Red Tent Toolkit

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The big picture

What we know from our experience

- It makes a difference if we take time for ourselves in a circle of women.
- Joining a circle of women is a way for each of us to reconnect to herself as a woman.
- When women meet in circle we can support each other to be more present in our own lives and thereby affect the lives we share with others.
- Meeting locally in this way we become connected to a global movement of women creating positive feminine spaces to enrich our lives.
- Supporting intergenerational connection enables older women to be celebrated and respected for their wisdom and experience.
- Creating a space where each woman's unique gifts and talents can be recognised, she can be supported to reach her full potential.
- Providing an environment where teenage girls and young women are supported creates healthy female role models of all ages.

Our values in the Red Tent Directory

1. We are and we only are fully responsible for ourselves.
2. We work in service, with clarity, openness and respect for each and every woman.
3. We meet our own needs before we give our time, energy and resources to this work. We encourage other women to do the same because we believe that learning to meet our own needs before supporting others is a vital lesson for many of us. From a place of fullness we have so much more to give.

Contacts

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Website: https://redtentdirectory.com/
Facebook: Group www.facebook.com/groups/RedTentMovementUK/
Facebook: Page https://www.facebook.com/RedTentUK

Setting up your Red Tent

Are you thinking of setting up a Red Tent in your area? Maybe you are feeling inspired to meet more women locally and join thousands of women meeting in Red Tents worldwide. Where do you start, how will it all come together and how can you keep it growing?

Here is a brief toolkit to act as a guide for doing just that. Use it as a way to help you prepare for your Red Tent or to stimulate discussion to decide what you want to do.

Why a Red Tent?

There are many women meeting together in groups, circles and workshops using a variety of models to connect with each other, so what is different or special about a Red Tent and why might you choose to establish one?

In essence, Red Tents are a global movement of women coming together and finding time to just be where they are, meet other women in their community and enjoy the opportunity for women to share in a deeper way than they might usually do. They are about creating some room in our lives and in our time together, to see what transpires instead of planning every detail with a goal or outcome in mind.

Red tents are also about building community, finding how easy it can be to simply be in the company of others and being nourished by this time together to recharge for the month ahead. Often Red Tents provide an opportunity to explore the stages and transitions within women's lives through intergenerational support and the shared experience of being a woman that goes beyond any cultural, economic or societal differences that can divide us in our everyday.

Red Tents are growing in number all over the world. They are a place where sisters, mothers, menstruating girls, menopausal women, young mums, grandmothers and friends attend a monthly gathering and are welcomed as they are and as all of who they are.

What is a Red Tent?

Red Tents are as varied and diverse as the women who attend them but we do recommend a base structure, which ensures that they are safe and supportive gatherings while remaining open and flexible to the specific needs of the women who attend. We describe that simple base structure in this toolkit.

Each month women invite women into their homes or meet together outdoors or in community spaces, and spend time together for a whole day, afternoon or evening.

In doing so we set the intention of taking time out of our busy lives to slow down, rest, talk, share food, enjoy creative pursuits and take part in other activities that fulfill our needs. When we come together in this way each month we are able to be more present in our own lives and the lives we share with others. When we meet in Red Tents we are also connected, by our practice and our intention, to all the other women who are holding Red Tents across the world.

Each Red Tent develops its own distinct rhythm and pattern to the gathering that works for those who attend. Equally the activities on a given day may differ, depending on what women in the group wish to receive or want to offer. The Red Tent is a place where we can step down from the roles we play in our own lives and provides a time to be together just as we are.

You are often invited to bring anything you would like to share, or a woman may offer to present something which is meaningful to her to stimulate some discussion and reflection. But most importantly the circle acts as a moment in the month where nothing more is asked of us than to simply be with where we are in ourselves, our bodies and our lives.

“Red Tent is a gorgeous opportunity for me to drop all responsibility for others and take the time to be fully present to myself within a circle of open-hearted women.” – Becca

“A space for women to come together, to love, to laugh and to cry, without shame, without judgement or fear. An invaluable and enriching circle, which I feel blessed to be a part of.” - Lucy

Starting your Red Tent

So you have decided to start a Red Tent in your area. Congratulations and a huge thank you to you from all the women who have yet to come together in your tent.

A good place to start is to invite a few friends together to have a cup of tea and chat about starting up a Red Tent and think about when you want to have them, how would you like to tell people about it, what the Red Tents will involve, and plan a date for your first one. The Red Tent Directory (www.redtentdirectory.com) provides a good place to think about some of those questions and you can look through the website to get an idea of other tents and generate ideas that way.

A few things to mention at this early stage is that Red Tents work well because they are self-evolving, based on shared ownership and collective involvement. For this reason it is good to think about elements like: how you could have Red Tents at a different home each month, finding a place that you could meet for Red Tents outdoors, rotating who holds the day, sharing responsibility for sending emails or the various tasks involved. Or if it is you that will be calling, inviting, hosting and organising your Red Tent yourself, think about ways you can ask people to help or bring something so there are wider contributions from other women.

Support

As you take these first steps towards your red tent, there is plenty of support available to you.

This toolkit: we at the Red Tent Directory are here to help answer any questions you may have and to discuss specific ideas, concerns or approaches. There are many elements to starting and sustaining a Red Tent. With our experience of organising, attending, supporting and planning red tents, we can help you to find ways forward that work for you.

Don't be shy: if you **ask the women around you**, they may already have experience of holding gatherings or circles. If you feel inspired, you could build up a network of support by visiting the nearest Red Tent to you. Visit https://redtentdirectory.com/ for local listings.

'Red Tent – the movie' is also a useful view into red tents too.

Covering costs

At the Red Tent Directory we only list Red Tents that are free or donation based. This is because we operate on a volunteer basis rather than as a business. We also think that, although some women do charge for Red Tents (and similar spaces) free or donation based Red Tents help keep this work and vision both co-created (rather than led) and accessible to more women. The vision we hold is for spaces created in the community by a group of women and open to all.

Our suggestion therefore is that you ask for contributions if you incur costs in holding your tent, for example for the venue or to cover anything that you buy to help create it and that as far as you can you ask women to donate whatever is required to help your tent exist and grow. For example you might ask women to bring or donate decorations, talking objects, food to share before or during your tent, and items to support any creative activities which you plan to do or that they may wish to share.

You may find that issues of money and the promotion of services come to the surface and need to be addressed. Clearly it is not our intention to suggest that any woman loses money by holding Red Tents and so if you do need resources we do encourage you to ask women attending to donate to cover costs. However often some of the women who help to hold and attend Red Tents have related offerings that they do charge for either as a practitioner or as part of their own businesses or a business that they run with others. For more information go to our Red Tent Directory Donation Policy which covers making Red Tents sustainable and community supported.

Sometimes indeed you may be asked to, or feel that you want to, promote these offerings. However, if your invitations or circles become focused on one more than other offerings we have found that this can detract from the spirit and intention of the Red Tent which is (for us at least) about creating a shared, open space for all.
We suggest therefore that you consider finding a way to do this that doesn't interfere with the intention of your tent. Obviously we don't want to prevent women from sharing their skills and talents and discourage them from making a living but in our experience we have found that it is best to keep both the invitations and communications about the Red Tent and the sharing during the circle itself free from promotion or advertising or services. Women are then of course free to share about their work and offerings during social time or perhaps you may wish to provide a special place for that sharing at the end of your tent or through another forum.

Invites

During your initial chat and planning meeting, you will have agreed a date for your first Red Tent. Many groups choose to hold a Red Tent in correlation with the phases of the moon, and traditionally women came together for the new moon to reflect on the month passing and the one to come.

In your invitation remember to give the practical information like timings for arrival, departure and when the Red Tent will start. Also give details of where it is and directions including relevant information about parking and public transport. It is a good idea to ask women to bring something to share, wear something red and maybe even something about what a Red Tent is and what to expect.

Emails

Most people organise things online. Creating an email list, Mailchimp account or a Facebook page to invite people to your Red Tent is the best way to stay organised and consistent. With regards to email if you're not familiar with lists or contact groups, the easiest way is to create a folder in your email account and place each name you are given in there. Or, if you are feeling a little more adventurous, you could create an email account just for your Red Tent. This way you have your inbox and send only to the women who are part of your growing community.

The important thing about the list is confidentiality and how you will use the names and addresses that you have been given. From our experience it is good at this early stage to agree how often and what you will communicate to people, keeping it related to red tents and not using it to promote wider work or workshops.

Make sure you check all the information before it goes out and bcc the emails (thereby hiding the email addresses). It is important to be sensitive to people's details so that are not used for other purposes.

Decorating the space

So you have set the date, sent the invites and women have confirmed they are attending. Great!

You choose how much you decorate the space and much will depend on the kind of venue that you have chosen for your tent. A few simple decorations can help to create a special atmosphere and many tents do quite a bit of work creating a space which changes the familiarity of the room and thereby invokes meaning and sets the tone for what will be taking place.

As best you can, make space for a circle of women. If settees and chairs are there, that's fine; some women will sit on them and some on the floor. If you don't have enough cushions to offer, ask the women to bring a cushion to sit on and a blanket if they wish.

It is usual for the space to be decorated with red fabrics of some sort. Throws, shawls, delicate scarves will do to start with and, as you meet more regularly, keep your eye out for those bargain material sales, or charity shop scoops. Invite women to donate any red fabrics they may have. Have a dedicated bag to keep the fabrics in. This makes it easier to store and transport if needed. Enjoy dressing up the room, creating the space for women to gather and relax.

Centre Piece

Starting simple, the main place to decorate would be the centre piece of the circle. You can place here anything that you would like to represent the "coming together" of the women. It could be your favourite ornament, picture or some fresh cut flowers. Be as creative as you like. You could also ask the women coming if they would like to bring anything to place in the centre of the circle too.

Make sure you have enough time to decorate the space in the way you would like to, as it can be time absorbing and before you know it, women are arriving. Also, ask for help tidying up afterwards.

Sitting in circle

Sitting in circle and holding the space can be a daunting experience the first few times. Even if you have led groups before, sitting in circle takes us out of our familiar conditions and asks us to focus on being connected to it rather than leading it. That means that you too get to speak and share, and ask for support from the other women if you need it.

As women, we so often feel that we need to respond and give advice because that is generally the way we have been 'conditioned'. Developing the art of listening to hear rather than listening to give your input can be transformational both for the listener and the woman who is being listened to. A basic expectation is that when one woman is sharing she is not interrupted. Advice is not given without request and what a woman talks about is not brought up again, unless invited by her. We experience that when women come together we can be intuitive to each other without responding to what is said, that we get what we need just by speaking and being heard. This way of sitting together in a circle enables each woman to introduce herself and share how she is feeling. It also brings in confidentiality and establishes a way of relating to each other and what is said over the course of the tent.

Confidentiality

At each Red Tent it is important to have a simple confidentiality agreement and to repeat this in each new circle, so that all women present agree to keep what they hear of others' stories and circumstances private.

"For me the red tent is a place to be heard, to be healed, to feel the release of pent up feelings which cannot be expressed safely anywhere else. I learn from the stories shared and carry their lessons home." - Carla

"It's great to be in a space where you can share and be supported by other women in total confidence without any agenda. To top it all I have met some really inspiring women." - Renee

Opening and closing the tent

Opening or starting the day is the glue that holds everyone together and builds connection so make sure that you do it with intention. It is always good to state the intentions as to why you have come together, confidentiality and the finish time.

Before you open the circle with a ritual it is always good to explain what is expected from each of us. Perhaps you could say something like:

"Safe space means allowing women to come as they are, whether you are feeling joyous or irritated, closed or open, however we are in this moment. Each woman is welcomed exactly as she is. As we go around there will be an object passed to you. This is a talking stick (see below). Everyone gets the opportunity to speak, if they wish. Take your time and say what you need to, ask for what you need or tell us what you would like to share. If you aren't ready to speak, then the talking stick will come back to you when and if you are ready. When a woman has the talking stick it is her space, so we don't respond with words, advice, or try to fix her tears or emotion. We listen, as best we can to her sharing. Once she has finished the talking stick is then passed on."

How Red Tents are organised can vary from tent to tent. But there are a few factors to be taken into account such as how much time you have together and how many women are in circle. The structure could look something like:

Arrive – tea/coffee and welcome
Come to sit – introductions and intentions for gathering
Confidentiality – agree to respect each other and words spoken
Introduce being in circle – space to talk, space to listen
Open circle with ritual – light candles or place things in the centre
Check in 1st round – names and how you are today
Check in 2nd round – what do you need or can offer
Bio break – short loo break
Activities – slowing down, ebb and flow, discussion, rest, music, massage, craft.
Check in 3rd round – closing words about how you are
Close with ritual – together to end the day

It is easier if you have a structure for your Red Tent. It holds the tent together and enables you to include everything women want, while allowing it to stay flexible to arising needs. If you are co-leading with other women, share the holding and decide who will introduce which element.

Ritual

The word ritual may have lots of associations to you. But the word here means a simple offering to open and close the circle, and because it is done exactly the same way each time, and with intention, we call it a ritual.

An example of a simple opening ritual could be the following:
Take three candles and say out loud the following
"*We light this first candle to represent all the women who have come before us* (expand on this if you wish), *We light this second candle to honour ourselves, all those present, including those that are gathering at a Red Tent around the world* (expand on this if you wish), *We light this third candle to symbolise the women who are yet to come into the world* (expand on this if you wish)."
Once you have lit all of the candles they could go in the centre of your circle with your centre-piece, burning as a reminder of your intention for gathering.

Talking Object

A good way to allow the check-ins to flow is using a talking object. Talking objects have traditionally been used in circle meetings throughout history. The idea is that a stone, stick or other or object is passed from woman to woman. When she is holding the object it is a woman's turn to speak. A woman may also pass the object on if she is not ready to speak. This way of indicating who is speaking helps to create the flow and intention of the circle, ensure that everyone has an opportunity to share and prevent the circle from developing into a 'conversation' or advice giving session as each woman has her own opportunity to speak and be heard when she has the object.

Closing ritual

The closing ritual could be as simple as:-
" ...to close the circle let's blow out the candles together!"

Try it out, what worked, what flowed, what sounded authentic and relevant to those women who have attended the Red Tent? Ask for help putting back the space how you would like it.

Sharing food

As your Red Tent is a time for women to come together in circle, there is little time for socialising and having a good old natter. One way of being able to connect with others, is to invite those who wish to, to stay to share some food after the closing ritual. It may be that you are gathering for the whole day so you break for lunch. However you choose to do it, it is a lovely way to connect informally. So within your invitation ask women to bring food to share. It's perhaps easier to make it a vegetarian buffet as food requests and varying diets can get complicated.

Ask for help tidying up and washing those plates and endless supply of cups you never knew you had!

Vegetarian Borscht Soup – why not cook a soup befitting a 'Red' Tent?

Ingredients (Serves: 10)

- 2 small beetroot, peeled and grated coarsely
- 3 tablespoons cider vinegar
- oil for cooking
- 1 onion, chopped
- 3 carrots, grated coarsely
- 2L water
- 130g yellow or red lentils
- 1/4 cabbage head, shredded
- 3 medium potatoes, peeled and diced
- 2 tablespoons tomato puree
- salt and pepper to taste
- soured cream and fresh dill to serve

Method

Prep: 15min › Cook: 45min › Ready in: 1hr

1. In a small frying pan, cook and stir the beetroot and vinegar on a low heat for 15 minutes until soft. Set aside.
2. Heat oil in a large frying pan over a low heat and add onion. Cook and stir for 2 minutes before adding carrots. Cook for a further 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Set aside.
3. In a large saucepan, bring the water to a simmer and add lentils and cabbage. Cook for 10 minutes before adding the diced potatoes. Cook for a further 10 minutes and add the beetroot, onion, carrots, salt and pepper. Add the tomato puree and simmer for a further 10 minutes until all the vegetables are tender.
4. Serve with soured cream and fresh dill.

Creative input

As you probably know already, women are naturally creative beings. Look around you at friends and family. I'm sure you will see those that love dressing up, tailoring their clothes to their own style. Or perhaps you know those that knit or sew, draw, sing, write stories or poetry. Even those that say "oh I'm not creative", take a closer look and you will see they love to garden, cook or organise their house or office desk in a particular way. So bringing creativity into the circle is the easy bit. How to time manage it takes a little practice.

You can navigate this element of the circle in many ways, for example when each woman speaks for the first or second time you could ask them if they have brought anything to offer. Let's take a look at some options.

Option 1) once you know what is to be offered, as a whole group discuss between yourselves how you would like to include all creative offerings. Explore what would work best to do in which order.
Option 2) if some women want to try different but not all offerings, you can suggest breaking into smaller groups. For example: if a woman wanted to talk about something in particular or ask advice while dancing was also being offered, and a woman or women from the circle freely offered the advice, then they could get together while the others dance. And then join in with the dancing when they have finished.
Option 3) break into small groups (if you have the numbers) and you can have a multitude of things happening at the same time, for example, massage, talking about something in particular, some arty activity or music. Women can then gravitate to where they want to be based or what they need, then come back together for the closing round.
Option 4) Find what works for your circle ☺

You should be aware that some activities e.g. group massage, for example, may be uncomfortable for some women and so you should make it clear that there is no obligation to participate in any activity. It's also important to allocate and watch the time... don't be strict, be organic to the needs of the group... BUT do save some time to close the circle *on time* with a ritual.

Things grow slowly

Just as in the newly turned allotment, your first few Red Tents will be about sowing seeds, weeding and watering. Watching the flourishing of your Red Tent will take commitment, inspiration and time.

As with the seasons, your efforts will pass through cycles of their own: welcoming women, noticing those who stay or just visit once, experiencing disappointment if things don't meet your expectations, and bathing in joy at the simplicity of sharing and being with other women. All the while you are holding the intention to provide a space for women to turn up, as they are, and for you to turn up just as you are.

It takes time for roots to grow, for consistency and momentum to take hold, so be kind and patient with yourself and others. It may be 13 moons before you begin to taste the fruits of your offerings. And fruits you will taste!!! So keep this in your intentions as you venture on with bringing a Red Tent to the women of your community.

Red Tent, Red Tent,
Welcome us inside,
So we can show you our true selves
And be free and release, with absolutely nothing to hide.

Red Tent, Red Tent,
How we have longed for your arms,
Your love and embrace.
With you behind and within us,
There is nothing we cannot face.

Two extracts from Lucy Montgomery's poem – Red Tent Cumbria

Growing the seeds of the community

Red Tents work well because they are self-evolving, based on shared ownership and collective involvement. This is how the Movement has grown worldwide and in our local communities: by supporting one another and telling each other about Red Tents.

All the work and time we do to build the Red Tent Directory is voluntary. It is our labour of LOVE because we believe in Red Tents, we want as many women to know of them, we want every community to have one and we want to help everyone find one near to them. And we need your help too.

What we would like is for you to do is:

- List your Red Tent on the Red Tent Directory website
- Tell people about our website
- Use our logo on your emails
- Ask us questions if you need support
- Encourage others to set up Red Tents
- Ask people to join our mailing list.
- Send us quotes about 'What a Red Tent means to you'
- Tell us stories about how your Red Tent is going
- Post about your Red Tent on our Facebook page
- Keep us up to date with your listing and tell us if we have made a mistake
- Let us know if you had an activity or theme which worked well and why
- Take someone new to the next Red Tent in your area
- Visit another Red Tent in another area
- Tell people in other Red Tents that you found their tent on our website