselves, others and the world, and to really look at ourselves when we receive feedback from others (rather than automatically challenging the veracity of it).

Being open to recognizing change from one moment to the next—even when it calls into question our very self-identity—is one way to understand the principle of Owning Your Experience.



If your experience is anything like mine, it's subject to changing vastly from one moment to the next; therefore taking responsibility for it necessarily includes taking a fresh look in each moment: probing it, questioning it, and admitting when a new, and even contradictory truth arises in my new present-moment experience. This view allows the principle of ownership to be deeply liberating, while deeply honoring of the human experience.

*\*This sequence from Socialized to Autonomous to Self-Transforming, references Harvard professor Robert Kegan's decades long, cross-cultural research in adult development.*

With love,

Jordan and the Circling Europe team.





## Module 9

**Claiming unclaimed experience;  
living unlived life.**

# WHAT ARE THE RULES?

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*“Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.”*

- Carl Jung



## Reclaiming our Shadow

A helpful way to understand humans, is to see that when we are unable to fully experience or own something inside of ourselves, we repress that experience.

This unclaimed experience then lives inside of us, and is often referred to as our "shadow"—following us around, usually unnoticed by ourselves (but obvious to others) until we are willing to let ourselves live it.

## The Dynamics of Projection: 1-2-3

A simple way to understand this is that when we experience something in the 1st person—such as aggression—and we deny it (because it threatens our identity, because we don't know how to deal with it, etc.), we "project" it onto someone else (a 2nd person).

We're essentially saying, "that's not me." You are aggressive, not me.

And when we really don't want to own that experience, we put it all the way out to the 3rd person, objectifying it. "I'm so annoyed that the world is so destructive and violent."

## Circling Reverses the Process: 3-2-1

In [Circling](#), we reverse the process.

We often habitually start with an idea of reality or an analysis of another person. This is a 3rd person perspective, almost always not based in the present—we're trying to label someone from the outside.

But when we become conscious, we take that third person objective view of someone else and bring them into a present moment, 2nd person relationship. We face another human being, and we are really with that person as they are in the moment.

By **being with them in their world**, really feeling what it is like to be them, we bring their perspective into our embodied, first person experience.

As a result of bringing presence into the connection, and allowing the aliveness of that experience to live within us, what was once totally disowned outside of us is now allowed to live out its experience in our own body-mind.

This is an organic process that might not always appear as systematic as laid out above; this is because how we re-own our shadow has often a unique flavour to it. Furthermore, in Circling we are continually allowing the moment to guide us on how far this process can go at any given time.

## **Owning Our Shadow Can Set Us Free**

In our example, you see a person acting aggressively and you judge them (3rd person). Then you bring yourself into relationship with them (2nd person), and imagine what it must be like to be that aggressive, feeling into the reality of that in your (1st person) personal experience.

This gives you a deeper sense of your own aggression—that when made conscious actually feels like your own power and protection of your own boundaries. This can often come with realisation of how this power has been cut off or missing, and can even surface painful memories where we were told that this part of us was wrong or unacceptable.

As a result, you are re-living what has been un-lived in you, and become free of it's unconscious hold on you.

You are more free to set strong boundaries, without needing to make anyone else wrong.



## Understanding Shadow

Although you don't have to understand the dynamics of projection to benefit from Circling, it is helpful—new interpretations co-create and give birth to new depth.

So I hope this opens new depths in your experience of being with others, in our Circles together and beyond.

With love,

Jordan and the Circling Europe team.



## Interested in learning more?

- Experience the transformational potential of the practice, as well as live and recorded theory sessions, when you join the global practice platform, [CircleAnywhere](#).
- Find an [in person experience](#) to deepen your wakefulness in relationship.
- Sign Up for [this free video series](#) or register for our next [online course](#) to continue exploring the relationship between theory and practice.
- Join the [6 Month SAS Circling and Surrendered Leadership Training](#).

To learn more about the relationship between Circling, adult education, developmental psychology, and integral theory, see:

- Blog articles [like this one](#) on Circling and Integral Altitudes.
- Live and recorded theory sessions at the [Austin Circling Studio](#) such as [this one on the Dialectic and How it Can Be Useful in Circling](#).