



This circle tale comes to us from Sharon Schindler Rising, Executive Director of the Centering Pregnancy and Parenting Association, Inc. The CPPA represents one of many healthcare organizations that is using PeerSpirit principles.

## **Circle Tale, February 2007**

### **Circle and Centering Pregnancy**

*In the mid 1990's Sharon founded this organization based on the belief that the most important thing pregnant women can experience is community and confidence in their mothering skills. In the Centering Pregnancy model, a group of pregnant women of similar gestation meet together regularly throughout pregnancy to receive and actively participate in their care, to sit in a circle to share wisdom and knowledge, and to have an opportunity to make meaningful connections. These groups are facilitated by health care providers. The Centering Pregnancy circles share some of the PeerSpirit circle components, but have style all their own. Recently Sharon attended a PeerSpirit Circle Practicum. Upon returning home to Connecticut, she shared this story of how she used her learnings with her board, faculty and women's groups.*

The first thing I did was to bring careful intention to our first board meeting in our new office space. Applying what I had learned about energetics, we formally "smudged" the space and then sat in circle together as we worked on setting the direction for our organization. We recommitted ourselves to working in group health care for mothers and babies and voted to expand our mission to promote the Centering model of care throughout the lifecycle. It was a big step that felt right to all of us. It was our most productive meeting. Our new board president is a major asset...very grounded and familiar with circle process.

The next place I worked to incorporate some of my learning was our faculty retreat. Beth Elmore, one of our faculty who also attended the PeerSpirit training, worked with me to plan the evening circles. We gathered in the midst of a dangerous rain/wind storm that left many flights delayed and power lines down so arrivals were sporadic throughout the evening.

Beth and I set the space with a wonderful fire in the large stone fireplace, center table covered with my lovely PeerSpirit scarf, many candles and a new centerpiece. I smudged each person as she entered the space and then Beth set the intent for the circle and began the sharing...a time of connecting.

The next evening we had similar space and each person brought a personal item to place in the center, sharing on a deeper level. By the third evening some had left (including Beth) but we had another circle which started with music and a reading (on CD) focused on caring for the caregiver. We sat in silence, spoke from our hearts, sang (for the second time) "Falling into the circle...", and had a formal closing. The work throughout the weekend was very productive.

Some people had to leave early and I realized later that since we didn't formally acknowledge their leaving the rim felt fractured. Next year we'll be prepared for the inevitable early departures and find a way to "mend" the space.

We're thinking about how we could bring more of the center into our Centering circles...with women actually contributing to creating a center either by bringing an item or by constructing an item during the group. We'll have to think more about how we will bring this process into our training workshops....a benefit both to the participants as well as to the women who eventually will be in their Centering Pregnancy groups. One of our faculty members sent the following comment:

*"The circle rituals promoted the creation of sacred space for our CPPA retreat in October. For me, this evoked a space of intimacy, trust, and love. Conversations shared by the group became profound*



*and encouraged thoughtful dialogue. I found myself wanting to share very personal and significant stories from my life for the purpose of both sharing and healing and as examples for others to use. I believe creating this kind of sacred space is important for women going through the transformation of pregnancy and birth for the same reasons, to have a place for sharing and healing.”*

I've continued to think about circle process and how we can be more intentional about bringing the process into our women's groups and our training workshops. At a recent workshop I talked with my co-leader about how we might create a center for the participants. We placed a candle in the middle of our circle of chairs, had soft music playing, and did a visualization asking people to imagine the ideal space for conducting our groups. The sharing afterward was quite profound, pushing the limits of the reality that is faced in our usual health care institutions. We reminded ourselves that imagining "sacred space" facilitates an invitation that creates it.

My understanding of both the process and content of our circle work continues to grow and I am awed by the transformative power that is present for us as providers and for our women and families. It is wonderful work.

*If you have a tale to tell, contact the PeerSpirit office and we'll help you share it.*

*For more information on many applications of circle, visit our web site at [www.peerspirit.com](http://www.peerspirit.com) and subscribe to our monthly Circle Tale newsletter using the subscription mechanism at the top right of the page. Your e-mail address will **not** be shared or used by anyone other than PeerSpirit, and you can unsubscribe yourself at any time.*