

## GROWTH CIRCLES

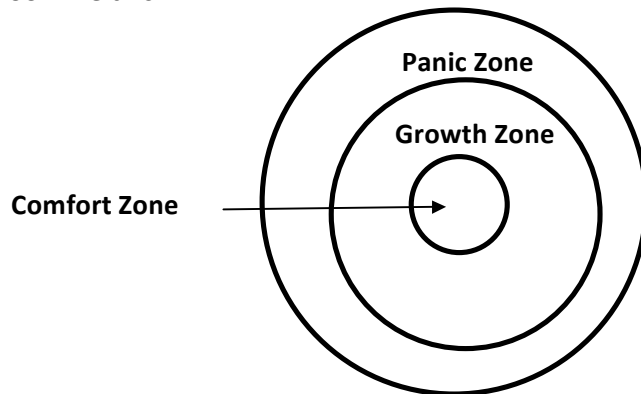
**Focus:** Thinking constructively, empowerment, perspective taking

**Materials:** Ropes or tape on the floor -- three concentric circles

**Level:** Youth: Ages 13 and older

**Sources:** Adapted from Luckner and Nadler, *Processing the Experience*, p. 20.

**Growth circles look like this:**



### Suggested Procedure

1. Outline the growth circles on the floor. Discuss the meaning of the growth circles (see facilitation notes).
2. Present some of the scenarios and questions like those below, and have people put themselves into the circle in which they feel is most appropriate for them.
  - You are sitting in a chair in your living room reading a book (so you are in your comfort zone). How would you feel about a spider walking on the chair behind your head? Would you:
    - \* Look at it and figure it will find its way out (comfort zone)?
    - \* Take it outside or kill it (growth or stretch zone)
    - \* Run out of the room, possibly screaming, to get someone else to deal with it (panic zone)?
  - Same scenario, but it's not a spider, it's a snake crawling on the chair behind you.
  - Same scenario, but it's a bat that flies into the room.
  - How do you feel about going bunji jumping? Whitewater rafting? Parachute jumping?
  - How do you feel about speaking in front of a large group?
  - How do you feel about singing, solo, in front of a large group? What about if you were singing in a choir? Would that change anything?
  - How do you feel about:
    - \* telling a family member that you love him or her?
    - \* confronting a friend about something they did or said?
    - \* taking an important test?
    - \* Going to a party by yourself?
    - \* Etc.
3. After each question is asked and people have moved into position, give participants a chance to comment on why they put themselves in their particular spots. Is there a story to share?
4. After some of your questions, allow participants to ask any questions they have for the class.

### Sample Processing Questions

- Were you surprised by where you ended up compared with others?
- How can we support the choices each of us makes?
- How can we encourage you to step into your growth zone without putting too much pressure on you?
- What kind of encouragement is useful to you?
- What can we do to respectfully tell people when the encouragement they are giving is too much?
- How have your experiences influenced the choices you make? What is your personal wisdom?

## **Facilitation Notes**

**Comfort zone:** Learning does not take place in this zone – people have already “been there and done that”. They have learned it already and are comfortable with it.

**Growth or Stretch Zone:** This is generally where learning takes place. Being in this zone means dealing with anxiety, struggle, or challenge.

**Panic Zone:** Learning does not take place in this zone because the brain is preoccupied with fight or flight. All anyone wants when in this zone is to get to the comfort zone. This can sometimes look dysfunctional (e.g. a participant who is asked to read out loud may pick a fight with the person next to her in order to get thrown out of the room. Once kicked out, she is now in her comfort zone).

Competence is built by moving between the comfort zone and the growth zone. Take, for example, the task of learning how to ride a bike. Most youngsters do not simply hop on a two-wheeled bike and take off. This would be too difficult and anxiety producing. Ideally, they start with training wheels. This addition gives the new bike rider enough support to challenge him or herself without risking undo harm. Eventually, the training wheels become easy (now moving into the comfort zone). The training wheels come off, but the rider is not left alone yet. Generally there is an adult or older sibling who now tags along, holding onto the back of the bike for stability. Now back in the growth zone, the rider has more control of the bike than having training wheels, but with less support. Eventually, this too becomes easy (comfort zone), and the older person let's go. The rider is now on his or her own and back in the growth zone.

When we are in our comfort zones, each of us is in a place that is safe and secure. By choosing to step out of our comfort zones to the growth zone, we are open to new ideas and experiences. We are, in essence, breaking new ground. Although not always comfortable, this is a place for optimum learning. What we try to avoid is going beyond the growth zone into the panic zone. The panic zone is a place where learning cannot take place because the threat is too great.

Offering choices is one way to provide participants with opportunities to make the decisions that are right for them. It is a delicate balancing act for each individual -- how to take advantage of challenging learning opportunities without going over the edge.

This activity helps the class to explore these issues. Through the discussion, boundaries can begin to be established about how much to encourage people to push themselves, and how to support the choices each person makes.