

## Charting Our Circles of Support

Everyone counts on many kinds of support from other people to get through every day. The people we count on and the people we can call on become especially important when trouble comes or when we want to make or respond to an important change in our lives.

Each of our relationships offers us the possibility to exchange emotional support, ideas, information, encouragement, and many kinds of practical help. One sort of relationship is not better than another; we have more possibilities when we have people who are close and share a lot of our lives and people who are farther away and connected to us only by weak ties.

This simple exercise gives us the time to remember the people we count on and the people who count on us. Stopping to remember may remind us of people we want to appreciate, people we want to get back in touch with, and people we can call on for help with something that matters to us.

**Imagine yourself in the center** of the circles on the page above. As you fill in the circles, remember that there are no right or wrong ways. There is only the chance to represent your awareness of who is part of your life.

Some people acknowledge those they have not seen for a long time. Some people acknowledge those who no longer share their physical world. Some people acknowledge four footed beings or winged beings. Some people acknowledge others in more than one circle. Some people notice that some of those they acknowledge don't fit neatly in a single category or in any of the categories in the exercise; if this happens to you, adjust the format to make room for the way you experience the relationship.

1. Think of those closest to your heart; those you can hardly imagine living without. Identify them in the circle closest to you, the circle of **intimacy**.
2. Think of those you count as true friends; those who each hold an important part of your personal story; those you can call on and count on; those who can call on and count on you. Identify them in the circle of **friendship**.
3. Think of those you meet –or have met– because you belong to a particular association, or work in a specific place, or live in a particular neighborhood. You share some time or activity or interest. You might call or be called on for engagement in projects

related to your shared association or interest or for information or for connections to others. Identify them in the circle of **participation**.

4. Think of those you count on because they provide a paid service to you. Identify them in the circle of **economic exchange**.

Look at the display you have made. What is there to be grateful for in this web of relationships? Do any of the connections need the attention of a phone call or an invitation to share a meal? Are any connections strained by bad feeling and in need of reconciliation?

Some people want to build their circles. Two lessons can help.

- Start building from the circle of participation by investing time, attention, and energy among those who share a common interest. Those who aren't sure what interests might connect them to others will need a way to explore. MAPS has proven helpful to people who want to bring their gifts into focus.
- Two, invite people to listen to your dream (read the following article by Judith Snow to understand this idea better.)