

CIRCLES OF SUPPORT

SUMMARY

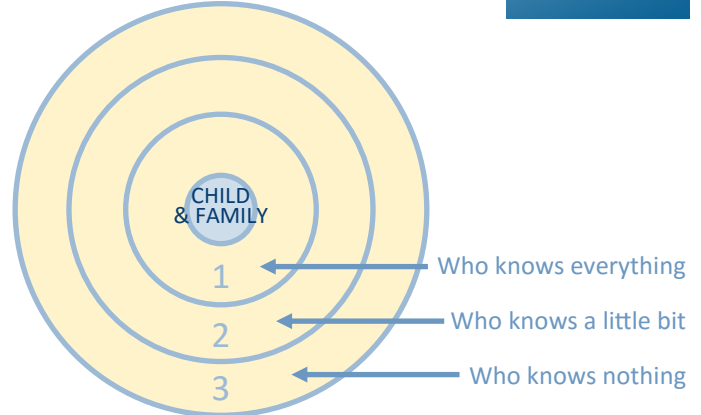
The Circles of Support is a tool to explore with a family who their natural support network is and who may be built into a formal Safety Network to help ensure the safety of the child in the care of the parent.

PREPARING WITH PARENTS

- The Circles of Support (sometimes called Safety Circles) can be done with a parent one-on-one — for example, in one of your first meetings with them — however, ideally it is completed in the context of a Child and Family Team (CFT) meeting.
 - If you complete it only with the parent, revisit it during a CFT so other participants have the chance to add to the network and share their perspective.
- Make the Circles of Support as open and transparent as possible; explain the process and why you want to do it. Inform the parents that:
 - Part of your job is to identify people who care about them/their child in order to help keep the child safe.
 - Building a Safety Network is a requirement for their child to come home/close their case.
- Ask the parent if they are willing to participate in the Circles of Support process.
 - If not, ask what their worries are. On a scale of 1-10, how willing are they to complete the process? What would it take to raise their number by one?
 - If they are still unwilling, let them know that you'll revisit it later, since building a Safety Network is necessary for children to return home/close a case.

COMPLETING THE CIRCLES OF SUPPORT

- Draw the circles as shown. Explain what each circle represents, then ask:
 - "Who are the people in your life/your child's life who already know what happened that led to child welfare being involved with your family?"
 - "Who are the people that know a little bit, who know something has happened, but don't know details?"
 - "Who are the people in your life who don't know anything about what has happened?"
- Compliment the parent for the courage they have shown in talking with people about what has happened.
 - "I imagine it may have been difficult to tell [your mom, friend, etc.] what happened. How did you find the courage to do that?"
- Explore the network by asking for detail.
 - "Now that we have identified people in your life, can you tell me more about them?"



- "How long have you known this person? Where/ how did you meet them?"
 - "How would you describe their relationship with your child?"
 - "If your life were going how you hope it will be in the future, what role would this person play? What role would they play in your child's future?"
 - "On a scale of 1-10, how confident are you that this person will be able to help you/your family?"
- Explore with the parent/team what it would take to move people from the outer circles to the inner circle.
 - "Who else from the outer circles do you think needs to be part of the inner circle? How come?"
 - "Is there anyone in an outer circle you have thought about telling, but haven't yet? What would you need to feel comfortable talking to them?"
 - "Who would _____ (in the inner circle) say needs to be in the inner circle with him/her?"
 - "Who would your kids want to be in the inner circle? How come?"
 - "Who do you think I (your social worker) would want to have in the inner circle? Why?"
- If you completed the activity with only the parent, discuss scheduling a CFT meeting and inviting the people in circles 1 and 2. At the CFT, further develop the Circles of Support with the team.

HELPFUL TIPS

Ask the parents if there was someone who used to be important to them, but who they no longer talk to. What would it take for them to reach out to heal the relationship?

Be mindful of cultural aspects of a parent's reluctance to share information with people in their network. Explore what would help them overcome their discomfort.

Adults who aren't capable of being part of the safety plan can still be part of the network by supporting the parent.

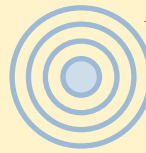
ADDRESSING RELUCTANCE/AMBIVALENCE

- Parents may be reluctant to share information about their network. Express empathy and be clear about why the information is needed.
 - “I know this is tough for you, and I get that you don’t want to do this. For us to be able to [move to unsupervised visits, return your child, close your case], I need to know more people are working together to keep your child safe. If you had to pick one person to attend a meeting, who I would tell all the good things I see you doing as well as what I’m worried about, who do you think it should be?”
- Ultimately, if a parent doesn’t want a network involved, it is their choice. However, services do not equal safety. Continue to work through the parent’s ambivalence while expressing the need for a Safety Network if the parent wants to achieve his/her goals (i.e., getting their child back, closing the case).

SAFETY NETWORK

- The next step is developing individuals identified in the Circles of Support process to actually become the child’s Safety Network. Discuss with the family/team:
 - Of all these people, who do you think would be important to have as part of the Safety Network?
 - Is there anyone you would not want in the network? How come?
 - How will we decide whether someone is part of the Safety Network?
 - What do people need to know if they are going to be part of the Safety Network?
- If a family has no one who can be part of a Safety Network, or has an inadequate network to ensure child safety, building a network must be a primary part of the initial case plan.
- There is no specific number of people needed to be part of the network; every situation is different and determined by:
 - Level of risk and potential future danger
 - Age and vulnerability of children
- The Safety Network needs enough people to meet the day-to-day arrangements required in the safety plan.
- Genograms and ecomaps are useful tools for developing the Safety Network, as well as for family finding/connection for the child.
- Additional questions that can help you explore a potential Safety Network include:
 - “Who are the people that you really trust?”
 - “Who are the people who know you at your best?”
 - “If you suddenly became sick, who would you trust the most with your children? Who would you want to take you to the doctor?”
 - “Who would your kids say they trust the most?”

SAFETY NETWORK



A safety network is a group of responsible adults (family, friends and professionals) who:

Care about the child and family

Are willing to meet with Child Welfare Services

Understand the concerns about harm and danger that CWS and others have

Are willing to do something that supports the family and helps keep the child safe

- “If we had to pick one person to start with to come to a meeting to start sharing about our work together, who would you want it to be?”
- Talk directly to children/youth about who is important to them, who they love and who they feel safe with.
 - Children are able to complete genograms/family trees at a young age, to the extent of their developmental capacity.
 - Who is their favorite grownup, besides their mom or dad, to do fun things with?
 - If the child had a worry, which grownup would they talk to about it?
- If potential Safety Network members don’t seem “appropriate”:
 - Be willing to meet with anyone, even if it’s not someone you think will be helpful.
 - Follow similar procedures for child visitation (i.e., background check) to assess for safety.
 - Someone who may not be able to help keep the child safe may be a valuable support in other ways, i.e., taking the parent to AA/NA meetings.
- Discuss with the network how accountability will be managed.
 - How do we make sure the network is doing what they agreed to do?
 - What will we do if the network does not do what they agreed to do?
 - How often will Child and Family Team meetings happen?

OTHER USES OF NETWORKS & THE TOOL

- Networks don’t only have to focus on safety. The network can tackle issues such as concurrent planning, healing from trauma, education success, transition to successful adulthood, and more.
- The Circles of Support is a great tool to use with older youth in permanency to explore who is important to them. Work with the youth to fill in who they are very close to in the middle, who they are somewhat close to in the next ring, and who they used to be close to in the outer circle.