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# Relationship circles

## Worksheet 4

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 disabilities, 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 disabilities 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 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 network 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 describes 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 Mom, Dad, partner, closest friend, children. Your relative doesn't need to get along 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: Whom do you call/text 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?

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**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. **NOTE** This circle is particularly important because it is the building block for circles 2 and 1. The more connections made in this circle will increase the likelihood of building meaningful connections in circles 2 and 1.

**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 network is or isn't in balance. For example:

- many people with disabilities 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 disabilities 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.

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 participation, people become friends over time.

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

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