Appreciative Living Learning Circles

Facilitator Overview

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For more information on Learning Circles and Appreciative Living, please visit:

[www.AppreciativeLiving.com](http://www.AppreciativeLiving.com)

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Thank you – Jackie Kelm

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Vision & Purpose
Appreciative Living Learning Circles

Vision

Entire families, communities, and organizations positively shift from the Appreciative Living learning circles as individuals take the practices into their lives. It is like droplets of water falling on a pond: As one person finds more joy it ripples out to affect all those around. More droplets form as more people get involved until the whole world is rippling & sparkling with joy.

It is heartwarming to see people all over the globe facilitating small groups in their homes, businesses, churches, community centers, and other gathering places. In their own voices with their own words and languages, they share the principles and practices of Appreciative Living in personal and meaningful ways that speak to all who have gathered.

Everyone benefits tremendously in the learning circles and enjoys the journey. Facilitators experience deeper integration of Appreciative Living into their own lives, as well as the incredible joy of facilitating meaningful positive change for others. Participants learn practical new ideas and tools for creating a better life, and the hope and belief they can do it.

The line between facilitator and participant is almost indistinguishable, as facilitators participate equally and learn right alongside the participants. It is not about "impacting wisdom onto others," but creating the space for all in the room to find the wisdom within themselves. There is a wonderful honoring of each person’s contribution, and it is magical to watch as people of all ages, nationalities and cultures come together to share their joy.

There are two quotes that capture the essence of what we are doing together. The first is by Victor Hugo: "There is one thing stronger than all the forces in the world, and that is an idea whose time has come." The second, by Margaret Mead: "Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has."

The time has come. Let us begin. A better world stands at our doorstep.

Purpose

To provide the knowledge, support, and tools for integrating Appreciative Living into the lives of as many people as possible throughout the world.
Considerations in Organizing Learning Circles

**When:** Learning Circles are typically run once a week for 4 weeks, and each one lasts 1 ½ hours.

**Size:** Learning Circles can run anywhere from 2-20 people, and there are tradeoffs with size. Groups with 5-7 participants are optimal for rich, intimate experiences. 10-15 people provide less time for everyone to share, but offer greater diversity in sharing. More than 20 people may require some process changes in the agenda.

**Attendance:** While statistics vary, approximately 10% of the people who sign up will have to cancel, and approximately 10% will be absent on any given week (in the US).

**Facilitator Responsibilities:** Facilitators market the Learning Circle, arrange the venue, provide workbooks, and guide the group through the agenda. Everything the circle participants need is contained in the workbook, so little preparation is required by the facilitator. The facilitator is not an expert, but a guide who keeps the group on track while participating fully.

**Price:** This is evolving and determined by the facilitator. Fees range from $20-$99 (in the US) per person for all four sessions, with some being offered free and some priced higher. Many include a copy of one of the Appreciative Living books in the price, but not all. Every effort is made to include people who cannot afford to attend by offering scholarships or barter arrangements. All proceeds go to the facilitator, who is responsible for collections.

**Appreciative Living Books:** A few circles are run without a book, such as those with people who have learning disabilities, economic barriers, or speak languages other than English. But most use one of the two Appreciative Living books, and the materials were designed to work with either one. The facilitator may select which book to use given the following considerations.

1. *Appreciative Living: The Principles of Appreciative Inquiry in Personal Life.* This is a foundational book, with a fair amount of theory and conceptual frameworks. It borders on being academic, and would be appropriate for groups that want to go deep into the theory underlying Appreciative Living.

2. *The Joy of Appreciative Living: Your 28-Day Plan to Greater Happiness in 3 Incredibly Easy Steps.* This book is more practical with lots of stories and examples. It still covers the foundational principles but is an easier read and speaks to the masses. When in doubt, this is the preferred book.

**Workbooks:** Facilitators provide a workbook for each participant, though rare exceptions can be made when cost is prohibitive or there are language barriers. Workbooks are made up of approximately 70 pages printed out from a pdf file that are bound together or put into a 3-ring binder or notebook of some kind. Estimated costs for doing this can range in the US from $2.50-$6.00 USD per workbook, and can go up from there with more elaborate covers and binding.

**Focus:** A circle can be marketed and focused in one particular area, such as parenting, aging, abundance, etc.
Dinner Clubs & Other Formats: There are a variety of ways you might want to run Learning Circles, and one is with smaller groups of people. You can do them over meals in restaurants, beverages at coffee shops, and other informal gathering places.

Evaluations: At the end of each Learning Circle a brief “valuation” process is done, where participants talk about what worked and what they want to change. The last week contains a more extensive written valuation, which gives the facilitator more detailed input and may also provide testimonials for the facilitator to use in marketing future Learning Circles. A forum is begin created for facilitators to post feedback, but for now you may send relevant suggestions to Learning@AppreciativeLiving.com

Selling Appreciative Living Products: An affiliate program is currently being designed where a facilitator can sign up to receive a percent of sales for Appreciative Living products, including books. Products can be sold through the facilitator’s website, at the back of the room, or through an affiliate code that automatically credits the facilitator when used during purchasing.

Selling Outside Products: The primary purpose of the learning circles is to teach and endorse Appreciative Living, but you may promote other businesses after the circle is over. For example, church leaders may wish to provide information on their church, or consultants may want to provide brochures for an upcoming workshop. You may do this as long as you follow these guidelines:

1. Set up a table or space that is separate from Appreciative Living materials, and invite people to stop by after the circle if interested. You may want to invite other participants to promote at this table as well.
2. Participate authentically in the circles. There could be a conscious or unconscious tendency to try to “look good” during the circle so others will think highly of you and want to purchase your services or products, especially if you offer something like coaching. Please be mindful of this possibility, and do your best to not let it get in the way of what you and the circle need most: Your authentic search for your personal joy.

Getting Listed on the Appreciative Living Website: When you are ready to be listed on the Appreciative Living website, send an email to Learning@AppreciativeLiving.com with the subject “listing information.” You must include your name, the email address where you want people to contact you, and the city, state, & country you want to be listed under. Your phone number, website, and/or area of focus are optional, and you may also provide them if you wish. It will be posted to http://www.appreciativeliving.com/LearningCircles/findclass.html

Spread the word: At the end of the 4 weeks, encourage participants to start their own Learning Circles. Groups average less than 10 people, so there is no need to worry about competion.

Questions? Email Learning@AppreciativeLiving.com or call 1-800-214-0959
Facilitating the Learning Circles

These guidelines were established based on US culture, which places a strong emphasis on time management, among other things. Please adjust these guidelines to fit your culture.

**Reading:** The facilitator may read the opening statement the first gathering, and can then suggest how the group will read through the materials going forward. They can be read out-loud one paragraph at a time, a section at a time, or whatever works for the group.

**Group Exercises:** Items in boxes on the agenda are exercises for the group to do. Everything outside of the boxes is meant to simply be read.

**Nametags:** Use nametags if possible. They help people feel more comfortable interacting with others and build community.

**Use “I” Statements Rather Than “You”**

There can be a tendency in open discussions for people to give advice to others. It is often done with the intention to help, but does not serve the group well. Talking about personal success stories is a better way to share information and ideas to help others. A way to make it easier for people to do this is to suggest participants be conscious of choosing the word “I” rather than “you.” This is mentioned in the operating guidelines the group reads each week.

**Keep Conversations Positive Focused**

It is not uncommon for Learning Circle discussions to get off track by diving deep into problems. We are so culturally ingrained to look at the negative side it is difficult to avoid. When this happens, you can help the person get back on track by acknowledging the issue and then asking an appreciative question to help move him or her towards the positive side. Here are two examples of what you might say:

- I hear you are very frustrated/angry/sad/etc. about ________. I know it may be hard to see, but what good you can you find in this?
- I see you are frustrated/angry/sad/etc. about _________. What are you learning as you go through this?

**Stay On-track:** The agenda is designed to inspire meaningful insights, so it will be unusual for people to complete conversations or thoughts in the time allotted. It is important the facilitator continue to move people through the agenda so they can turn their insights into practical action that will ultimately change their lives. To help stay on-track, “stop time” spaces are included throughout the materials that can be filled in ahead of time. These will act as visual cues by the facilitators and participants to help keep the group on-track.

**Start & End On-time:** Each part of the agenda serves an important function, so do your best to start and end the meeting on-time so you can cover everything. Starting on-time respects the
people who show up early, and ending on-time respects commitments participants make afterwards. Plan to arrive at least 45 minutes early the first evening so you have time to set up and collect payment prior to the start of the gathering.

**Timer:** A timer is not required, but can be helpful in two situations. First, if the facilitator is not comfortable or adept at keeping conversations within the time allowed, a timer alarm can be set to signal the group when it’s time to move on. The second way a timer can be used is to allot a certain number of seconds or minutes for each person to share to help ensure participants get equal time. This can also be an effective way to deal with someone who is talking more than others.

**Talking Stick:** This is also not required, but is a tool that can be helpful if people are talking over each other or if one or more people are dominating the conversation. A “talking stick” is a designated object that people must hold in order to speak. You can create rules that make sense for the situation, such as each person can only hold the stick one time per discussion. You may find it necessary for a gathering or two, and then you may not need it if the group begins to self-monitor effectively. It can always be brought in and out as necessary.
### 4-Week Content Overview: Appreciative Living Learning Circles

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Week 4</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Focus</strong></td>
<td>Appreciative Living Overall</td>
<td>Step 1: Appreciating What Is</td>
<td>Step 2: Imagining the Ideal</td>
<td>Step 3: Acting in Alignment</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Principles</strong></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Constructionist &amp; Poetic</td>
<td>Anticipatory</td>
<td>Simultaneity &amp; Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key story</strong></td>
<td>Life as a Movie</td>
<td>Accident Story</td>
<td>Drug Rehab Story</td>
<td>Eyeglass Story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exercise</strong></td>
<td>Question Your Stories</td>
<td>Multiple Perspectives</td>
<td>Visualization</td>
<td>Appreciative Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facilitator Prep</strong></td>
<td>Exercise Story &amp; Buddy Process</td>
<td>Administer Buddy process</td>
<td>Administer Buddy Process</td>
<td>Collect Written Valuations</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>App. Living Book pgs.</strong></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1-52, 145-155</td>
<td>71-96</td>
<td>53-70, 97-112</td>
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### The Guiding Principles of Appreciative Living

**Constructionist Principle**
- We construct stories together with our thinking about what happens in our lives.
- Our story is one perspective, and there are an infinite number of perspectives.

**Poetic Principle**
- We have poetic license to create, interpret, and focus our stories, and whatever we focus on, expands.
- There is always a positive side to any situation or person, but we have to choose to find it.

**Anticipatory Principle**
- We anticipate what the future will be like by forming pictures in our minds, and then we live into those images.
- We can deliberately change the future by visualizing what we want.

**Simultaneity Principle**
- The moment we ask about something we simultaneously begin to move towards it.
- Questions are a powerful tool for positive change.

**Positive Principle**
- Focusing on positive aspects creates positive upward spirals.
- Building on strengths provides greater leverage for change than fixing weaknesses.
Operating Guidelines
Appreciative Living Learning Circles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What</th>
<th>How</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Start &amp; end on-time, and keep to the agenda.</td>
<td>The agenda is thoughtfully designed to take you from insight to action, and each part plays a critical role in making this happen. It is important to stay on-track to get through all of it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. What is said in the circle, stays in the circle.</td>
<td>Do not share what others say in the circle without their permission, but do share your own success stories outside the circle. They are incredibly helpful to others.</td>
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<td>3. Be mindful of air time.</td>
<td>Be aware of your sharing in the group and self correct if you are talking too much or contributing too little.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Success stories first, ideas second.</td>
<td>What really works is sometimes different than what we think will work. Ideas are helpful, but real-life success stories are the richest and best source of information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Find your answers within.</td>
<td>There are no “experts” or others in the circle who have your answer. You can learn from others, but ultimately you have to find your wisdom from within and learn to trust it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Talk about “I” and not “you.”</td>
<td>Allow others to find their own answers and please do not give advice. We can never know what is right for someone else. Advising others can distract us from doing our own work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Look for the good in each other.</td>
<td>Adopt the mindset that you are going to focus on the strengths, potential, talents and any positive attributes you can find for each person in the circle, including the facilitator.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Do what works for you.</td>
<td>Participate and do the exercises with integrity in a way that sincerely works best for you. Allow others the same respect.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Open your heart.</td>
<td>Be open to positive ways of seeing your life, beliefs that take you higher, dreams you’ve hidden away, and miracles. Be open to changing your mind and to letting go. Be open to what is emerging in the circle. Be open.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Take Responsibility.</td>
<td>With kindness, appreciation and love, take full responsibility for your life and where you want to go.</td>
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Roles
Appreciative Living Learning Circles

The facilitator is a participant with additional responsibility for starting and ending the circle on-time and guiding the group through the agenda.

Participants are responsible for discovering their own answers by following the operating guidelines and applying the guiding principles.
Location Considerations & Ideas

When selecting a location to hold your Learning Circle, consider the following:

- Is it centrally located and/or close to major highways?
- Cost. Can you barter with the owners (free participation) in exchange for the space?
- Set-up. Are there adequate chairs, tables, and space? Is there a sign-in/product table?
- Customer potential. Can the venue act as a possible customer source? For example, holding it at a senior center and advertising there might help fill the class.
- Aesthetics. Does it “feel good” in the room? Is there natural light? Is it a pleasing space?
- Convenience. Is it easy to find, park, and get in and out of?
- Food/beverages. (if you are having any) Can you bring it in? Any special requirements?
- Outlets if needed for hot water, computers, etc.
- Clean-up requirements. Do you have to empty trash? Are there recycle bins?

Location Ideas

- Assisted living facilities, senior centers, & hospice facilities
- Community centers like United Way, YMCA, Lions Club, Rotary Clubs, & youth services
- Hospitals or local medical offices and/or societies
- Churches
- Local colleges and schools
- Condo or apartment club houses, community centers in large housing developments
- Private clubs
- Local lodge organizations such as Moose, VFW, etc.
- Bookstores sometimes have back rooms.
- Libraries - many require the event be non-profit
- Coffee shops/restaurants – small groups can meet around a table
- Conference rooms of local businesses off-hours. Some examples: Chiropractors, massage schools, martial arts centers, etc.
- Beach or park pavilion in nice weather