

Circle of Friends

What is a Circle of Friends, A Circle of Support?

- A Circle of Friends or Support is a group of people who agree to meet on a regular basis to help an individual with a disability accomplish specific personal visions or goals.
- The Circle members provide support and they take action on the individual's behalf.
- The members of the Circle are usually friends, family members, co-workers, neighbors, church members, service providers, and/or school staff members.
- The majority of people in the Circle are not paid members, however, Circles are pleased to include paid Service Providers, paid Providers can be an essential resource to the Circle.
- The Circle is typically referred to as a "Person-Centered Team" when the majority of the members are paid Human Service workers or School Staff employees.
- The Circle of Friends/Support can be a useful tool in assisting the individual with a disability to reach his/her personal visions or goals by helping him/her to overcome obstacles and to open doors to new opportunities.

FOUR STEPS TO BUILDING A CIRCLE

- 1) **FOCUS** on an individual's likes, dreams, support needs and **GENERATE** a vision. A Vision of what the individual desires will help set guidelines and plan strategies. Do not take on too much. Starting small and insuring positive results will allow movement towards more difficult steps with confidence, especially if there seems to be a number of barriers to tackle. Knowing the vision will help Circle members stay centered when barriers get in the way. Prepare a road map: "know where you are starting, where you are going, how you can get there, when and with whom." Some hints for creating vision:
 - Listen to the desires and wants of the individual. Build on the things they say. Listen to their feelings. Feelings are neither right nor wrong. They just are.
 - Look at the person's gifts and contributions to make the vision come alive for them. How can the community become part of removing barriers and making the vision real?
 - Don't expect things to happen overnight. Let each person share his/her gifts. Each person has his/her own unique contribution to make. The gifts are as various and as numerous as those who possess them.
- 2) **EMPOWER** the individual or family. The Circle's purpose is to work with the individual and/or family to support their visions not tell them what is right for their child or themselves. The purpose of empowerment is to always work towards **THEIR CAPACITIES** (the highest level of independent achievement possible), while focusing on the individuals dreams.

SELF EMPOWERMENT STARTS FROM THE INSIDE OUT! It does not work from outside in. People short-circuit the process for others by trying to do the task of self empowerment for the individual. The Circle tends to automatically think of doing something for the individual. The Circle needs to keep the individual in the lead role. The Circle maintains the role of support and should not give the impression that family, friends, and professionals have all the answers.
- 3) **WORK** with interested friends, family and others who care about the individual. The circle can be a "bridge" for the person with a disability, into activities and social groups in the community.
 - Invite family members, friends and neighbors to become part of the Circle.
 - Identify particular networks of people within the group.

- Look for the "gifts" of the people within the Circle.
 - View different ideas as ways to discover more and see new solutions to a problem.
 - Develop strategies to overcome the obstacles and BRING THE VISION TO LIFE for the individual.
- 4) **FIND CONNECTIONS** within existing family members, friends, neighbors and community resources for getting more involved in the community. Look through local community newspapers and newsletters to find resources to meet the challenges of each person's vision. Then look at the Recreation and Leisure section of the Navigator for new ideas. Next, ask the Circle several simple questions to help find possible support connections:
- Where do relatives and friends work?
 - What clubs do they belong to?
 - What churches do they go to?
 - How might they assist the individual in becoming an independent member of their community?

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