



## Circle of Friends

The 'Circle of Friends' is a structured, peer-support intervention designed to increase inclusion, friendship and positive relationships for a child who is experiencing social and emotional difficulties in school.

A small group of classmates (the 'circle') volunteer to meet regularly with an adult facilitator to think about how they can support the focus child, help them solve problems and improve their friendships in school.

The emphasis is on peer understanding, empathy, shared responsibility and practical support, rather than 'fixing' the child.

### 1. Identify the child that needs support

- *Identify the concerns:* The approach best supports a child who may be isolated, frequently in conflict with other children, anxious, withdrawn or struggling with friendships.
- *Gain consent:* Talk with the child (in an age-appropriate way) and their parents/carers. Explain that the aim is to help them feel more included and supported—not to single them out.

### 2. Plan with key staff

- *Agree the aim of the intervention:* Define clear, positive goals (for example, for the child to feel safer at playtime, to have more friends to play with, to reduce fall-outs at lunch).
- *Choose a facilitator:* Typically a member of staff from the Pastoral Team or a trusted staff member in school.
- *Decide the logistics:* Time, frequency (often weekly), location (quiet, safe space) and duration (for example, six–10 weeks).



### 3. Introduce the idea to the class

- *Whole-class discussion (initially without naming the child):* Talk about friendship, inclusion, feelings and how it feels to be left out or misunderstood.
- *Elicit empathy:* Use scenarios or stories to help pupils think about how they can support someone who is finding school difficult.
- *Introduce the focus child sensitively:* With their consent, explain that someone in the class is having a difficult time and would benefit from extra support from friends.

### 4. Invite volunteers for the circle

- *Unpick the social dynamics of the class:* Consider completing a sociogram as part of the initial assessment of the social dynamic and to aid the development of the Circle of Friends. Ideally, complete the sociogram before Step 3 has been completed so children's responses are not influenced by the conversations around the focus child struggling in school.
- *Ask for volunteers:* Considering the results of the sociogram, invite children to join a small group to help support the focus child. Emphasise it is voluntary and a responsible role.
- *Select a balanced group:* Aim for six–eight pupils who are kind, reliable and represent a mix of peers (not just the 'usual' helpers). Avoid only choosing high-status or very dominant children.
- *Reassure the focus child:* Check they are comfortable with the chosen peers.

### 5. Hold the first Circle of Friends' meeting

- *Set the ground rules:* Considering respectfulness, confidentiality (explaining safeguarding limits) and listening to each other.
- *Share the child's perspective:* With the focus child present (if appropriate), explore what is hard for them in school and what they would like to be different.



- *Build a shared understanding:* Help the group think about the child's strengths as well as the things they find difficult.

*Generate ideas:* Ask the circle to suggest practical ways they can help (for example, inviting them to play, sitting with them, helping them join games, reminding them of rules, kindly).

- *Agree small, specific actions:* Each member chooses one or two things they will try before the next meeting.

## 6. Run regular review meetings

- *Meet weekly or a couple of times a week:* Keep sessions short (20–30 minutes).
- *Review what happened:* What went well? What was tricky? How did the focus child feel?
- *Problem-solve together:* Adjust strategies, add new ideas and celebrate small successes.
- *Reinforce positive roles:* Acknowledge the efforts of circle members and the focus child.

## 7. Monitor progress and wellbeing

- *Track change:* Use simple rating scales, observations or pupil/teacher feedback to monitor friendships, behaviour and emotional wellbeing. Consider repeating the sociogram with the class.
- *Check in with parents/carers:* Share general progress and any positive changes noticed at home or school.
- *Adapt if needed:* If difficulties escalate or new concerns arise, consider additional support (for example, pastoral or therapeutic work).

## 8. Plan for ending and sustainability



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- *Prepare for closure:* When goals are largely met, discuss with the group how and when the formal circle will end.
- *Celebrate success:* Acknowledge everyone's contribution and highlight the skills they have developed (empathy, problem-solving, responsibility).
- *Embed ongoing support:* Encourage the class and staff to maintain inclusive practices so the focus child continues to feel supported, even after the formal meetings stop.