

Circle of Security[®] Parenting[©]

A Relationship Based Parenting Program

Chapter One: Welcome to Circle of Security Parenting

Overarching Goals

- The first is for participants in the group to begin to experience the facilitator as a secure base which provides both a safe and an exciting context in which to explore parenting.
- The second goal is to introduce the concept of the Circle of Security and how the Circle is “always taking place” in the lives of children and adults.

Chapter Two: Exploring Our Children's Needs *All the Way Around the Circle*

Overarching Goals

- One goal is to increase caregiver’s observations and inferential skills (Seeing and Guessing). Behavioral descriptions are used to help distinguish among the “need” moments all the way around the Circle. The first step, based on the behavioral description, is to decide if the child is on the top or bottom of the Circle and then to identify which need is being exhibited.
- The next step is to learn about being “Hands” on the Circle and the challenge of being bigger, stronger, wiser and kind. The caregivers are invited to reflect about providing these caregiving functions to their child and what they learned from their own parents growing up about “top of the Circle, bottom of the Circle and Hands”. The underlying learning of this chapter is that children closely watch their caregivers for cues about going out to explore and coming in to seek comfort and reassurance.

Chapter Three: “Being With on the Circle”

Overarching Goals

1. Help the caregivers see that creating a relationship with their child in which feelings can be shared helps build a solid emotional foundation for their child.
2. Help the caregivers understand that teaching their children to manage emotions, which can only be learned within relationship, is an essential part of developing a secure attachment.
3. Help caregivers understand that “being with” isn’t a technique, but rather a state of mind or an underlying attitude of empathy for their children. This is both especially important and especially difficult when intense emotions arise. While positive results from “being with” may show up quickly, that isn’t the goal. The goal is to help children develop an emotional healthy life by allowing others to “be with” them and to learn to “being with” others.

Chapter Four: Being with Infants on the Circle

Overarching Goals

- Show that babies require relationship and so do all of us throughout our entire lives without overwhelm the caregiver with a message of being needed “too much”.
- Teach caregivers a simple form of attunement to children’s shifts in attention and emotion.
- Offer an alternative to static and/or negative representations of infants (i.e. difficult baby) by showing the dynamic process of feelings and behaviors.
- Show that “Feeling OK/Not OK” and “Going out/Coming in” provides the foundation for secure attachment.
- Show that infants can’t learn to organize their feelings without our ongoing support.

Chapter Five: The Path to Security

Overarching Goals

- Help caregivers feel safe and maintain hope as they explore their vulnerability with the metaphor of “Shark Music”
- The “Pathway to Security” is presented as the road to security. The goal is both to reassure participants that security is obtainable and that the path requires a few crucial steps.
 - To use the Circle of Security as a Map
 - To self reflect, which is doable if the participant can tolerate the vulnerability
 - Talk to someone about what you are doing and not yet doing, which requires a relationship that feels safe enough to share vulnerability
 - The facilitator needs to be the “hands” to hold the participants and help them feel safe
- With the introduction and normalization of “Shark Music”, invited caregivers to more fully explore their struggles with their child. Caregivers will vary in their capacity to do this and it is important that the facilitator finds a way to positively acknowledge each person’s efforts and not be confrontational with those who do not “open up”.
- Facilitate an “empathic shift” by helping caregivers see that miscues and acting out are self protective behaviors and not motivated by mean, hostile, or uncaring intentions.

Chapter Six: Exploring Our Struggles

Overarching Goals

- Help parents see their role as the Hands on the Circle as being, “Bigger, Stronger, Wiser, and Kind.
- Promote a feeling of safety for the caregivers so they can talk about vulnerable aspects of their relationships
- Help the participants understand how acting mean (bigger/stronger without kind) or weak (overly accommodating without bigger/stronger) or being gone creates fear in their child.
- Help caregivers understand and embrace that it is never too late and reflection is the key.
- Empower caregivers by helping them see where they are struggling and talk about it so that they have new power to see and decide to act differently in the future.
- Acknowledge caregivers courage and commitment to look at difficult issues.
- Give caregivers permission to explore their own experiences of fear from their childhood.
- This chapter is crucial for caregivers who have children that “act out” and are identified as having behavior problems

Chapter Seven: Rupture and Repair in Relationships

Overarching Goals

- Support caregivers empathic shift by helping them see that when their children are acting out, they are actually trying to get help managing genuine needs.
- Help caregivers see that underneath acting out behavior a child saying “I need you and I don’t know what to do with what I’m feeling.”
- Help caregivers understand that ruptures are the caregivers stepping off the Circle, not the children.
- Help caregivers understand that repair is when the caregiver returns to the Circle and offers their Hands to meet the child needs.
- Help parents learn to use “Time In”.

Chapter Eight: Summary and Celebration

Overarching Goals

- Celebrate how much the caregivers have learned
- Summarize and answer questions
- Give the caregivers an opportunity to debrief their experience.