

Cultivating Circles of Friends/Support More than a tool



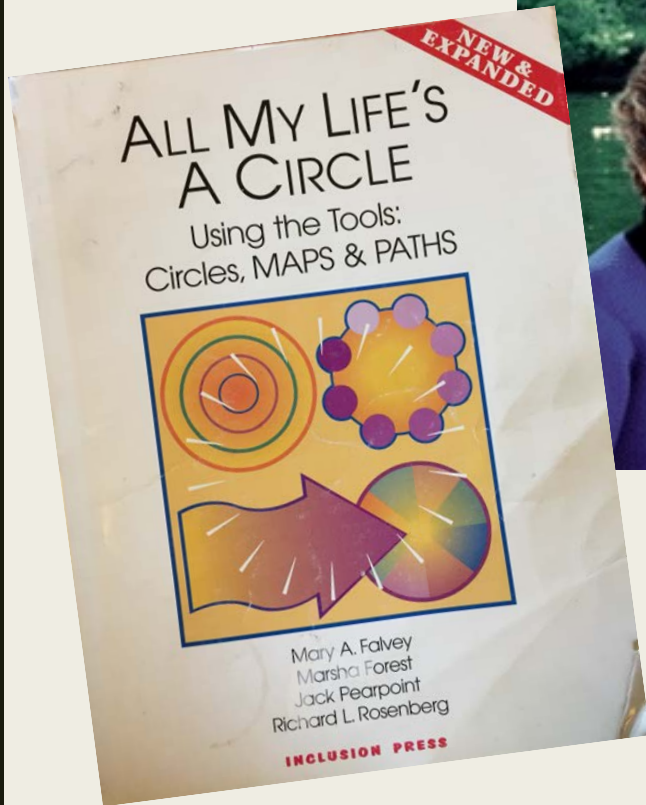
Janice Fialka, Emma Fialka-Feldman, Rich Feldman



Our intention for being together today:

- Strengthen your interest or current work in cultivating Circles.
- Recognize one “next step” you will take.
- **“Fall in love” with the act of intentionally inviting support and asking for help.**

Honoring our pioneers of Circles




Jack Pearpoint
Marsha Forest



Judith Snow

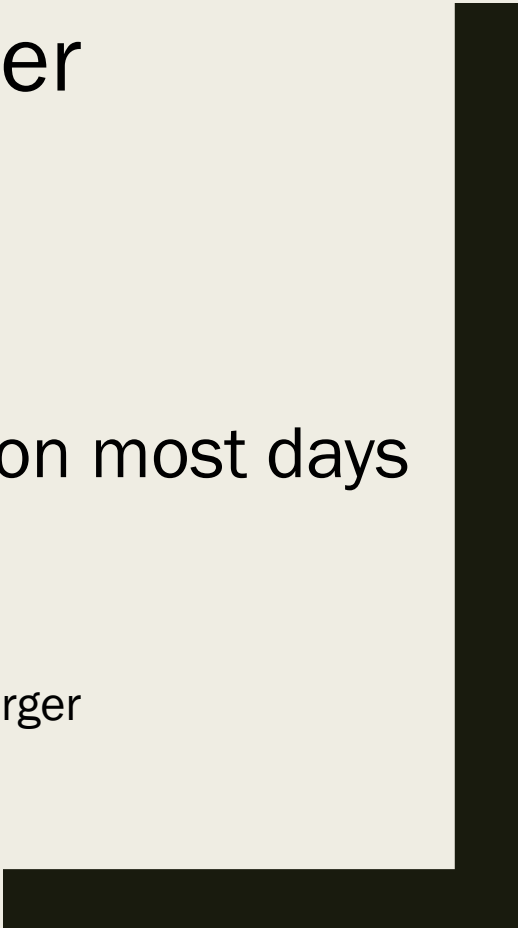
www.inclusion.com


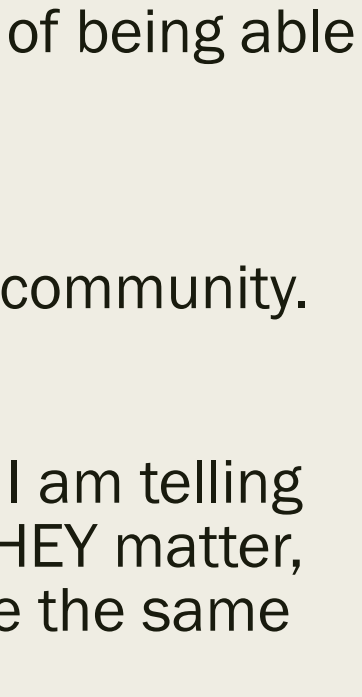


Inviting support/Asking for help is our superpower

“To hell with bootstraps,
for surely we need to swoop in on most days
and save each other.”

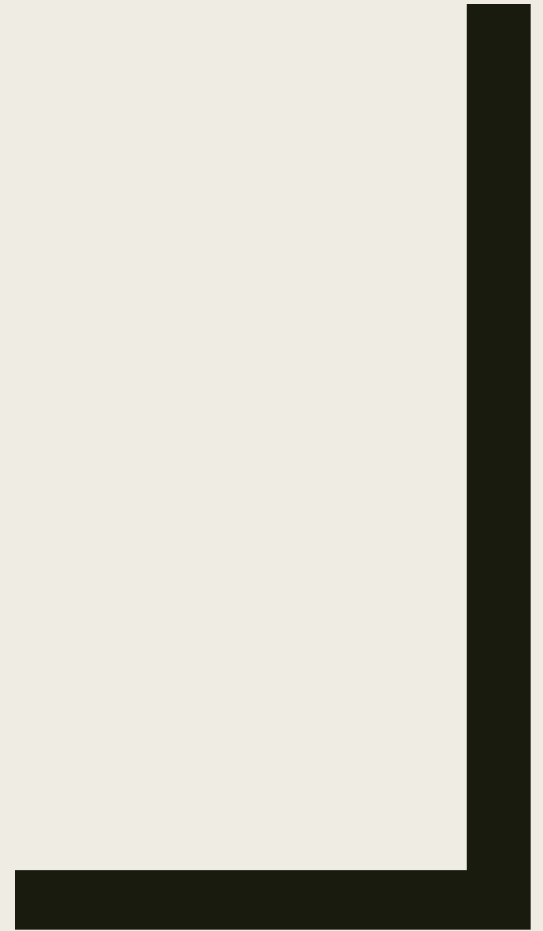
~L.R. Berger

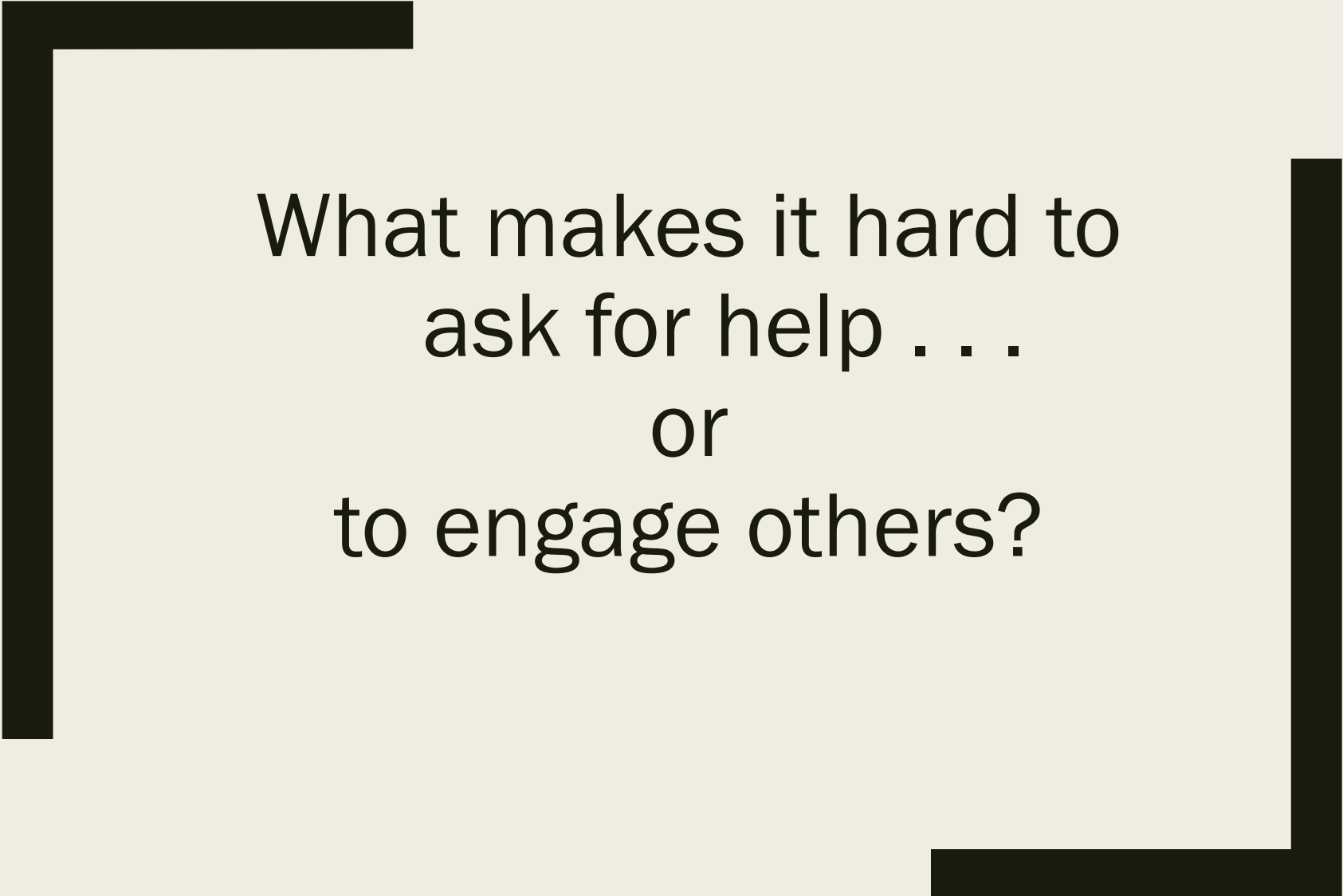


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- What I have learned is the brilliance of being able to ask for help.
 - Asking for help = builds connection/community.
 - When I invite support from others -- I am telling others that THEY are needed, that THEY matter, and that my community would not be the same without them.



A story . . .





What makes it hard to
ask for help . . .
or
to engage others?

Today's Agenda

Micah's Circles Over the 30 Years



Why Circles Matter

The 7 "I"s of Circles (Principles)

Ways to cultivate, create and maintain
Circles

A little bit about Micah's journey!

More and more labels

Mentally retarded
Cognitive impaired

Neurological disorder
Seizure disorder
Anxiety disorder
Heart aneurysm....

Political junkie!



Micah in first grade



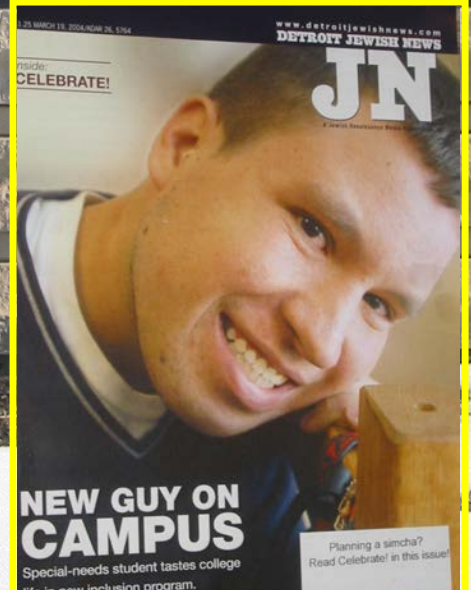
"I wanna go in
the same door
as my friends."

Micah's Circle –
3rd Grade



Micah's Circle – High School











Micah's Circle in Syracuse



Watch the documentary:
Intelligent Lives on Amazon Prime

Why circles matter to Micah?

“I always tell parents who have young kids with disabilities, “Start a Circle of Friends.” I tell my adult friends with disabilities, “Start a Circle of Friends.”

In my Circle, we laugh a lot, eat pizza, and talk about things that I want to talk about. Sometimes they help me think about things that I haven't thought about.



Judith Snow

My Circle is one of the best things I have in my life.



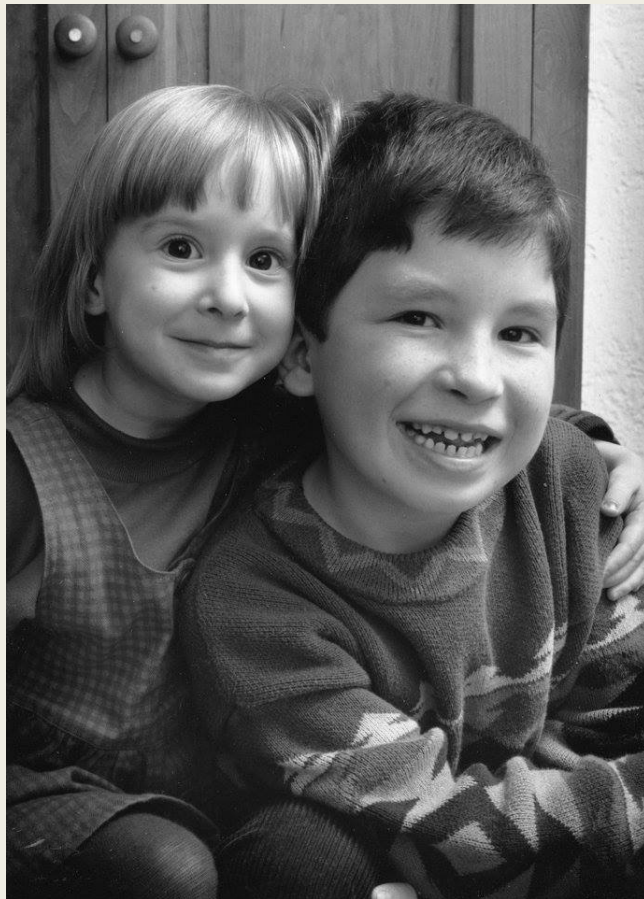
My Circle of Friends started when I was in third grade. I'm now 39 years old. **I still have a Circle of Support.**

When I want to do new things, have fun, or need help or a ride, or want to try skiing, or yoga, or just want to hang out with my friends, **I know my Circle is there to plan with me or support me.**

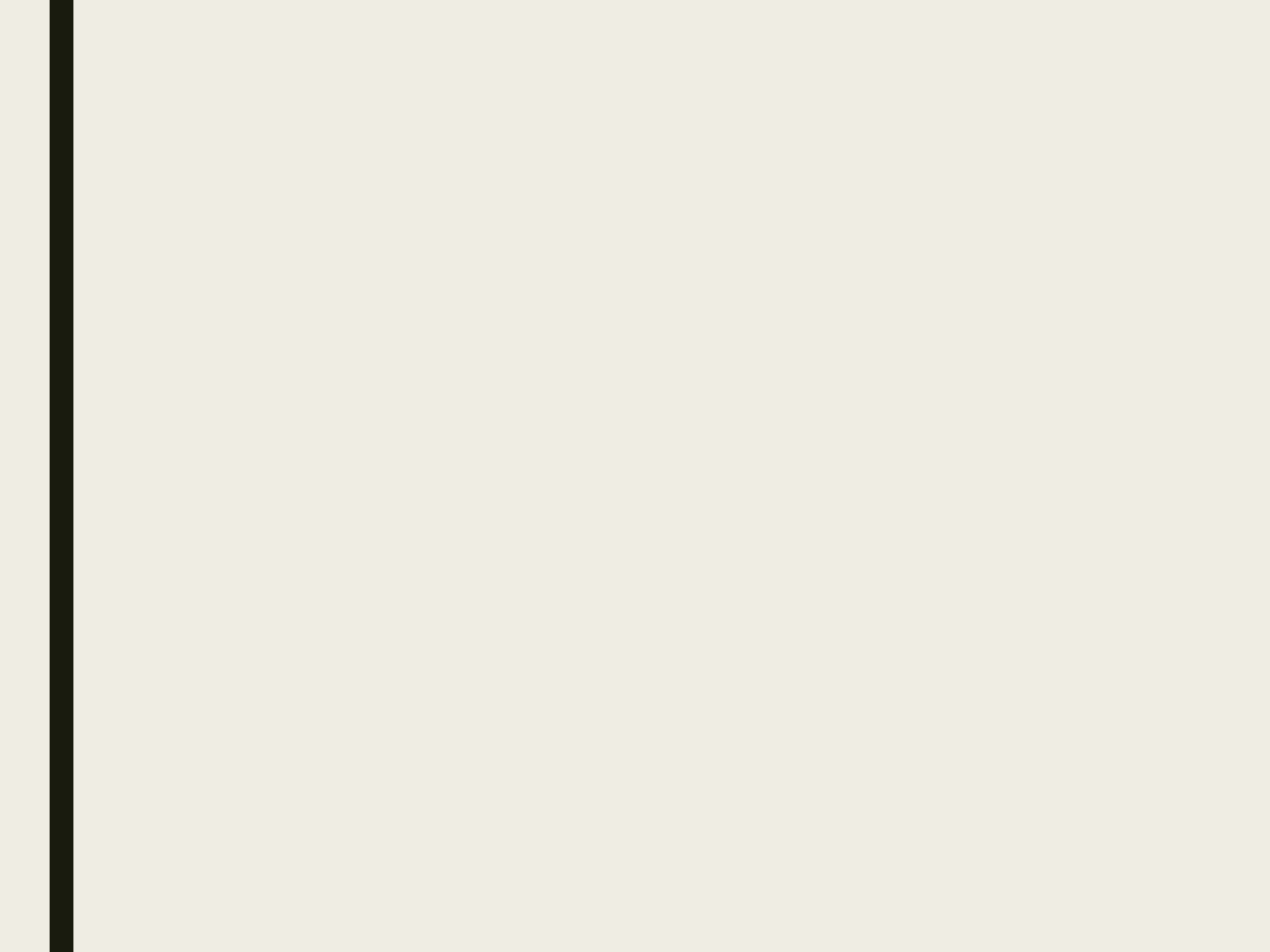
Sometimes I have **to make important decisions**, like choosing a new roommate or thinking about my future goals. I'm more confident because I know I can talk it over with my Circle.

A couple of years ago, I wanted to start dating. I was excited and kind of scared. I talked it over with my Circle. They helped me do "practice dating." I got less scared and started dating.

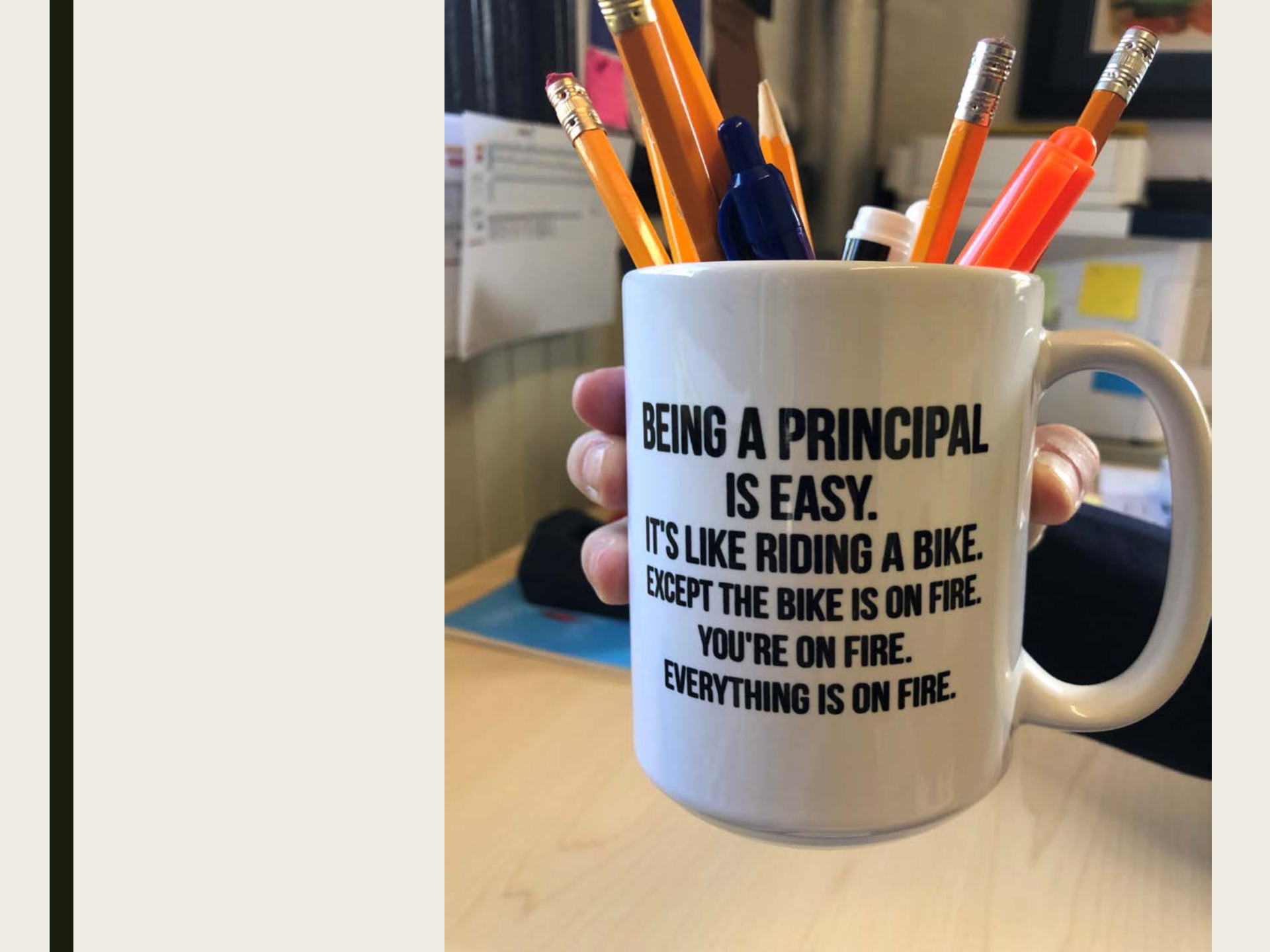
Why circles matter to siblings?



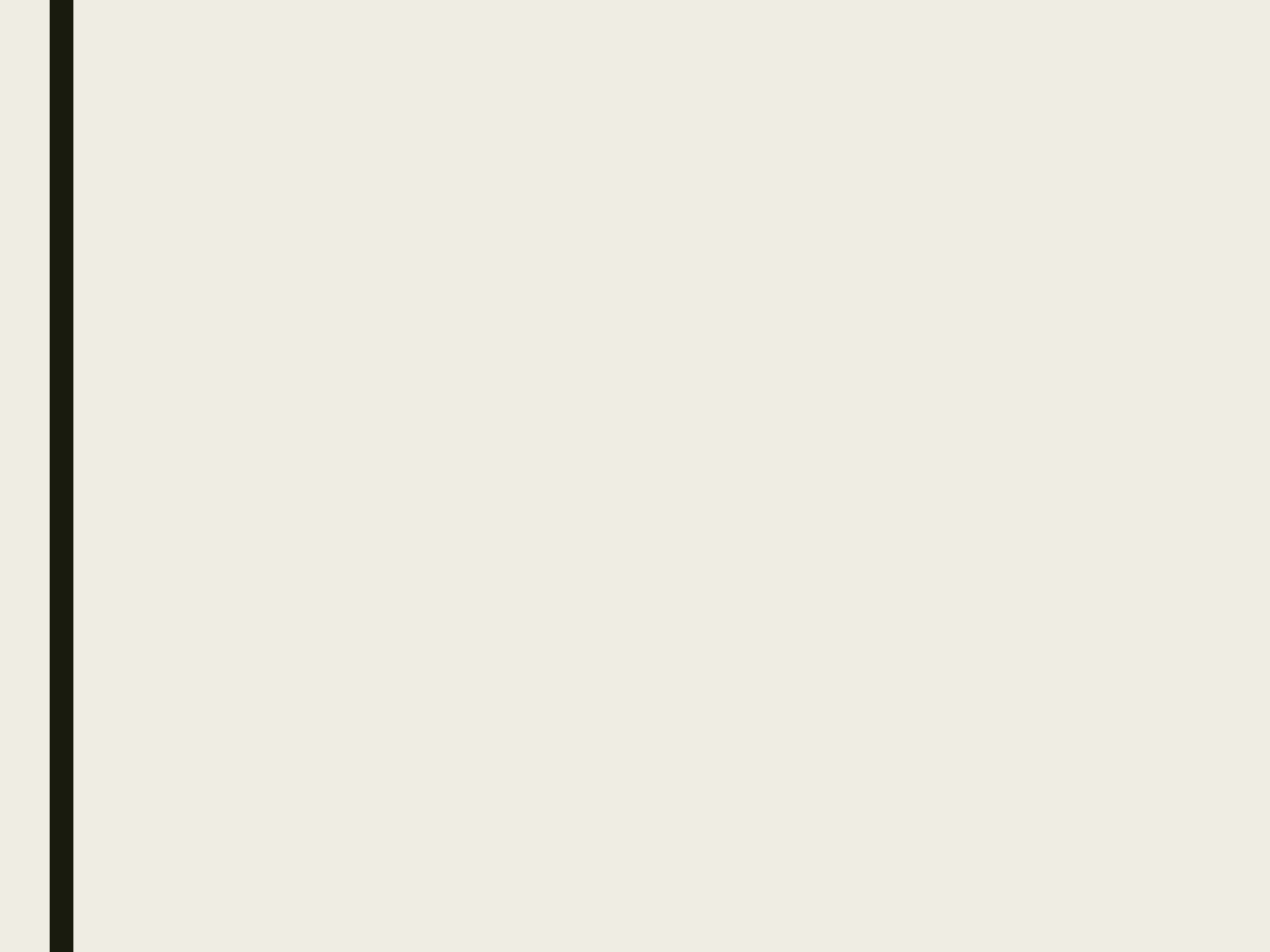
I am not alone





A white ceramic mug is held by a hand, filled with several orange pencils and a blue pen. The mug has a humorous message printed on it in bold black text. The background is a blurred office desk with papers and a computer mouse.

**BEING A PRINCIPAL
IS EASY.
IT'S LIKE RIDING A BIKE.
EXCEPT THE BIKE IS ON FIRE.
YOU'RE ON FIRE.
EVERYTHING IS ON FIRE.**





Why circles matter to parents/caregivers?

Protector

Guide



It's not about letting go . . .

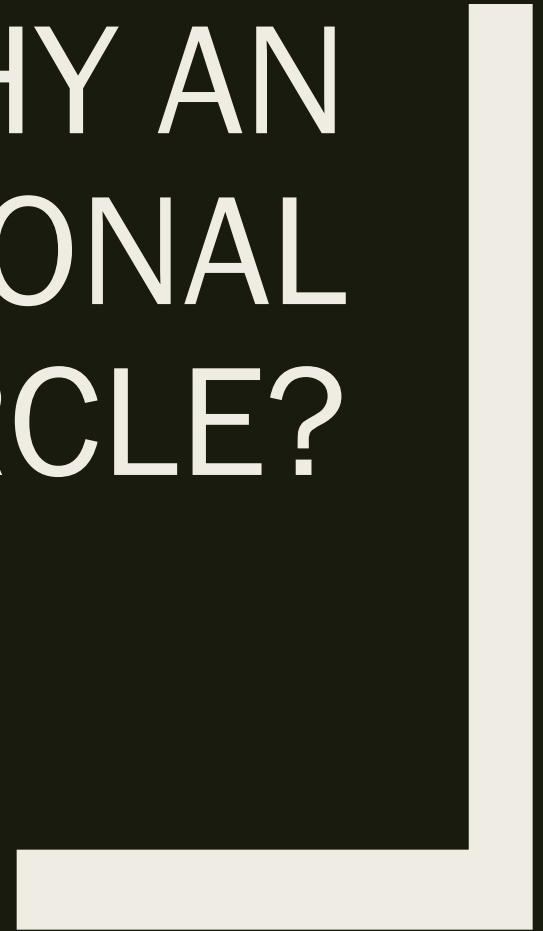


**It's about
learning how to
hold on
differently.**

Supported
Decision
Making



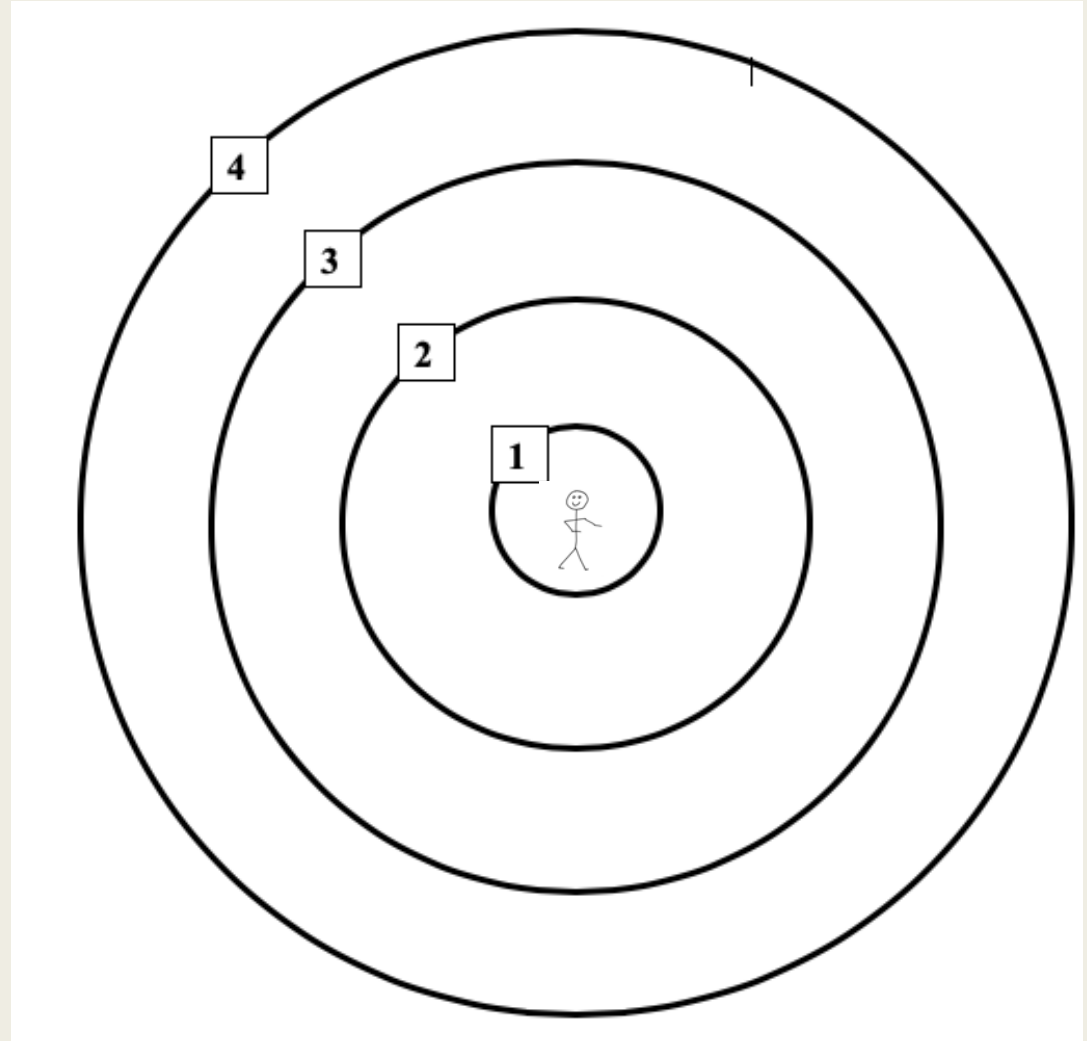
WHY AN INTENTIONAL CIRCLE?



People In Our Lives

Circles of Participation

1. Intimacy (parent, sibling, caregiver)
2. Friendship (friends & family)
3. Participation (organizations, networks, clubs, colleagues)
4. Exchange (teacher, doctor, OT, PT, barber, etc)



Why INTENTIONAL Circles?

1. Intimacy

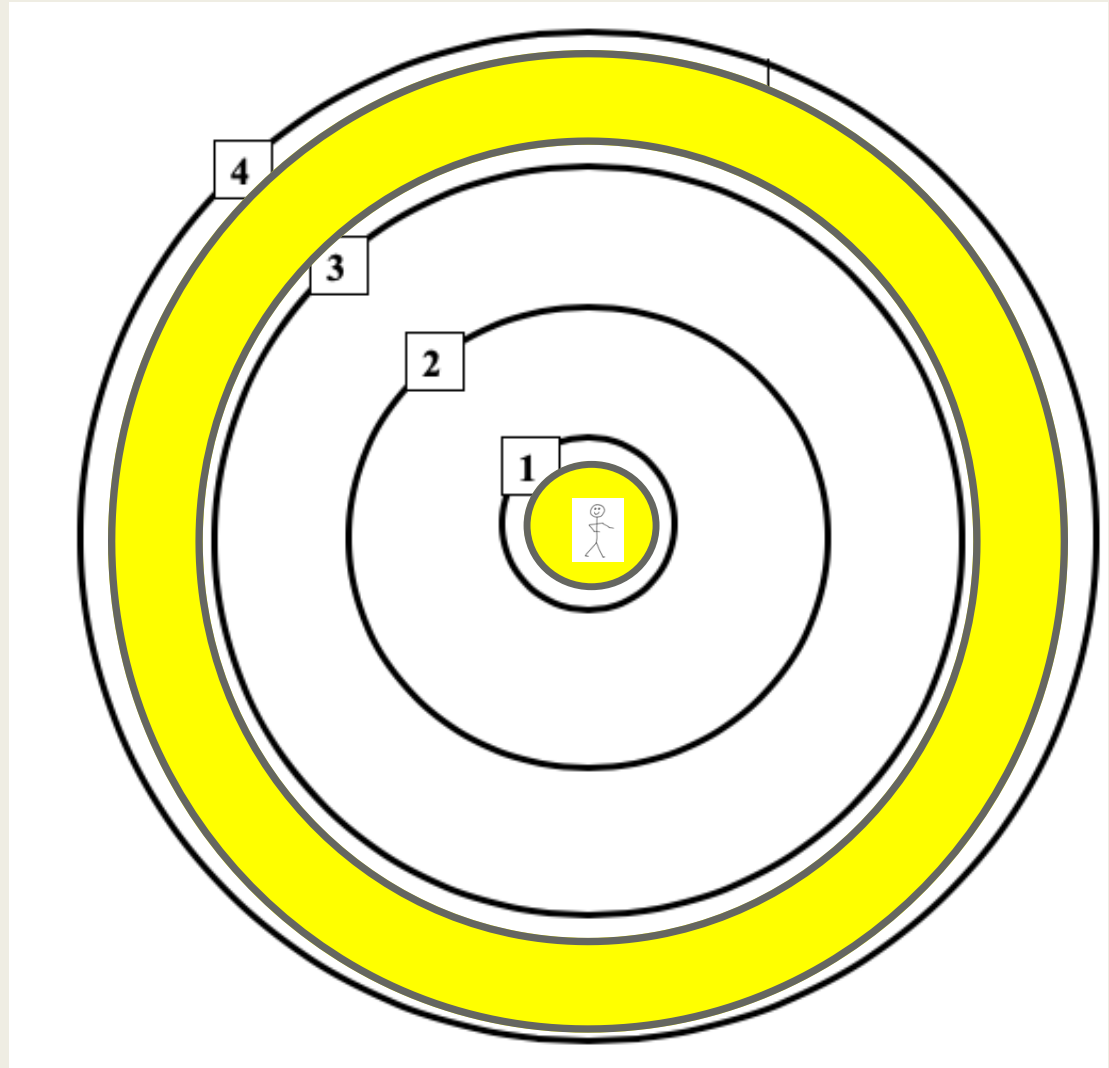
(sister, mother, caregiver)

2. Friendship (friends & family)

3. Participation (organizations, networks, colleagues)

4. Exchange

(teacher, doctor, OT, PT, barber, trainer, dance teacher)



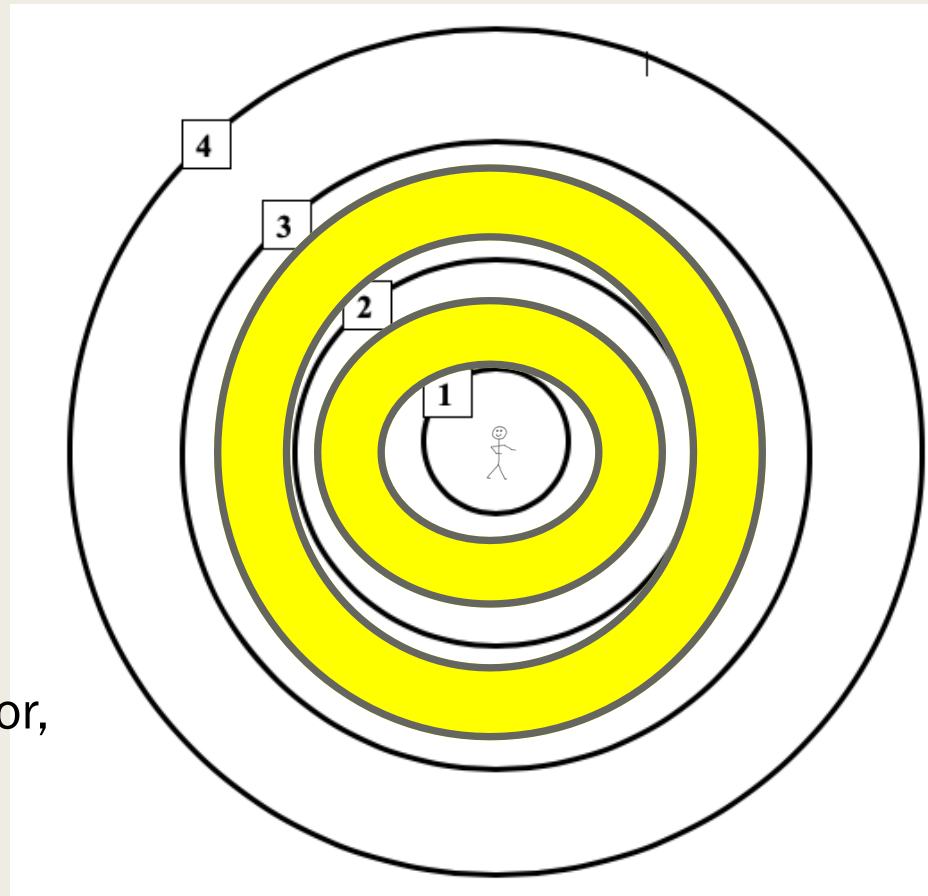
How do we intentionally build the friendship and participation circles?

1. Intimacy (sister, mother, caregiver)

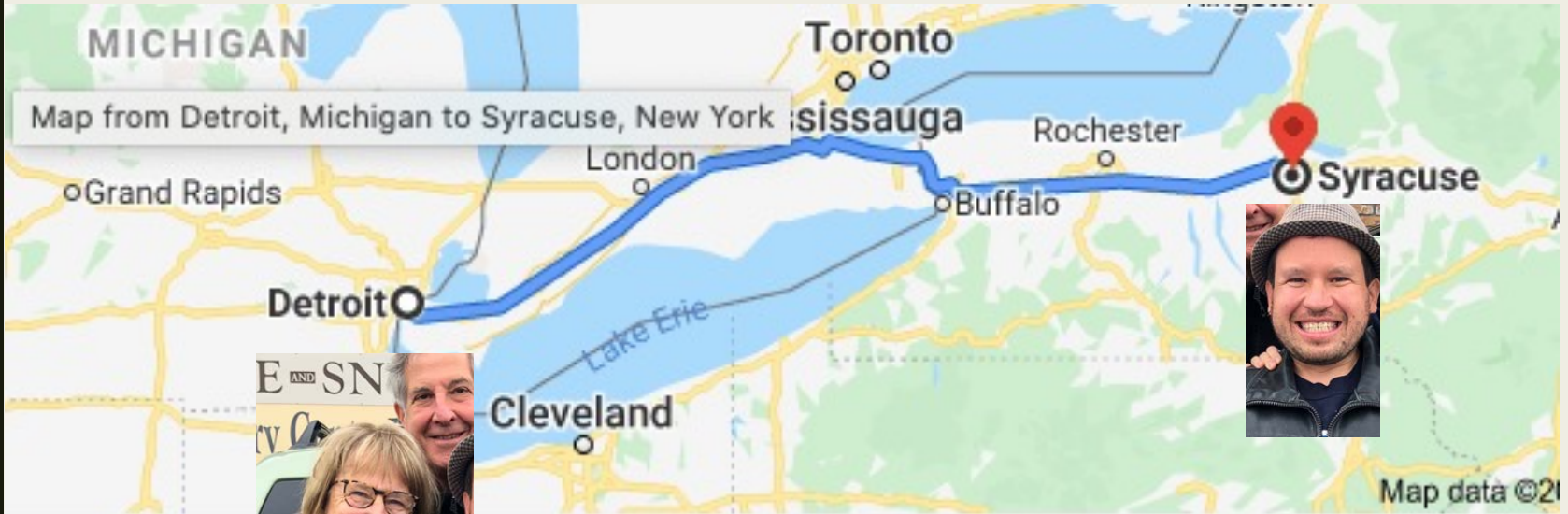
2. Friendship

3. Participation
(community members)

4. Exchange (teacher, doctor, OT, PT, case manager)



A story of strengthening Circle Connections



6 h 20 min (400.9 mi) via ON-401 E and I-90 E

DIRE





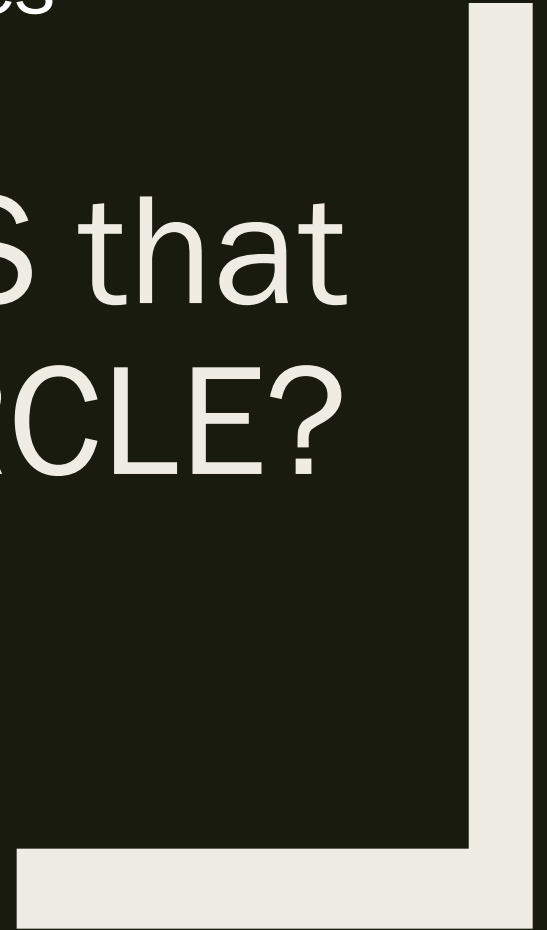
What is a Circle?



Party with a purpose
Not a program

The 7 “I’s” of Circles

The PRINCIPLES that GUIDE A CIRCLE?



The 7 I's to Circles

- Intentional & Invitational
- Individual with disability
and their Interests
- Interdependent & Impact on ALL
- Include a Facilitator



Intentional

Circles are intended to connect people together in fun, meaningful, ongoing ways. Intentionality can result in genuine belonging and friendships.



Invitational



Most people won't come into a Circle if they are not invited.

Who can we invite?

- Credit Union staff
- Bus driver
- Faith-based members
- Restaurant worker
- Sports manager
- Shop keeper (comic store)

Letter from Parent & Teacher of Second Grade Student

Break the silence.
Name the difference.

Describe the Circle.

Name the FIRST
invitation.

Letter from Parent & Teacher of Second Grade Student

I am the mother of Tyler. As you may know, he is a student in your child's class. Because of his unique learning needs, he receives some specialized instruction each day in addition to being in Ms. Emma's class.

Ms. Emma and I are writing to you because we are excited about "Circle of Friends" being used around the country. All children want and need friends. Sometimes children with learning differences or disabilities benefit from having additional support or help to make and maintain friends and peer relations. General education students also often need some assistance in their efforts to connect or interact with their peers who may have learning differences.

Continued....

The “Circle of Friends” group is a friendly and a bit more formal way to support opportunities to hang out, do things together, and engage a classmate who has some disabilities. We have learned from many families that these “circles” have benefited all children, both with and without differences. There are many beautiful stories of growth and discovery for everyone, including families.

We decided to write you so that you are aware of this program. Emma will be talking about this program in the next week or so with the class and inviting children to participate in this weekly lunch group. The lunch group will eventually grow to include out of school events, planned by the children, with support from me and, at times, the families part of the circle.

Sample letter from a parent & a teacher about Circle of Friends

I am the mother of Tyler. As you may know, he is a student in your child's class. Because of his unique learning needs, he receives some special instruction each day in addition to being in Ms. Emma's class.

Ms. Emma and I are writing to you because the "Circle of Friends" program is being used around the country. All children benefit from having additional support or help to make and maintain friends and peer relations. General education students also often need some assistance in their efforts to connect or interact with their peers who may have learning differences.

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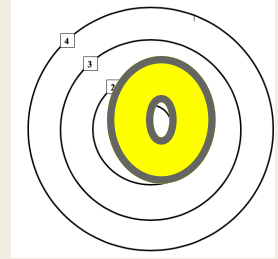
We decided to write you so that you are aware of the program and can participate in this weekly lunch group. The lunch group will include out of school events, planned by the child, with support from me and, at times, the families part of the circle.

**Break the silence.
Name the difference.**

Describe the Circle.

**Name the FIRST
invitation.**

Individual with disability and their Interests



Building a Circle around the interests or growing interests of the person with the disability often results in new opportunities and deeper connections.

The interests can be:

- hobbies,
- talents,
- sports,
- Politics/current events,
- spiritual or religious groups, or
- may be something totally new and unexpected.



Check list of a few ideas. Feel free to check what might work for you.

- ___ going to the movies
- ___ attending concerts
- ___ cooking/planning meals with Micah
- ___ helping with homework
- ___ being a part of his job searches/planning
- ___ exercising/jogging/weight lifting
- ___ helping with his speaking engagements
- ___ computer technology training
- ___ transportation
- ___ arranging for volunteering activities
- ___ organizing his Circle of Support activities
- ___ hanging out
- ___ talking on the phone or emailing Micah
- ___ Political work with the Democratic Party (Micah is clear about his political party!)
- ___ Jewish young adult activities or Synagogue
- ___ sports activities
- ___ not sure what I want to do, but I would like to participate in some way _____

Sample checklist used to invite members of community and honor passions/interests of individual

Your name:

Emails:

Phone:

Interdependent & Impact on ALL

Build a Circle (and grow the Circle) by recognizing the various ways people can contribute.



Include a Facilitator

School staff

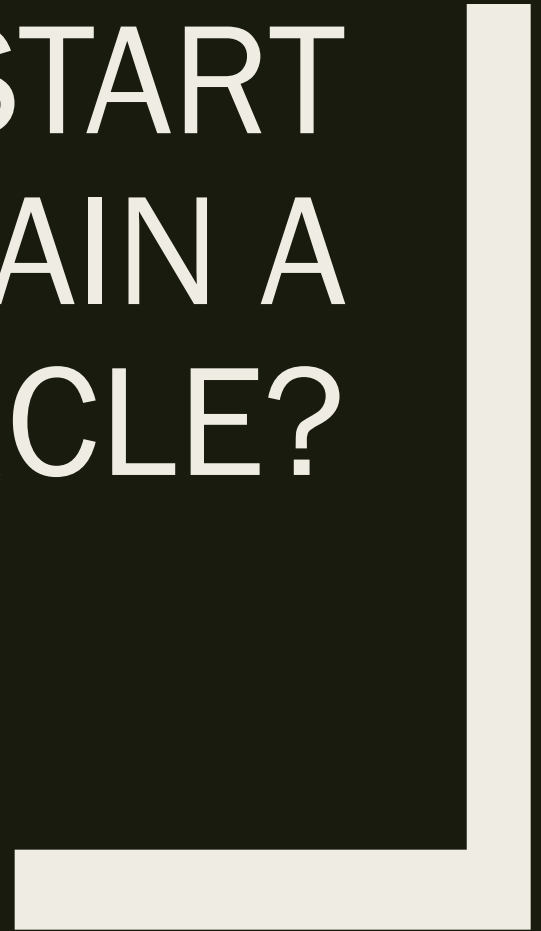
Consultant

Service Coordinator

- Assist with planning
- Keeps focus on person
- Creates comfortable and safe environment
- Ensures participation of all, especially person



HOW DO YOU START AND MAINTAIN A CIRCLE?



Any age (!) is a
great time to start!



Creating & Maintaining Circles

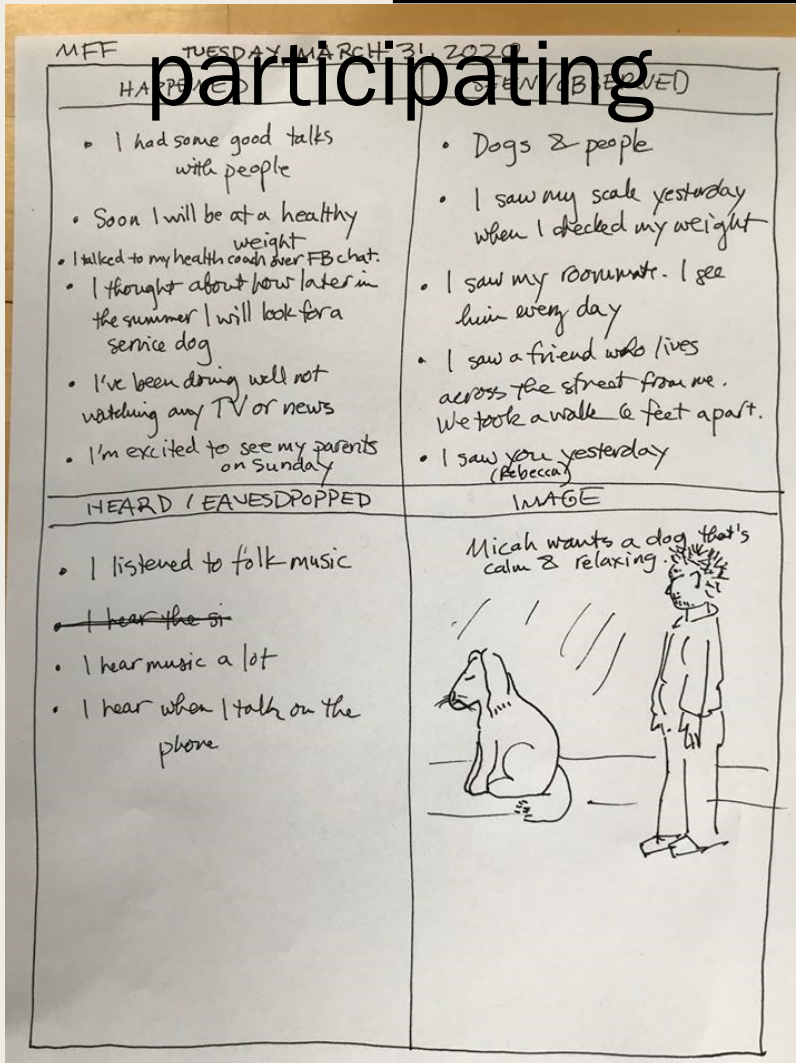
- Seek out someone to talk to/explore
- **Make a list** of potential people
 - *Think outside the box*
- Create invitations, a letter, a text message
- Plan a gathering & host regular check-ins
- Keep focus-person at the center & engaged



Creating & Maintaining Circles

- Value different types of

participating



Yoga class

Driving

6-minute journal

Micah's Circle Meeting

- Intentional: Named Challenge

- *Feeling Lonely*

- *Concerns for the future*

- Invited members of

- Interests of Micah from

- *Dating*

- *Housing*

Outcome:

- Reorganized future meeting time/focus
- Members took greater initiative
- Micah felt heard

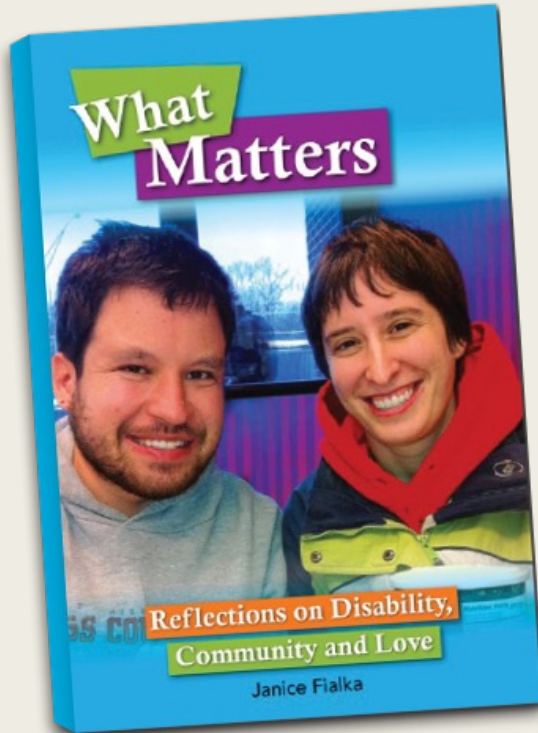


Creating & Maintaining Circles

- Take risks
- Ask for help
- Nudge
- Celebrate
- Reflect



Inclusion Includes Belonging



What Matters: Reflections on
Disability, Community and Love

danceofpartnership.com
throughthesamedoor.com

One hour recorded webinar on Circles by Emma and Janice

[https://thinkcollege.net/events/think-college-
webinar/intentional-inclusion-cultivating-circles-of-support](https://thinkcollege.net/events/think-college-webinar/intentional-inclusion-cultivating-circles-of-support)

- I want to live in a world where help is asked for and given freely, without guilt, pity or scorekeeping. But with a generosity of spirit that comes with the knowledge that we need each other --- that no one of us is really on our own.
- Ask for help without apology but with dignity and grace.