

Worksheet 4

Relationship circles

For most of us, relationships with family and friends are what keep our lives on track. We have a whole range of relationships—family, partners, lifelong friends, work colleagues, neighbours, people with whom we share an interest, right through to people whom we pay to provide services.

For people with a learning disability, these relationships are equally important but can sometimes be challenging to create.

We needn't leave friendships and relationships to chance. We can be really intentional and make it easier for people with a learning disability to strengthen their networks. We can do this by enabling them to go to places where they can engage in existing or new interests, hobbies and passions, and have the opportunity to meet people who share these interests.

Use the relationship circles tool on page 61 to look at the people your relative already has in their life. It will help to map out their community as well. It can be completed one-to-one, or with family and friends, or even brought to a circle meeting to complete as a group.

In the relationship mapping diagram, the concentric circles are used to plot out relationships. Marsha Forest, Jack Pearpoint and Judith Snow describe these circles as:

- the circle of **intimacy**
- the circle of **friendship**
- the circle of **participation**
- the circle of **exchange**.

CIRCLE 1 The circle of intimacy is concerned with loving relationships and the anchors in your relative's life. In here, go the people your relative cannot imagine life without. Typically Mum, Dad, partner, closest friend, children. Your relative doesn't need to get on with them all the time!

CIRCLE 2 The circle of friendship is concerned with the friends and allies of your relative. Good questions to ask your relative are: Who do you call when you've got good news? Who do you moan to when you've had an argument with your partner/your parent(s)? Who do you draw strength from, share a laugh with and share your dreams with?

CIRCLE 3 The circle of participation is concerned with shared interests and a neighbourhood connection. In here are people your relative knows from clubs, committees, work and so on.

CIRCLE 4 The circle of exchange is concerned with paid relationships. In this circle are people like your relative's doctor, dentist, window cleaner, hairdresser, taxi driver and so on. What will emerge when your relative's diagram is complete, is a picture of how your relative's circle is or isn't in balance. For example:

- many people with a learning disability have the same number as other citizens in Circle 1, but few in Circles 2 and 3 and markedly more in Circle 4
- some people with a learning disability spend most of their lives with people who are paid to spend time with them; that is, those in the outer circle, the circle of exchange.

We also know that people don't come straight into Circle 2, the circle of friendship. Friendship doesn't happen instantly.

The main strategy for strengthening the inner circles is to bring people in to Circle 3, the circle of participation. These are people who spend time sharing an activity of mutual interest—anything from working together, playing a sport, sharing an art or craft activity, to going out for a meal together or going to the theatre.

Through this route some people with whom we share an interest become friends over time. Some people, however, will quite naturally remain in Circle 3 as acquaintances and colleagues.

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