

Using **Circles of Safety and Support** to create Safety Networks with Families

What are Safety Networks?

An important part of family and safety-centered practice is helping the family build and strengthen a safety network—made up of family, friends, and involved professionals. A safety network supports caregivers to develop and maintain a safety plan for the children. It is hoped that the family’s safety network will continue in this role after professional services end or are no longer needed.

They are a group of family, friends, or professionals who:

1. Care about the child and family.
2. Are willing to engage with child welfare.
3. Understand the safety concerns child welfare and others have.
4. Are willing to do something that supports the family and keeps the child safe.

Why are Safety Networks important?

A strong, active safety network assures child welfare professionals that the caregivers have the support they need to use the safety plan for as long as the children remain vulnerable to the identified concerns or dangers within the family. For cases with an identified danger to the children, establishing a safety network is critical when developing the safety plan. The rationale for building a safety network includes:

1. Child protective services involvement is temporary.
2. Visits by a social worker twice a month is often not enough to ensure safety for a child. A safety network is needed to enhance safety.
3. Families often have people involved in helping care for their children even when child welfare is not involved. These people help with supporting permanency and well-being of a child. It takes a village/network of ongoing support, services, and love to raise a child.

How can **Circles of Safety and Support** help develop a Safety Network?

Circles of Safety and Support are a visual tool to help identify people for the family’s safety network and to help professionals and family members talk about the network’s role and who can be part of it.

The primary focus of the initial visit with a family during the assessment is safety. It can be beneficial to start the discussion of a safety network, at this point. Using the **Circles of Safety and Support** diagram on the following page will help families identify who may already be a part of their network, and who could become a part of their network. People in the network will work together to help the caregivers build and follow a safety plan that assures the children will always be safe.

Engaging parents/caregivers using the **Circles of Safety and Support** tool is a good first step to helping them understand what a safety network is and who needs to be a part of the safety planning process. Share with parents that the network is built by them and can include family, tribes, friends, neighbors, service providers, and others that they believe will be beneficial.

Remember, children also have a role providing valuable information when discussing safety networks! During interviews with children, listen for friends, relatives, etc. who they could see as a support.

Circles of Safety and Support Tool:

*To start the discussion about **circles of safety and support**, discuss each layer of the circle.*

*It is important to emphasize to the family the focus of this process is their child(ren). The social worker should **use the child(ren)'s first names** when explaining this to the family because it personalizes the conversation. Having a picture of the child(ren) available is also helpful.*

Family Safety/Support Circle :



- How did you find the courage to tell the people you have?
- Where do you find the strength?
- Who was the hardest person to tell?
- What helped you tell that person?
- Who is most helpful and supportive to you and your children?

Inner Circle: Ask parents/caretaker: Who supports you the most?

1. Who already knows everything that has happened?
2. With whom do the children feel the most connected?
Who are the first people you call when you are in need?

(At this point in the process compliment the parents/caretaker by saying: how did you find the strength to reach out to them about this?)

Middle Circle: Ask the parents/caretaker:

1. Who supports you a little?
2. With whom do your children feel some connection?
3. Who knows a little about what is going on?

Outer Circle: Ask the parents/caretaker:

1. Who knows nothing about what is going on?
2. Who creates challenges/barriers for your family?
3. Who have you not reached out to, but could see yourself reaching out to in the future, maybe a childhood friend, a relative you don't see often?
4. Who is willing to support you but you don't feel comfortable asking them to help you? What is holding you back from asking them? Is there someone that used to support you? Could we engage them again?
5. Who is in your phone/contact list? Who do you connect with on social media?

Moving people from outer to inner circles: Ask the parents/caretaker:

1. What would it take to move someone from the outer circle to the inner circle?
2. Who needs to move to an inner circle?
3. Who would grandma/the children/the social worker want to see move to the inner circle?
4. Is there anyone you thought of telling but just haven't reached out to yet?

Helpful questions to ask when a family has a hard time identifying supports:

1. If you were in an accident and were taken to the hospital, who would you call to pick up your children from school?
2. If your house was on fire and burned to the ground who would you call?
3. If you won the lottery, who would be the first person you call?
4. Who would your children say they want to spend the night with if you needed to go out of town and couldn't take them with you?
5. If you died tomorrow, who would you want to take your children in and care for them until they are adults?

6. Who is someone who has shown a lot of interest and support to your children now or in the past? (teacher, neighbor, counselor, church member, someone you work with?)
7. Who can help you move closer to your goals? (Boss, co-worker, counselor, neighbor, friend of a friend)
8. Do you belong to a church, club, support group, sports team? If so, who are some people who have been there for you and your children?
9. Who do you look up to? Who encourages you when you are having a bad day?
10. Has there ever been a time you felt no one cared about you and your feelings? Who is someone who stepped up and made you feel better?
11. Tell me about a time when things were working well for your family, what did that look like and who helped you and your children at that time?
12. Who in your life has had a tragedy and you helped them through that difficult time?
13. Create a family tree with the parent/caretaker and ask about communication and location of these individuals.

Remember: What are our safety goals?

1. What do we want to achieve?
2. What will we do to move forward to the next phase?
3. How will we know we are on track?
4. How long do we expect this process to take?