

**Growth Circles (Adapted from Luckner and Nadler, *Processing the Experience*, p. 20)**

**Collaborative Skill:** Thinking Constructively

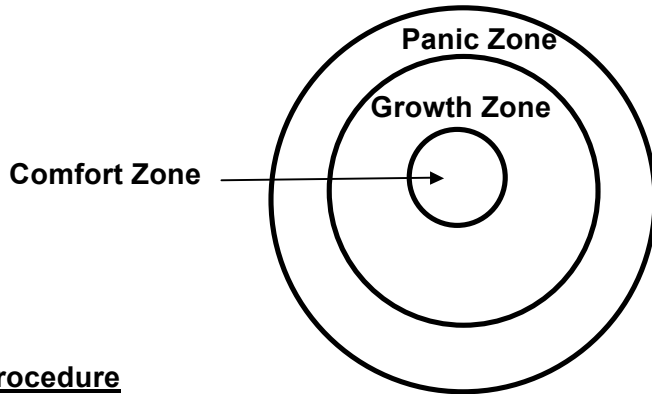
**Focus:** Challenge by Choice, Perspective taking

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

**Level:** Grades 5 and higher

**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. Ask questions like those below, and have people put themselves into the circles they feel most appropriate.

**How do you feel about?**

- spiders?
  - speaking in front of a large group?
  - singing solo in front of a large group?
  - singing in a choir?
  - Bunji jumping?
  - telling a family member that you love him or her?
  - heights?
  - confronting a friend about something they did or said?
  - snakes?
  - taking a math test?
  - introducing yourself to someone new?
  - taking a driver's test?
3. After each question is asked and people have moved into position, give the students a chance to comment on why they put themselves in their particular spots. Is there a story to share? Who is sharing a point of view?
  4. After a few of your questions, allow the students to ask any questions they have for the class.

**Sample Processing Questions for Growth Circles**

- 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**

When considering the idea of Challenge by Choice, it is helpful to talk about the idea of challenge as well as choice. The Growth Circles activity allows this. 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.

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.

Challenge by Choice affords the opportunity for students (and teachers) to make the decisions that are right for them. It is a delicate balancing act for each individual -- how to take advantage of challenging 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.