

MDS Alert

Tool: Form A 'Learning Circle' To Solve Critical Problems

How this communication method can improve understanding.

Whether you need your staff to brainstorm ideas to solve a specific problem, or you need to have a general conversation about your facility's overall direction, a "learning circle" is an effective way to get everyone's opinions and perspectives.

Why? Although some people are at ease with jumping into a group discussion, others tend to shy away from participation, explains the **Oklahoma Foundation for Medical Quality (OFMQ)**, a state-based Quality Improvement Organization for the **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)**. "Through use of a learning circle, the group gets the benefit of everyone's experience and perspective."

"Learning circles provide a structured way of conversation that ensures everyone is part of the sharing," OFMQ states. "In a learning circle, everyone has the opportunity to speak once before anyone speaks again." (Use the Clip 'N' Save below as a sample list of discussion questions.)

According to OFMQ, you should take the following steps to properly conduct a learning circle:

- 1. Select a group leader or facilitator.** The leader/facilitator can be an expert on the subject or not. The leader's job is to facilitate the discussion (not to determine the subject matter), set the agenda, drive the discussion to a prejudged outcome, and reinforce the ground rules.
- 2. Set aside plenty of time** for everyone to speak during the learning circle session. If you have a group of eight to 10 people in your learning circle, set aside at least 30 minutes total.
- 3. Limit initial comments** to approximately two minutes per person. "In the first round of speaking, people share their own experiences and perspectives rather than commenting on what they've heard from others," OFMQ states.
- 4. Invite anyone** who feels strongly enough to become the person to start the conversation by sharing his or her own experience.
- 5. Follow with the next turn** going to the person to the right or left, sharing their own experiences. Again, limit each person's turn to about two minutes. Go around the circle with each person speaking in turn.
- 6. Allow anyone to pass** on their turn if they so desire.
- 7. Go back to anyone who passed** and ask if they would like to speak, after the group has gone full circle.
- 8. Open the conversation up** for anyone to add to what they have said, ask each other questions, comment on what they've heard from others, and generally engage in discussion. "After everyone has had an opportunity to speak once and have their own ideas heard, then everyone in the group is free to explore and discuss what they have heard from

each other," OFMQ explains.