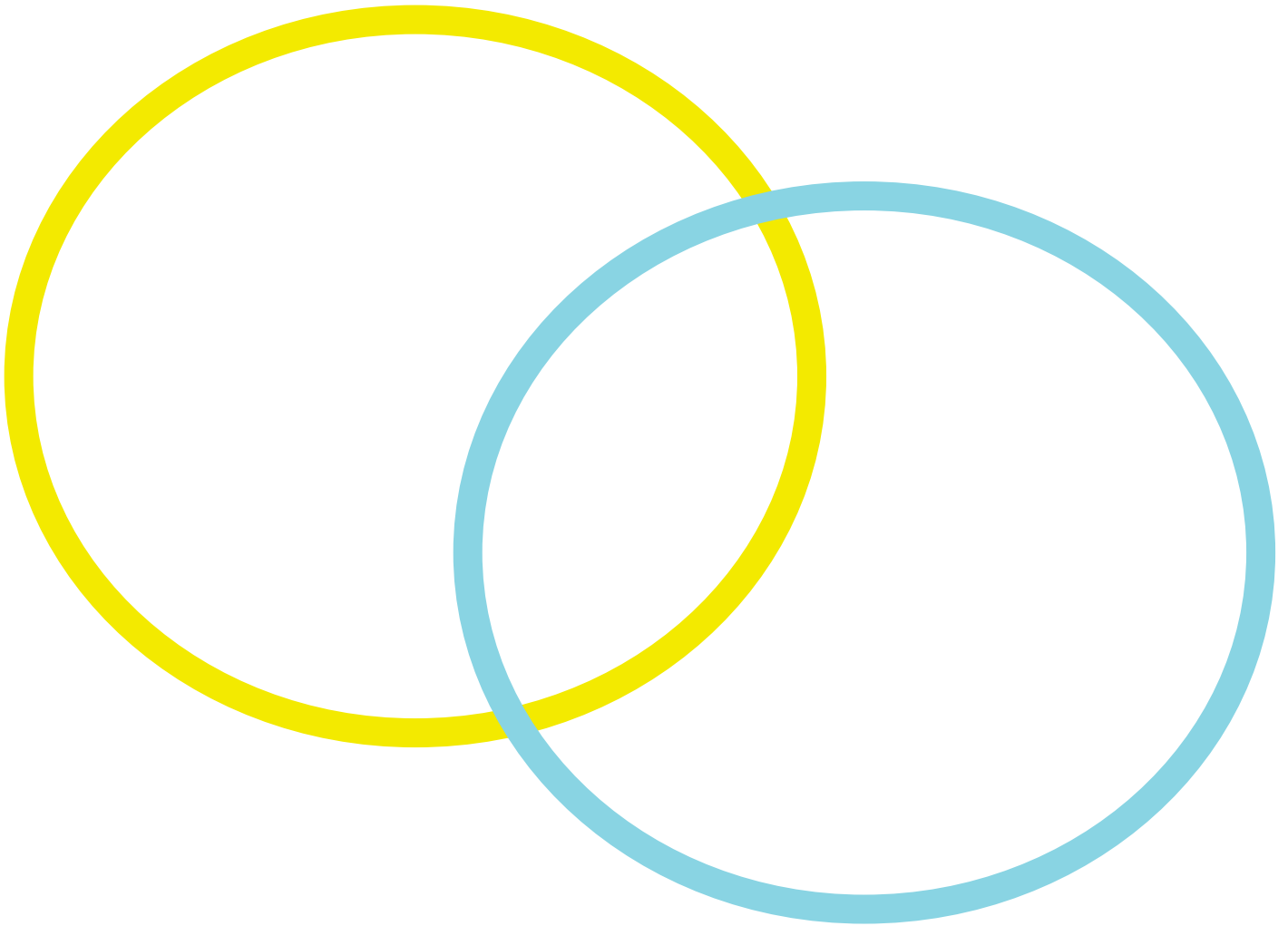




A Guide to Circles of Support



foundation for
people with
learning disabilities



This guide is to help people start to think about circles of support.



It can be used by people with learning disabilities, their families and people who support them.



We wanted to write a simple guide to thinking about circles for people who may not have heard of them before.



This guide also talks about using circles of support at work, so it may be useful for employers or job coaches.



This is an introduction to circles: you can use these ideas to help you get started or you can come up with your own way of running a circle.



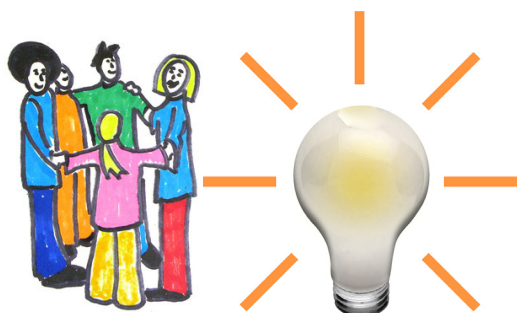
The most important thing is that people with learning disabilities are in charge, or are supported to be in charge, of the circle.



What is in this guide



What is a circle of support..... Page 1



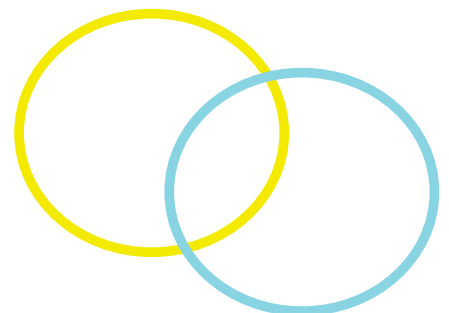
How do I start my circle of support..... Page 4



Starting a circle of support at work.....Page 11



What is a circle of support?





We all need to know other people.



They may be family, friends, neighbours, people we work with or people who help us sort things out in our lives.



People with learning disabilities can sometimes find it harder to meet people in their local area.



Often they spend more time with paid staff rather than have the chance to make their own friends.



A circle of support is a group of people that the person chooses to meet together as friends.



The group help to support the person to make their own decisions about their life.



The people in the circle should know and care about the person who needs support.



A circle is like having a group of friends that can help to sort out things that may be worrying the person.



People with learning disabilities often find a circle of support is a good way to make their life better. It helps them to stay strong and in control of their life.



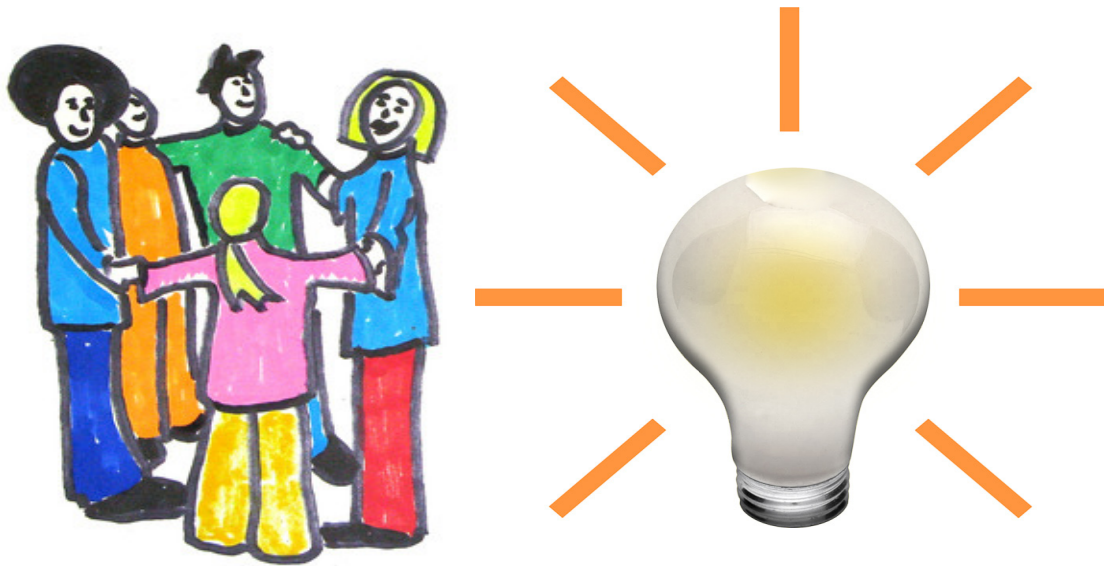
It is really important the person with a learning disability is at the centre of the circle.



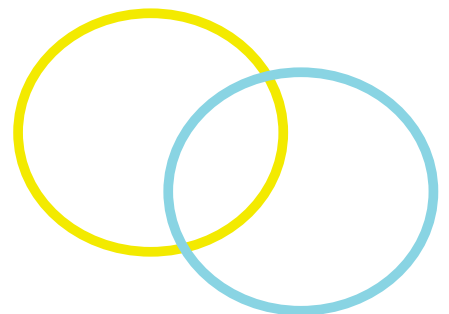
The circle should be about finding out what the person wants and how they can get it.



The circle helps the person stay in charge.



**How do I start my
circle of support?**





Before you start your circle



What is your circle going to do?



Start by thinking about what you would like the people in your circle to help you with.



You could talk to someone who knows you well for some ideas.



Who can you invite?



It is good to invite people you know and like but also people who can help make the things you want happen.



You may need people who know about certain things like finding work, getting support, or joining classes.



You could ask someone you trust to help you think about who to invite.



The most important thing is to have friends that you can count on in your circle.



Where and when will the meetings be?



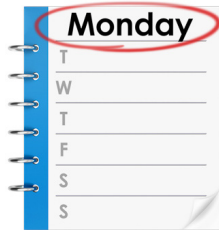
Choose where you would like to have your first circle meeting.



It may be in your home, someone else's home or in a pub, café or wherever you will feel comfortable.



Choose a time and day.



This could be any day of the week, but think about who's in your circle and when they may be free before you set a date.



Invite people to the first circle meeting. You may find it easier to give them a written invitation so they have the information they need.



You can ask someone to help you to do this.



Your first meeting



Circle meetings are best when they are friendly and fun.



It helps to think about how you can get people to enjoy themselves.



A cup of tea and biscuits (or whatever you enjoy) can help.



Some people may not know what a circle of support is and how it works.



There is a video on our website (see the 'An Ordinary Life' page) which you can show people which may help them to understand circles of support.



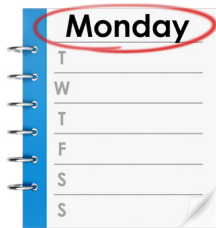
Sometimes it's good to write a list of the things you want to talk about at the circle so everyone knows what it is about. (See our example on page 10)



Tell the circle about what you would like them to help you with and ask them for their ideas of how you could do this.



Make sure you agree what will happen next and what people need to do to make these things happen.



?



Some circles meet every few weeks, some meet every few months.

?



Ask your circle how often they can meet.



At the end of your meeting



Before your circle meeting finishes you may want to look at what has worked well in the meeting.

You could also look at what has not worked well.



Before you end the meeting it is a good idea to arrange the next meeting.



Example of a circle of support meeting agenda



Helen's first circle meeting



January 2015



1. Who we are and how we know Helen



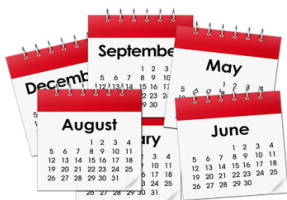
2. What is going well in Helen's life



3. What Helen wants to change about her life



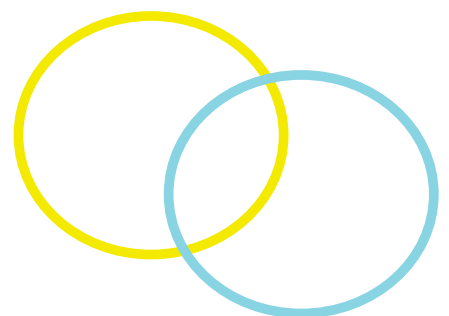
4. What will the circle do and how often will we meet



5. Date of next meeting



Starting a circle of support at work





Sometimes circles of support can be really helpful for people with learning disabilities in their jobs.

1. ____
2. ____
3. ____

They can help you to:



- Get to know the people you work with and make friends



- Think about new skills you could learn



- Learn how to act at work



- Get advice or support if there's a problem

1. ____
2. ____
3. ____

- Keep track of your work if you work with lots of different people



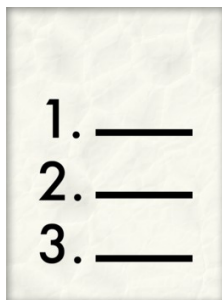
How to start your work circle



Talk to Human Resources and your line manager about starting a work circle.



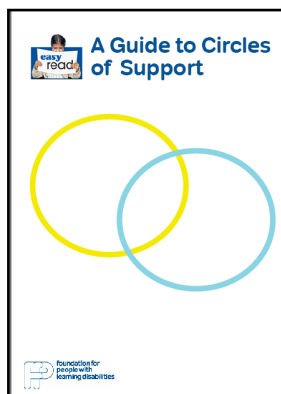
Your line manager can help you choose the best people to be in the circle (see more on this on page 14)



Write a list of ideas of what you want your circle to help you with (see more on this on page 18,19)



Arrange a meeting with the people you would like to be a part of your circle



Tell them what a circle is and give them this guide to help explain circles of support.



Who to invite to join your work circle of support



- Invite people who you get on well with. You want to feel good around the people in your circle.



- Invite people who you work closely with, they will know what is going well and not so well at work.



- Think about what you want the group to do. Invite people who can help to make those things happen.



- Invite your line manager and/or someone else in your team to help with planning and running the circle.



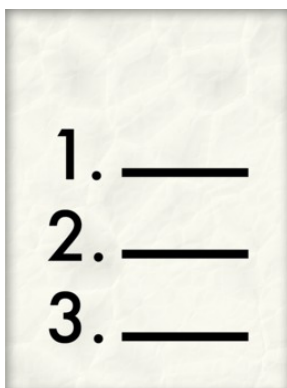
- Invite people who are likely to be able to come to the meetings. Some people are not at work everyday and so cannot make all the meetings.



How to run your circle of support



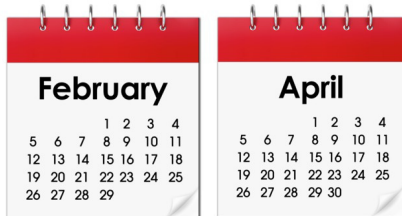
It is good to set some guidelines or rules when you start your circle.



This will help the people in your circle know what the meetings are for and what they need to do to help you.



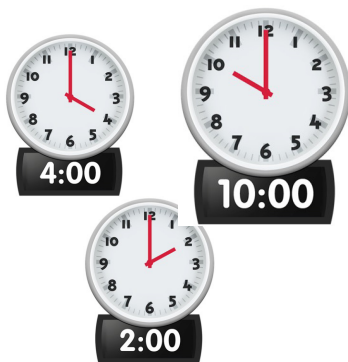
How often should your circle meet?



- Most circles meet every month or every 2 months.



- But if someone is new to a job or is having problems at work you may want to meet more often than this.



What times are best to meet?



- Some people find lunchtimes are a good time to meet as people can eat lunch together and it's more relaxed.



- For other people, meeting in the mornings or the end of the day would be better.



What do you need to do to make sure the meetings are run well?



- Does someone need to write a list of things (an agenda) to talk about at each meeting? (See our example on page 21)



- Does someone need to take notes?



- Who will be in charge of arranging the meetings?



Think about what you want to get out of your circle meetings



- Do you want help to meet new people at work?



- Do you want help to learn the rules of work and how to be professional?



- Or do you want support to learn new jobs?



Ask the circle group for their ideas about how they can help you



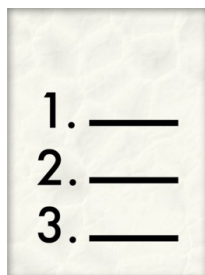
- Other people may have good ideas about how you can run the circle meeting.



- It also helps people to feel part of the group if you ask for their ideas.



Be clear about what people in the circle need to do



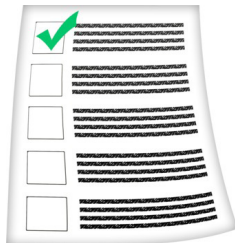
Make sure the members know that:



- they will need to try and come to every meeting



- they may need to do things outside of meetings to help support you



- it's important they get involved and offer ideas and help.



And finally.....have fun!



Circles of support at work sometimes have to be serious when things aren't going well.



But keeping the circle fun and friendly will make people want to be part of it and want to support and get to know you.



It's good to plan some fun things to do with your work circle so everyone gets to know each other. For example, going out for lunch together one day.



Example of a circle of support at work agenda



Simon's first work circle meeting



January 2015



1. Who we are and how we know Simon



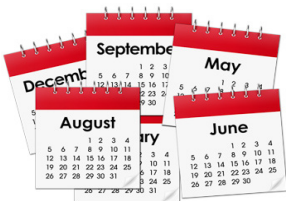
2. What is going well in Simon's job



3. How can the circle help Simon at work



4. What will the circle do and how often will we meet



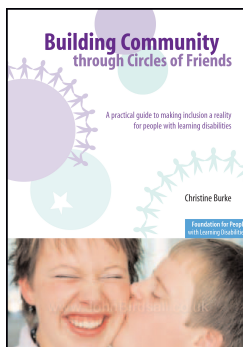
5. Date of next meeting



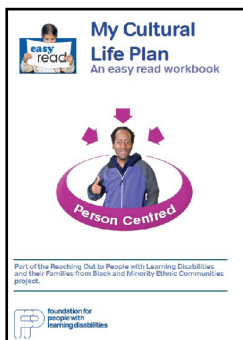
If you want more information about circles of support please see the following resources:



- A video on circles



- Building Community Through Circles of Friends



- My Cultural Life Plan



- Example of a circle of support - Hanifa's circle of support



All of these resources are free to view or download from our website
www.learningdisabilities.org.uk

This guide was written by Christine Burke and Kate Ball.



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