



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

FORMING A NEW CIRCLE GUIDE

Once a Circle is formed, members have several decisions to address within the first few meetings. These decisions, which are discussed in detail in this section, include determining who to include in the Circle, appointing leadership, selecting a Circle name and program nicknames, creating a cheer or jingle, collecting Circle property, selecting attire, and attending to details.

The YMCA recommends holding at least one parent meeting before the first Circle meeting takes place. If possible, have a Circle Organizer (an experienced member of another Circle) attend this initial meeting. See the information on parent meetings on page 15 for more information on business to be conducted in meetings for parents only.

APPOINT OR ELECT LEADERSHIP

A Circle becomes a group of friends when parents and children commit their time, talents, and treasures to the effort.

- **Time**—planning for meetings and events, showing up for commitments, and serving others in the Circle
- **Talent**—special skills that benefit the Circle, such as storytelling, singing, trip planning, teaching, leading, and so on
- **Treasure**—all that is special about each member, the wonder of what makes each of us unique and different, and our resources that we entrust to the Circle

The roles listed here are recommended for parents in the Circle. Typically, the parent's child contributes in a Junior role (e.g., Junior Treasure Keeper) when he or she is ready and able to assist the parent. Parents also keep a watchful eye for opportunities to involve young members in contributing to the success of the Circle.

The selection of officers can be an election or volunteer process. In some cases parents may volunteer or a Circle Navigator may be appointed by the YMCA Outfitter or Circle Organizer. If the Circle carries over from year to year, members may decide to elect their officers.

- **Navigator.** The Circle Navigator ensures continuity in meetings and typically conducts portions of each meeting. The Navigator acts as the leader and representative for the Circle. He or she also presides at parent meetings, makes assignment sheets, and checks to see that jobs are being done. The Navigator represents the Circle at the Expedition meeting. The Y will provide training for the Navigators.
- **Compass Bearer.** The Compass Bearer takes on the duties of the Navigator when the Navigator is absent. He or she attends Expedition meetings and usually becomes the next Navigator.
- **Treasure Keeper.** The Treasure Keeper looks after all Circle resources, including the Treasure Box, drums, talking stick, Expedition awards, and other materials. He or she keeps record of reimbursements to members from the Treasure Box for approved expenses and collects all fees for program enrollment and various Expedition gatherings and submits them to the YMCA office.
- **Log Keeper.** The Log Keeper keeps Circle records and rosters and conducts roll call at meetings. He or she submits reports to the Y regarding Circle adventures and accomplishments, conducts the annual Circle evaluation, and is responsible for communication.

Other roles that can be filled as needed include the following:

- **Naturalist.** This Circle member assumes responsibilities for gathering, creating, and leading ceremonies, especially at the Expedition or Federation level.
- **Scout.** This Circle member helps lead recruitment of new members.
- **Crafter.** This member stocks all Circle craft supplies and assists meeting hosts in preparing craft projects as needed.
- **Song Leader.** This member leads songs at Circle meetings and assists at Expedition gatherings as called upon.
- **Storyteller.** This member selects and tells the stories at Circle meetings.
- **Trail Guide.** This Circle member plans outside trips and camps and handles details for such events.
- **Elder.** An Elder is usually a past Navigator or other member of long standing. Elders usually help new Circles get going and sometimes serve as Expedition officers or leaders.

All officers receive support from the YMCA-appointed program director, known as the Outfitter. Outfitters assume responsibility for the staff role in leadership. They guide and support program leadership and assume responsibility for budgets, record keeping, and program promotion. The Outfitter plays a major role in program recruitment and attends events and adventures whenever possible.

SELECT A CIRCLE NAME

Naming a new Circle can be as important as naming your new child! Do not take the task lightly, as you'll be living with the decision for years to come. We recommend several principles to consider when choosing a Circle name.

- Give the name meaning. Consider brainstorming to get a list of values important to your group. Ask your Circle members, "What do we want to be known for?" and then write down their responses.
- Give the name a link. Every community has a unique characteristic. Every neighborhood has an identity. Consider linking your Circle's name to your town, neighborhood, street, or school or perhaps to a geographic feature in your area. Or you might link the name to a mutual interest among Circle members.
- Don't copy or imitate others. Unique names are important, so don't copy or imitate the name of others, either from the past or present. What we think might be an honor to a group might in fact be hurtful to those imitated.
- Build your name on a program theme. Many Expeditions adopt a thematic name that Circle names can then follow. Ask your local Y if your Expedition has a theme.
- Choose a name that will stand the test of time. Don't name your Circle after a current fad that will eventually become unknown or irrelevant

Name possibilities for your Circle are almost endless. The important thing is to take your time and get it right. There is no big rush. Here are some examples of Circle names and their meanings to their members:

- **Elm Street Eagles.** All the Circle members live on Elm Street and want to soar to new heights together.
- **Niguel Nuggets.** Circle members all live in an area named Niguel and believe that each member brings something golden and precious to the group.
- **Amigos de la Playa.** All Circle members are friends of the beach!
- **Stingrays, Sharks, Dolphins, or Voyagers.** All Circle members live near the ocean (or simply like the ocean).
- **Lions, Tigers, or Bears.** Circle members want to grow up BIG and STRONG.
- **Mountaineers.** All Circle members live near or love the mountains.

Some YMCAs might choose to retain tribal names from the Y-Indian Guides program. Examples might include:

- Hummingbirds
- Good Knights
- White Fang Circle
- Thundering Herd
- Whispering Pines
- Mini Oaks Circle
- Leaping Deer
- Wild Ponies
- Galloping Horses
- Jagged Rock Circle
- Sky Dancers
- Soaring Eagles
- Screaming Ponies
- Blue Water Circle
- Black Water Circle
- Soaring Spirit Circle

Finally, some Circles might choose a name closely associated with an outdoor adventures theme, such as those listed here:

- Pioneers
- Trackers
- Trekkers
- Pathfinders
- Trailblazers
- Backpackers
- Mountaineers
- Inventors
- Shell-Seekers
- Voyagers
- Astronauts
- Journeymen
- Quest-Seekers
- Seekers
- Foresters
- Aquanauts
- Cybernauts
- Rock climbers
- Rafters
- Rocketeers
- Rapellers

The choice of a Circle name is the responsibility of the entire Circle as a group, but parents might want to develop a short list of names for parents and children to consider together at the first Circle meeting.

SELECT MEMBER NICKNAMES

Just as naming your Circle requires careful consideration, so does selecting your Circle nickname. Nicknames are used in the program as a way of equalizing members of all ages. There is a silliness that comes from using nicknames that helps children see parents through different eyes.

Your nickname should not copy or mock anyone or anything. It should say something about you, what you like, or what is important to you. A good choice might be the name of an animal or a flower or might describe something about your character. If possible, connect the nickname to your Circle. Many of the names used in the former Y-Indian Guides program might still be acceptable if they are not specific to American Indian cultures, and if they become nicknames rather than "Indian Names." Have fun picking your own name, and always use it at Circle meetings.

Use these examples to help you come up with ideas for your Circle nickname.

- Black Hawk
- Soaring Eagle
- Quick Cat
- Tall Giraffe
- Sleeping Bear
- Hopping Rabbit
- Clever Carl
- Mighty Bill
- Snappy Sam
- Swift Skier
- Swift Swimmer
- Boulder Mover
- Rock Climber
- Tree Climber
- Mountain Climber
- Tread So Lightly

CREATE A CHEER OR JINGLE

Some Expeditions and Circles like to make up a cheer or jingle to use in a question-answer greeting. For example, someone might ask you, "What is your true north?" and members of your Circle will always answer "My Family." Be creative, but check with your YMCA. Traditional greetings might already be in use within your Expedition.

SECURE OR MAKE CIRCLE PROPERTY

Circle property plays a part in Circle meeting rituals and helps create a sense of Circle ownership. The basic property for your Circle might include the following:

Nameplates worn as necklaces. Circle members might agree that everyone in the Circle should have his or her own nameplate necklace that includes first name, nickname, and Circle name. Nameplates can be made from the following materials:

- "Tree cookies"—cut a cross-section of a three-inch diameter branch and form words with dried alphabet noodles that you glue on and then varnish.
- Leather rounds—purchase leather pieces and use tool-punched lettering.

- Fabric—use sturdy denim or other cloth and cross-stitch names.
- Beads—use lettered beads.

You can make your necklace out of leather cord, plastic lanyard, natural jute, or other materials selected by the Circle. Your nameplate necklace can also be used for displaying beads awarded for accomplishments within your Circle.

Circle candle. Invite each member to bring some old wax crayons of any color and melt them down. (Melt wax in an old pan by filling the pan half full with water and adding the wax to the water over medium heat. The melted wax will float on top of the water.) Tie a weight on the end of a candle wick (available at craft stores) and alternately dip into the melted wax and then cold water. Continue dipping until the candle is the desired size. You can also tie a wick inside an old milk carton and fill the carton with wax. For a “Swiss cheese” effect to your candle, fill the carton loosely with ice cubes before you pour the wax in.

Talking stick. The talking stick (or talking rock or talking ball) is a useful tool for limiting talking at Circle meetings. Only the person holding the talking stick is allowed to talk. Talking sticks can be fashioned from a natural piece of wood of any convenient size—look for one during a walk around camp or at a lake or a beach. Drill holes in the stick and have each Circle member tie on a lanyard or fill a short leather cord with colorful beads and tie off the ends. Talking rocks or talking balls can be painted or signed by each member. Whether you use a stick, rock, or a ball, try to find a size that fits inside the Circle Treasure Box.

Circle drum. Your Circle’s drum can be one of the most important symbols of the Circle. The drum is used as a part of the opening ritual at Circle gatherings and is passed from one host to the next at each meeting. Kits for making drums from natural materials are easy to find at craft stores.

Circle banner or Circle map. Your Circle banner says, “We are Here!” Find a cut bed sheet or other sturdy material. Use felt or other colored material for stenciled letters, or use markers or fabric paint. Let each member sign the banner. Attach ties to the corners or fashion a shower rod into a holding pole.

Treasure Box. The Circle Treasure Box should be large enough to hold key supplies but not so large that you can’t carry it along to Circle meetings or Expedition gatherings. The Treasure Box can be made of wood, cardboard, or plastic. Some Circles decorate a cardboard file box with member drawings or a plastic container with acrylic paints. Another idea is to ask each host parent and child to add a decoration when they host a meeting.

Circle Log. Use leather or wooden covers and display lots of pictures. The Log Keeper uses this to report meetings and events or to create a written history of your Circle. The log will grow in value as the years go by.

SELECT CIRCLE ATTIRE

Although particular Circle attire is not mandatory, distinguishing clothing among Circle members helps establish unity in your Circle and puts you in the spirit of the program. Some Circles prefer their Navigator to wear different attire from the rest of the members.

Member Attire

Typical Adventure Guides program attire for you and your child might include a program vest, hat, or other headgear. Small emblem patches for your hats are available through the YMCA Program Store. Members might also wear their nameplate necklace (with award beads), as described in the previous section.

Your YMCA might opt to use one vendor for program vests, or they might instruct your Circle to choose the material and style you want and make your own. If they choose the latter, your Circle might use this opportunity as its first project for adults and children to work on together.

To make the vest for you and your son or daughter, you'll need at least two yards of material—use flannel, denim, canvas, rayon, suede, leather, or wool. Use three yards of half-inch flannel or bias tape for seam binding. If you want to, you can buy yarn or embroidery cotton for designs and fringe. Trace a vest pattern on wrapping paper for each of you—one piece for the back and two for the front of the vest. (Keep in mind that your child will grow during his or her time in the program.) Pin the patterns together and fit them to yourself and your child, making adjustments where needed. Trace the patterns onto the material and cut them out. Pin the pieces together and add the flannel or bias tape as a seam binder. Decorate the vest and add the fringe as desired. You can create your own design or pattern with fabric, decorations, or paint, or your Circle might decide on a uniform look for the group.

Vests are an important part of the program because they give you a place to display program patches. The number of patches varies from YMCA to YMCA, but typically they include the following:

- Adventure Guides patch (first year, second year, and third year)
- Event patches (campout, service, adventures)
- Officer patches (for both parent and child)
- Awards or other occasions when recognition is appropriate

Navigator Attire

Navigators wear the same attire as members as well as a special compass medallion denoting their status and level of responsibility. They also carry a walking stick, passed down (and individualized) from leader to leader. The walking stick can be made from a solid tree branch, large dowel, flag pole, or broom handle decorated with metallic gold paint, ribbons, and other craft items.

ATTEND TO DETAILS

As with any program of this magnitude, there are some details for which your Circle is responsible, such as completing paperwork for the YMCA, obtaining a charter for your Circle, and evaluating the strength of your Circle. If you are a part of an established program, your YMCA leaders might assign you a Circle Organizer to work with you to make sure you get off to a good start and complete the steps needed to make your Circle strong.

- **Paperwork.** Early on and throughout the year, your YMCA will require paperwork from you. They will ask for a Circle roster, event planning sheets, and Circle report cards, given to you by program leaders (a sample report card appears in *Leading the Way*, the manual for leaders of Adventure Guides). This information allows the YMCA either to celebrate your successes with you or to step in if you need some help. It also gives them news for the program newsletter. YMCA

leaders will share a system for how to collect and process forms, dues, event registrations, and such.

- **Charter.** Once your Circle is off and running, your YMCA should recognize your Circle, presenting you with a Circle charter. The charter recognizes your Circle name and status and can be stored or displayed with your other Circle property.
- **Circle evaluation.** We hope that your Circle will grow and flourish in the Adventure Guides program. To help you build a strong Circle and stay on track, use the Circle evaluation form "Evaluating Circle Strength." Filling this form out is a task you might want to address in your parent meetings.

Determining the Membership of your Circle

Circles are usually made up of 7 to 10 parent-child pairs. YMCAs use various methods for breaking new membership into Circles. Here are some possibilities:

- **By gender.** Boys and girls develop differently during the early elementary years. Boys need time to be boys and girls need time to be girls. Experienced programs tout the success of gender-specific Circles. However, if a parent has more than one child, or the program is small and just starting out, it may be difficult to separate genders into separate Circles.
- **By neighborhood or other common bonds.** Some members would prefer to be in a Circle with others from their neighborhood (or their place of work or worship). This keeps travel time to a minimum and often allows children to relate to friendships already established.
- **By meeting night.** More often than not, parents who show interest in joining the program will also be involved in many other things. Because scheduling is a concern for them, they might prefer a Circle that meets on a given night of the week for the biweekly or monthly Circle meetings. At that point in the agenda when you are ready to break into Circles, a call-out process (depending on numbers in attendance) seems to work well. "All those who prefer a Monday night meeting come to this corner; all those who prefer a Tuesday night meeting come to the front of the stage," and so on.
- **By ages.** A fourth way of breaking into Circles is by age group—grouping children together by kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and so on. Single-age Circles allow activities to focus on age-appropriate needs and interests. Circles grow up together and share many passages. There is no competition among younger and older. But if you use this method, be aware of two possible problems. One is the parent with two children of different ages in the program but who prefers one Circle. The second possible problem relates to Circle longevity. Normally, a parent and child's involvement lasts three to four years. If all members of the Circle start while in kindergarten and stay in the program three or four years, this Circle will die out at the end of that time, unless it adds new members along the way.

You may find that you use some or all of these methods to form your Circles. Another common method used in combination with these is to assign new members to existing Circles. You can do this by making sure a representative of a Circle looking for new members is attending the information and recruitment meeting. During the time on the schedule when you are forming new Circles, the Circle looking for a new member should recruit parent-child pairs that fit its Circle criteria (i.e., meeting night, neighborhood, or age).