

Circle of Friends

What is it?

Circle of Friends was formulated out of the recognition that problem situations can't be considered on an individual level alone, and that any change in behaviour is more likely to be maintained if members of the peer group are involved to move the situation forward. In addition to benefiting the problem child, it was also noted that the intervention could be a 'rich learning experience for all members of the circle'. Six key themes of improvement were identified – development of empathy, identifying and expressing feelings, improvement in social problem solving skills, listening skills, being better at making links between feelings and behaviours and increased awareness of an individual's power to change. A circle of friends is a peer group support network for a child about whom there is concern (focus child). Members of the group are involved in moving the situation forward, making them aware of their contribution to any changes in the focus child, and thus positively affecting their expectations and perceptions of him/her.

Why would we use it?

As a means of promoting the inclusion of children with Special Educational Needs, primarily those with EBD in mainstream schools. Construction of a group of friends ensures that the emotional and behavioural needs of the focus child may begin to be met. In these ways, it is intended that the child or young person is able to change in their everyday context and that this change is maintained.

How does it work?

The 'circle of friends' approach works by mobilising the young person's peers to provide support and engage in problem solving with the person in difficulty. 'Circle of friends' is not the same as 'circle time' but many of the skills and techniques used by teachers in 'circle time' can be used to support the 'circle of friends' process. It is essential that the focus child and their parents/carers accept and support this activity taking place and give consent for it to do so. A key member of staff must be committed to using the approach and able to give sufficient time to supporting the Circle of Friends. Circles of Friends are usually set up by the class teacher with support from an educational psychologist. During weekly sessions the group agrees ways in which they could support the focus child. As a result, targets for the following week are set, and then reviewed at the subsequent session.

How can we find out more?

- [Circle of Friends – Promoting Inclusion and Interaction](#) – National Autistic Society
- [Inclusive Solutions](#)