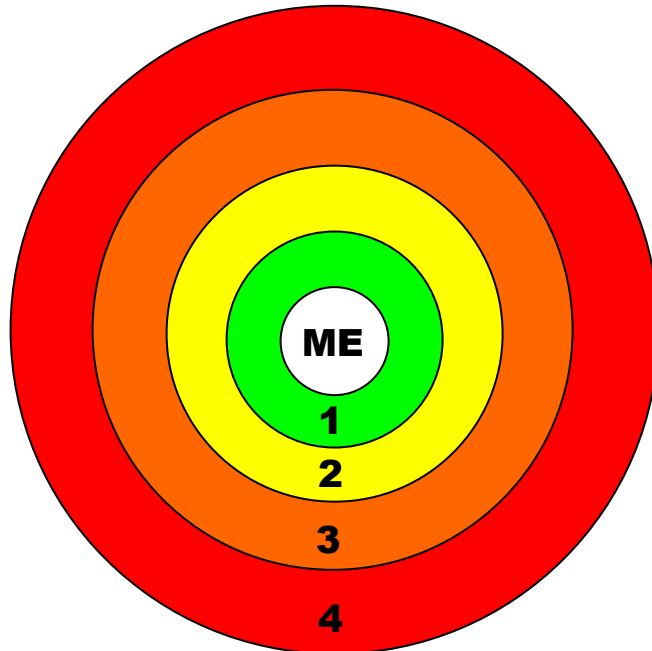


Teaching Sexual Abuse Prevention: Circles and Relationships



A primary concern of parents is to protect their children from sexual abuse. Use the “Circles and Relationships” approach to address this concern.

In preparation for teaching this important safety concept, take a picture of your child and take pictures of the following people in your child’s life:

- Family members and close friends (first circle)
- Casual friends, acquaintances, classmates, and teammates (second circle)
- Doctors, teachers, social workers, police officers, and store clerks where you regularly shop (third circle)
- Strangers (fourth circle)

You can also use pictures obtained online or from magazines for some of the people in the third circle and all of the people in the fourth circle.

On a large sheet of paper, draw 5 circles and write ME in the center circle. Place your child’s picture in the center circle too. Number the other circles 1 – 4 as shown in the diagram above. Coloring in circles 1 – 4 will help to provide a visual cue to the differences between the circles.

This activity will need to be repeated many times, especially in the beginning and any time after your child makes a “touching” mistake.

“Let’s talk about these circles. We’ll start with the ME circle. That’s where you are because you are the most important person in these circles. The circles around ME are for other people in your life. When we talk about these other people and your relationship to them, we’ll think about:

- Who is part of each circle
 - The **kind of feelings** that goes with each relationship
 - The **kind of touch** that goes with each relationship”
-



“The **First Circle** is for **family and close friends**. Who’s in your family? Who are your close friends?”

“What are some of the feelings we have for family and close friends?”

Love, trust, enjoying each other’s company, dependability

“How do we act around family and close friends?”

We share personal thoughts with them.
We share personal feelings with them.
We trust them.
We want to be together with them.
We talk with them when we’re upset.

“How do you touch the people in the first circle?”

Handshakes, hugs, brief hugs, kisses (cheek), hand holding, hand on shoulder

“Even with people in the first circle, all touch must be consensual. This means both people agree to and want the touch – both people say YES.”

“Let’s look at these pictures. Who belongs in the first circle? Let’s put them there.”



“The **Second Circle** is for **casual friends, acquaintances, and groups we are part of** (classmates, teammates). Who are your casual friends and acquaintances? Who are your classmates? Who are your teammates?”

“What are some of the feelings we have for casual friends and groups we are part of?”

Like, trust, enjoying each other’s company, feelings of fun

“How do we act around casual friends and groups we are part of?”

We are friendly with them but we are not friends with them.

We do not share personal information with them.
We do not share personal feelings with them.
We feel comfortable around them but not close to them.

“How do you touch the people in the second circle?”

Handshakes, high fives, fist bumps

“If someone in the second circle doesn’t want to give you a handshake, high five, or fist bump, then don’t do it. Remember, all touch must be consensual. This means both people agree to and want the touch.”

“Let’s look at these remaining pictures. Who belongs in the second circle? Let’s put them there.”

“Can a person in the second circle ever get into the first circle?”

Yes. Our feelings for a person can change as we get to know them better.



“The **Third Circle** is for **helping professionals** (doctors, teachers, social workers, police officers, and store clerks where you regularly shop). Who’s your doctor? Who’s your teacher?”

“What are some of the feelings we have for helping professionals?”

Friendliness, appreciation

“How do we act around helping professionals?”

We are friendly with them but we are not friends with them.
We might share personal information with a doctor, teacher, social worker, or police officer.
We might share personal feelings with a doctor, teacher, or social worker.
We feel comfortable around them but not close to them.
We’re glad we have helpers like doctors, teachers, and police officers.

“How do you touch the people in the third circle?”

Handshakes, waving

“If someone in the third circle doesn’t want to give you a handshake, then don’t do it. Remember, all touch must be consensual. This means both people agree to and want the touch.”

“Let’s look at these remaining pictures. Who belongs in the third circle? Let’s put them there.”

“Can a person in the third circle ever get into the first or second circle?”

Yes. Our feelings for a person can change as we get to know them better. [**Note:** Consider

your child's teachers. You've probably seen a teacher hug your child or put a hand on your child's shoulder. Perhaps you've seen your child hug one of their teachers. And now you may be thinking that you have to put a stop to this. In fact, you shouldn't put a stop to this because nurturing touch tells your child that they are valued. What's happened is that the teacher has moved from the third circle to the first circle. We tell teachers not to hug their students the very first time they meet, but within a few days teachers often jump to the first circle.]



“Let's look at the rest of the pictures. These are the people we do not know – people we have not been introduced to by someone we know and trust. Everywhere we go we see people we do not know. What do we call people we do not know?”

“Yes, strangers. The **Fourth Circle** is for **strangers**.”

“Can you think of some places where you might see strangers?”

On the bus or subway
On the street
In a store

“Some strangers may not make us feel uncomfortable, but it is important that we do not hang around with them anyway. Other strangers will make you feel uncomfortable. When that happens, get away from them very quickly. Has that ever happened to you? Has a stranger ever made you feel really uncomfortable?”

“How do we act around strangers?”

Be polite, but be cautious

“How are strangers different from other people?”

Some are nice and some are not nice. We just don't know.
Some strangers may offer you a ride in their car.
Some strangers may want to buy you things.

“How do you touch the people in the fourth circle?”

Usually there is no touching. When you are introduced to a stranger by someone you know and trust, then you can shake the stranger's hand (but only if you want to).

You don't have to be mean to strangers, unless they make you feel uncomfortable.

“Okay, let's put the remaining pictures in the fourth circle.”

FOR CHILDREN WITH HIGH SUPPORT NEEDS

For some children, it may be necessary to break these steps down into much smaller steps. Each smaller step will then need to be repeated until the information is mastered. For example, you may have to spend more time identifying the people in each circle before you can talk about the different kinds of touch used in each circle. You may also decide to skip the “How do we act?” question for each circle. Here’s one way to break down the steps:

Note: In preparation, you will need to take some additional pictures. Take pictures of your child’s first circle members shaking hands, hugging, kissing on the cheek, holding hands, and with hands on shoulders. Take pictures of your child’s second circle members shaking hands, giving high fives, and giving fist bumps. Take pictures of your child’s third circle members shaking hands and waving. Do not use these pictures until steps 3 and 4 (see below).

1. Using the original set of family member pictures, help your child identify family members. “Save” the family member pictures in the first circle. You do not need to name the circle in any way.
2. Place the family member pictures among the other pictures to see if your child can pick out family members. “Save” the family member pictures in the first circle.
3. Using the new set of family member pictures, help your child identify family members shaking hands, hugging, kissing on the cheek, holding hands, and with hands on shoulders. Be sure to talk about all of these behaviors. “Save” these pictures in the first circle.
4. Place the pictures of family members (both the original set and the new set) among all of the other pictures. See if your child can pick out all family member pictures. “Save” these pictures in the first circle.
5. Once your child can identify all family member pictures, repeat steps 1-4 with the pictures of close friends. Then repeat steps 1-4 for members of the other three circles (one circle at a time). Be sure to “save” the pictures in the correct circles. When you get to the fourth circle (strangers), be sure your child understands that they don’t touch strangers at all.

FOR CHILDREN WHO CAN READ

If your child can read, you may want to use small labels instead of pictures. Use one label per person. Each label can then be taped in the appropriate circle. For people who will be placed in circles 1 and 2, write their name on the label. For people who will be placed in circle 3, write their name and/or profession, depending upon how your child refers to the person. For the strangers who will be placed in circle 4, write a description of the person (for example, woman walking her dog or man sitting in a car).

If your child can read, you may also decide to use both pictures and labels. Think about how your child will best remember the concepts being taught here, and if the pictures will help, then you should still use them.

WHEN YOUR CHILD TOUCHES SOMEONE ELSE

Once your child understands that they get to decide who touches them, you can then use the “Circles and Relationship” approach to show your child why they can’t touch other people without asking.

Suppose you see your child touching an adult or another child who doesn’t want to be touched by your child. Tell your child that everybody is in the middle of their very own set of circles. Draw a small set of circles and put that other person (the one your child touched) in the middle of the circles. Figure out which circle your child belongs in and place a picture of your child (or write their name) in that circle. Then discuss the types of touch that are appropriate for people in that circle. Remind your child that even if they’re in a circle that allows touching, both people have to want the touch. “Just like you have the right to decide who touches you, _____ has the same right to decide who touches them.”

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR TEENS



“Sometimes people ask where a girlfriend or boyfriend belongs. They belong in the ME circle with you. That’s because you may want to touch a girlfriend or boyfriend in ways that you wouldn’t touch people in the other circles.”

“What are some of the feelings we have for girlfriends or boyfriends?”

Like, love, trust, enjoying each other’s company, physical attraction, sexual desire, “butterflies in the stomach”

“How do we act around girlfriends and boyfriends?”

We share personal thoughts with them.
We share personal feelings with them.
We trust them.
We want to be together with them.
We talk with them when we’re upset.
We want to touch them in ways we wouldn’t touch people in the other circles.

“How do you touch girlfriends or boyfriends?”

Sitting close, holding hands, kissing, hugging, sexual touch of different kinds

“But remember, all touch must be consensual. This means both people agree to and want the touch. Both people say YES.”

If you’ve got a picture of your child’s girlfriend or boyfriend, put it in the ME circle.

Adapted, in part, from Sexual Education for Adults with Developmental Disabilities, Planned Parenthood of Northern New England and Green Mountain Self-Advocates, 2007.