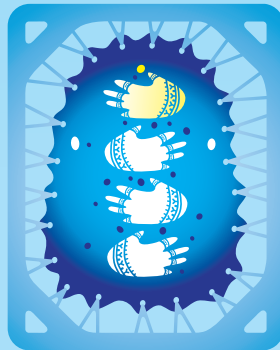


Inuusinni Aqqusaaqtara  
My Journey

# Cancer Healing Circle Guide for Inuit



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**PAUKTUUTIT**  
INUIT WOMEN OF CANADA



Canadian  
Cancer  
Society

This guide was created as part of our *Inuusinni Aqqusaaqtara - My Journey* cancer project and generously supported by the Canadian Cancer Society.

Other cancer resources can be found on our website at [www.pauktuutit.ca](http://www.pauktuutit.ca). There you will find the *My Journey* booklets, with easy-to-read cancer information in English and regional dialects of Inuktitut for people with cancer, their caregivers and healthcare professionals. They give information to people recently diagnosed with cancer to support them through their cancer journey, and are written especially for Inuit to understand cancer better and to make informed decisions. They will also help Inuit and healthcare professionals communicate with each other. The goal is to support Inuit with cancer and improve their quality of life.

Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada

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## Are you or your community ready for a healing circle?

### 1. How will the support group be structured and facilitated? Will it be a peer support group or professionally facilitated?

A Support Group Facilitator is the person who guides group members in healthy and purposeful discussion, either a Peer Facilitator or a Professional Facilitator. If your group is structured as a Peer Support Group, or “self-help” group, it is managed and organized by participants, generally Peer Facilitators. Peer Facilitators are those who have personal, lived, experience with the issue, and may have received training on the concepts of recovery, peer support, and on using their own journey of recovery to assist others. Professional Facilitators are professionals who do not share the members’ first-hand experience. They can include social workers, religious officials, psychologists, etc. The facilitator type should be selected based on the needs, focus, and purpose of the support group.

### 2. Is there someone who is prepared to facilitate the healing circle? A good Support Group Facilitator may be someone who:

- can identify people who may need help;
- remains open to everybody and treats everyone equally;
- can help participants by sharing their own life experiences;
- can give encouragement to others;
- can listen to others without judgment; and
- promotes healthy ways of dealing with strong emotions.

You and other facilitators may feel more confident and more skilled to help others if you also have some training in group facilitation or counselling. There may be opportunities to receive training such as workshops or retreats, which may be offered through other organizations such as Ilisaqsvik, Mental Health First Aid, or the Canadian Cancer Society.



### 3. Who are your allies within the community? Who could be part of a support network or team for your circle?

Your circle will be stronger and last longer if it is built upon partnerships. You may already have strong connections with front-line service providers (health care workers, teachers, social workers, etc.) that can support your group. Other groups can also support your circle, for example, a community or wellness centre could support by hosting the circle and by referring new participants.

#### Considerations and questions before creating your circle

- Is your circle for a specific type of cancer?
- Is your circle exclusively for people who have/had cancer or are other impacted people welcome?
- Does your circle cater to a specific demographic (e.g. women, men, youth, parents, etc.)?
- How will people know your healing circle is happening?

Some suggestions include making an announcement on the radio, handing out posters or fliers, or social media posts. When you promote the healing circle you should keep in mind that people may feel stigma and shame about cancer, and especially about sharing their experiences.

- Please note that circles do not require any rules around who is welcome to participate, but it's important to acknowledge the ways different types of participants might interact with each other (e.g. someone newly diagnosed interacting with someone with advanced cancer).
- Does your circle have a set number of sessions or is it ongoing?

Do you want it to be a weekly or monthly meeting? Establishing a calendar of meetings helps members know what events are going on with your group. A routine may also help potential members feel like they can join at any time, and not feel pressure to join right away.

- How many people do you want to limit the group to?

Too large, and people may not feel comfortable sharing in front of a big group. A good number is under 10. You can always split up the group into smaller groups if more people show up.

- Will parents and caregivers be able to bring children to the meeting?

If so, is it possible to offer childcare in a room separate from the rest of the group? It is important to consider how to make the meetings accessible to those with childcare concerns, but participants may not feel free to speak about all topics with children present. These are good questions to revisit as the group evolves.

- Do you want to center your healing circle around a group activity (sewing, beading, cooking, food sharing, etc.)?



**Canadian  
Cancer  
Society**

The Canadian Cancer Society has an online Community Services Locator to help you find services and programs for people with cancer and their family and friends: [csl.cancer.ca](https://csl.cancer.ca).

Adding your group to the Community Service Locator will help people find the group. You can add your group to the Canadian Cancer Society's Community Service Locator at: [csl.cancer.ca/Add](https://csl.cancer.ca/Add).

## 1. Before the healing circle begins

- At the beginning of the first healing circle, participants can collectively agree on ground rules for the circle. Some suggested group rules are included at the end of this guideline.
- Introductions and ice breakers are helpful for first meetings and new participants. New participants should also be introduced to group rules. It may also be useful to give a printed copy of the group rules to new participants.
- Giving information at the beginning of a meeting can help take away fear of what might happen. A set agenda or process is important to let participants know what to expect and to allow them to feel more confident sharing and working with others.
- Consider offering snacks or a meal of country food to encourage people to join the group. Be sure to add enough time to the meeting if you serve food.
- “Checking in” – a time in which participants can tell the group about their feelings, hopes, and fears, both concerning the circle specifically and as a general update.

Below is an example of how much time to spend on each topic during a 90 minute meeting. Please note that breaks should also be planned and extra time will be needed if food is being served.





## 2. During the healing circle

- Taking fun/relaxed 15-minute breaks throughout the circle can help participants during difficult discussions. Breaks can include refreshments and/or a game to help relax the group.
- Some discussions may not go as expected. The flow of the meeting should be flexible enough to allow for unplanned topics.
- Plan for the session to be approximately an hour and a half, however, the group should decide together when to end the meeting.
- Shared decision-making should be used when making decisions that affect the group.

## 3. After the healing circle

- A debriefing period (“checking out”) where participants can express their end-of-circle emotions and takeaways or last thoughts.
- Consider different ways to end each healing circle on a positive note. This can be singing a song, saying a prayer, taking a moment for quiet reflection, sharing food, or playing a game, etc.
- A bus voucher or a taxi chit should be provided for those that need it at the end of the evening (if needed or possible).



## Other practices

- Prayer may be included if participants wish.
- Healing circles should be drop-in style. If lots of members show up, the group can be split into smaller, more manageable circles to allow everyone the chance to participate.
- Lists of resources for people with cancer, cancer survivors, and caregivers/family members should be available, including Inuit-specific and community-specific resources (see the resource list).
- Breakout space and counselling support should be available during the circle, if possible. Consider having an Elder, long-time cancer survivor, social worker, and/or counsellor present at each circle, particularly an Inuk who is in one of these roles.
- Meetings can be weekly, biweekly, or monthly depending on the needs of members. It may be useful to print up a calendar of your meetings.
- The facilitator/or lead should consider acknowledging contributions in the discussions in a non-judgmental, non-comparative way. (e.g. rather than saying “good comment” they can say, “I can tell that it took courage for you to say that today.”).
- The facilitator should not control the discussions but guide them and keep the conversation flowing, however, there is no need to fill every silence.
- To ensure that there is only one person speaking at a time, you can go around the circle one-by-one or you can have a designated “speaker object” for the speaker to hold and pass on to the next speaker.



## Including your culture and values

The healing circle should be guided by **Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit** principles of healing and working together, including these four principles:



Consult an Elder or have an Elder present at the circles.

Healing circles should be conducted in whichever language is appropriate to the needs of the members, and members should be encouraged to speak in whichever language they choose.



## Discussion/conversation starters

These conversation starters may be helpful for a traditional sharing circle format, as some participants may not know where to start. Changing these conversation starters is encouraged and it is important to know that listening is also active participation.

### Reflection

When I was told that I was diagnosed with cancer it made me feel... Today I feel...

One thing I wish could've been different is...

Something in my life that has changed a lot since my diagnosis is... This has made me feel...

I am proud of myself for...

Something I've learned about myself is...

A challenge that I have overcome is...

Something I wish others understood about cancer is...

### Coping strategy prompts

Something that gives me hope is...

I feel loved and valued when...

I take care of my mind, body, and spirit by...

My community has helped me by...

What helps me when I feel angry is...

What helps me when I feel afraid is...

What helps me when I feel sad is...

What helps me when I feel stressed is...

### Dealing with grief/loss

A loss that I experienced was...

The hardest part for me has been...

I am coming to terms with...

A source of healing and comfort for me is...



## Sample group rules

1

Everything shared in the group is confidential and should not leave the room.

2

Don't give unasked-for advice.

3

Speak only for yourself and from your own experience.

4

Listeners should be non-judgmental and accepting. There are no “right” or “wrong” experiences.

5

Listeners should be respectful and give the person speaking their attention; there should be only one conversation ongoing in each circle.

6

Sharing is encouraged but not required. Listening is also active participation.

7

Tears are welcome and a healthy part of the healing circle process.

## Resources

### Crisis Lines

#### *Inuvialuit Region and NWT*

**NWT Help Line**  
1-800-661-0844  
Open 24/7

#### *Nunavut*

**Nunavut Kamatsiaqtut Help Line**  
1-800-265-3333  
Open 24/7, with volunteers speaking English, Inuktitut, and French

#### *Nunavik and Quebec*

**Nunavut Kamatsiaqtut Help Line**  
1-800-265-3333  
Open 24/7, with volunteers speaking English, Inuktitut, and French

#### **Tel-Jeunes**

Helpline for young people  
Call: 1-800-263-2266  
Text: 1-514-600-1002  
Online chat and e-mail: [teljeunes.com](http://teljeunes.com)  
Open 24/7, in English and French

**Ligne 1 866 APPELLE**  
Suicide intervention line  
1-866-277-3553  
Open 24/7

#### *Nunatsiavut and Newfoundland and Labrador*

**Mental Health Crisis Line**  
1-888-737-4668  
Open 24/7

**CHANNAL Warm Line**  
Confidential non-crisis peer support for people living with mental health issues  
1-855-753-2560  
Open 11 am – 11 pm

#### *Alberta*

**Alberta Health Services Mental Health Help Line**  
1-877-303-2642  
Open 24/7

#### *Manitoba*

**Klinic Crisis Line**  
1-888-322-3019  
Open 24/7

**Manitoba Suicide Prevention and Support Line**  
1-877-435-7170  
Open 24/7

#### *Ontario*

**Talk4Healing**  
Culturally grounded helpline for Indigenous women  
Call or text: 1-855-554-4325  
Online chat: [talk4healing.com/live-chat/](http://talk4healing.com/live-chat/)  
Open 24/7, in English, Inuktitut, and twelve other Indigenous languages

#### **Distress and Crisis Ontario**

Text: 741741  
Online chat: [dcontario.org/ontx.html](http://dcontario.org/ontx.html)  
Open 2 pm – 2 am

#### *National*

**First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line**  
Call: 1-855-242-3310  
Online chat: [hopeforwellness.ca](http://hopeforwellness.ca)  
Open 24/7, in English, French, Inuktitut, Cree, and Ojibway

**Kids Help Phone**  
1-800-668-6868  
Open 24/7

**Mental Health Crisis Line**  
1-888-893-8333  
Open 24/7

