

**Are We Missing the Obvious?  
Supporting the Parent-Child Relationship**

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## Goal and Objectives

- **Goal**
  - To provide information that will increase observational skills of responsive parent-child interaction while conducting a home visit.
- **Objectives:**
  - To share why the first three years of a child's life are so critical to building a healthy relationship with caregivers.
  - Illustrate how the parent-child attachment can be supported during home visits by using the Circle of Security.

**What Attributes Are We Looking for When We Go Into a Home?**

- Basic needs being met  
shelter, food, transportation, income
- Safe environment  
cleanliness, lead, mold, hazards
- Medical concerns  
diabetes, hypertension, preterm labor

## Other Potential Concerns

- Chronic or toxic stress
- Violence – domestic or environmental
- Inadequate supports and resources
- Past trauma
- Substance use
- Mental illness
- Household with many people living there

**Is There a Basic Need We Overlook?**

- We are "hard-wired" to need to be in secure relationships
- Development depends heavily upon the child's ability to form a strong relationship with at least one primary caregiver
- Relationships support the flourishing or withering of a child

## Bowlby's Attachment Theory

- Attachment is:
  - a psychological connectedness that occurs between humans
  - lasts for a long period of time
  - is what keeps a baby connected to his mother
- Strong attachment to a caregiver provides a necessary sense of security and foundation.
- Without an attached relationship in place, a great deal of developmental energy is expended in the search for stability and security.

## Let's Review How Relationships Develop



## Templates

- The brain creates templates or blue prints of experiences against which all future experiences are matched.
- Set of associations and memories form the child's brain about what to expect from relationships.
- Children carry these templates into all future relational interactions.



## Templates

- Home with attuned, attentive caregivers
  - Template is that relationships are safe, predictable and source of comfort and pleasure

## Templates

- Home with domestic violence or caregiver preoccupied and chaotically neglectful
  - Template is that relationships are unpredictable and source of fear, chaos, pain, and loss

## Experiences

- Things we see, touch, hear, smell and taste
- What you recognize as safe and comfortable has only become so through your experiences
- The same theory applies to feelings of fear or threat

## When Relationships Are in Jeopardy

- Affects pregnancy and unborn child
  - Toxic stress affects developing brain and organs of fetus
  - Baby at risk to be premature and underweight
  - Baby more likely to experience developmental delays and metabolic diseases later in life
  - Baby is born with potential for regulation problems
  - Often results in attachment problems for both

## What Does an Unhealthy Parent-Child Relationship Look Like?

- Mother is depressed
- Parent has flat affect
- Does not respond to baby's needs appropriately
- No "serve and return"
- Interaction with baby is harsh or distant
- Constant fear and threats

## Fear, Uncertainty, and Inconsistent Care

- Affects brain development of the infant and young child
  - Brain undeveloped yet plastic
  - If unfavorable conditions – neurodevelopment is negatively affected
  - Chronic fear response can lead to adaptive changes in emotional, behavioral, and cognitive functioning to promote survival

## Fear, Uncertainty, and Inconsistent Care

- Affects the baby/child's ability to interact with the environment
- Heightened stress and fear response creates maladaptive persistence of fear state
- Impacts the child's ability to self regulate
- Can cause infant/child to be
  - Hypervigilant
  - Hypersensitive
  - Withdrawn

## Hypervigilant Child

- Increased muscle tone
- Wide-eyed expression
- Anxious
- Displays behavioral impulsivity
- Focuses on threat-related cues (usually non-verbal)



## Hypersensitive Child

- Cries a lot
- Inconsolable
- Frequent temper tantrums
- Skill regression
- Unable to comfort or calm self
- Easily distracted or frustrated
- Hyperactive



## Withdrawn Child

- Very "good" baby
- Shut down and tuned out
- Flat affect, no range of emotions
- Rejects/avoids being touched or held
- Does not play with others
- No reciprocal smile response
- Indifferent to others
- Poor eye contact, no tracking



### Clues That the Family May be Experiencing Stress

- Missed appointments
- Parent with mental health or substance use problems
- Parent under influence during visit
- Communal or overcrowded household
- Unsecured weapons in the house
- Instability related to housing, electricity, food

### What Does a Healthy Parent-Child Relationship Look Like?

- Provides a safe and peaceful environment
- Parents talks to the baby with gentle tone of voice
- Touches with soothing hands
- Plays with the baby
- Engages in “serve and return”
- Responds to baby’s needs

### Other Parent-Child Interactions to Observe

- Is there mutual delight in their interaction?
- How do parent and child recover from distressing situations?
- During home visit does the child look to the parent for comfort and reassurance?
- Does the parent respond to distress appropriately?
- Is the parent able to support the child’s emotional needs?

### Other Parent-Child Interactions to Observe

(Continued)

- Is the parent able to read child’s cues and respond appropriately?
- Does mother respond to continuous crying by infant or toddler?
- How does the parent seem to be doing emotionally?
- Does she seem happy with her baby? Overly stressed? Angry?

### Critical or Sensitive Period

- During the first three years of life
  - human brain develops to 90% of adult size
  - majority of systems and structures responsible for all future emotional, behavioral, social and physiological functioning are created
- These are critical periods during which bonding experiences must be present for the brain systems responsible for attachment to develop normally.

### Are Attachment Problems Always a Result of Maltreatment?

- Majority of attachment problems are likely due to parental ignorance about development rather than abuse.
- Many parents have not been educated about the critical nature of the experiences of the first three years of life.
- Individuals with insecure attachment can form and maintain relationships.

## Self Reflection

- What were my own early childhood experiences?
- Have I developed healthy relationships and am I able help others?
- Who do I know in a healthy relationship?
- Who can I talk with to help with my relationships?
- Why am I in the helping profession?

## So What Can We Do?

- Our professional training provides a foundation for what we can do to help
- Reflective supervision/practice
- Awareness of our own “baggage” is important

## Self Reflection

- Ask yourself:
  - Do I see the strengths of this family?
  - What is my role in helping this family?
  - Am I willing to go beyond my traditional role?
  - How do I build a relationship?
  - What tools do I have to help the family?

## How Can a Home Visitor Help Build Better Relationships?

- By using your observation skills
- Sharing with a parent the often unseen but obvious circle
- Showing patience and compassion
- Sharing the concept of the Circle of Security (COS)

## Disclaimer

- Not a Circle of Security training – just a very brief overview
- After attending this webinar you may want to attend a Circle of Security training

## My Testimony

- The concept of Circle of Security changed my professional outlook on working with families
- Helps with compassion fatigue
- Relationships impact your health
- Relationships between home visitors and parents are essential for change in a family

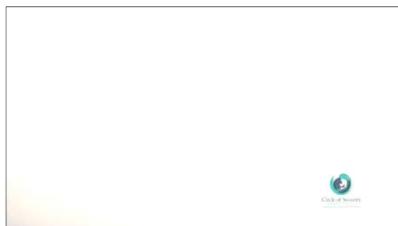
## Introduction to Circle of Security

- Circle of Security Parenting is a relationship-based parenting program developed by Kent Hoffman, Glenn Cooper, and Bert Powell.
- Program is based on:
  - five decades of research about how security is supported (and not supported)
  - key principles regarding specific themes that seem essential for security in relationships

## Circle of Security Clip “Good Enough”



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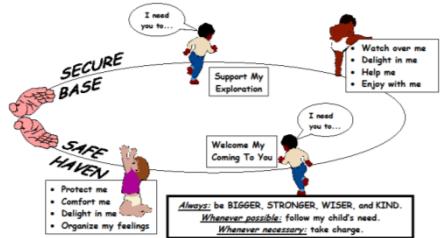
### CIRCLE OF SECURITY® PARENT ATTENDING TO THE CHILD'S NEEDS



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### CIRCLE OF SECURITY

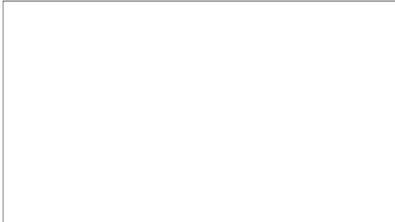
PARENT ATTENDING TO THE CHILD'S NEEDS



## Circle of Security Clip “Be With”

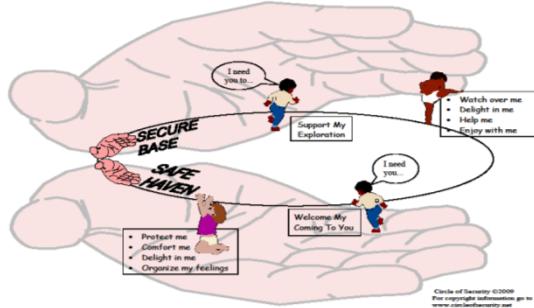


## Circle of Security Clip “Be With”



### CIRCLE OF SECURITY®

PARENT BEING HELD WHILE HOLDING THE CHILD



## Circle of Security Clip “Connections”



## Circle of Security Clip “Connections”



### CIRCLE OF TRUST

How to Help Your Child Feel Safe When Your Own World is Turned Upside Down



Mom and Dad.  
All this chaos feels too big for me. Sometimes I might feel OK, but sometimes I feel scared and scared I might cling or get real quiet or act out of control. At those times I'm telling you I don't know what to do with how I'm feeling.

I need you to:  
• Talk with other adults and let them help you trust in the future.  
• Be in Charge.  
• Be kind.  
• Give me predictable daily routines.  
• Sit down with me often, offer warmth and reassurance, and let me know it's still OK to be afraid.

I'm really trying please help me. I need you because I'm often still scared and confused. You may not realize how much you help me just by being with me.

The Circle of Trust applies to children of all ages. See: [www.circleofsecurity.org](http://www.circleofsecurity.org)  
© 2001 - Gandy, Coopé, Hollingshead, Marin & Powell

## Paradigm Shift for Home Visitor

### Change is difficult

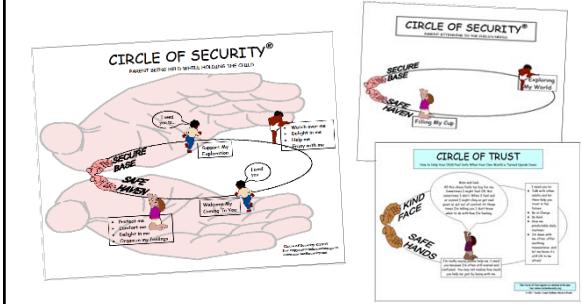
- Changing from being behavior-focused to relationship-based
- Observing relationships in a different way
- Understanding how stress affects relationships
- Understanding how stress affects development
- Developing relationships with parents

## Paradigm Shift for Parents

- Understanding that people parent their children the way they were parented
- Providing parents with healthy ways to communicate
- Teaching parents to understand their emotions
- Encouraging self reflection

## Download the Circle of Security Resources at:

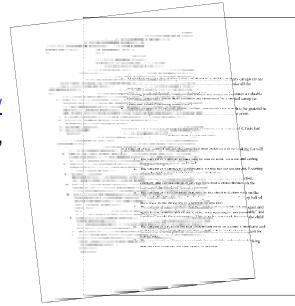
<http://circleofsecurity.net/>



## Circle of Security Resources

### Additional handouts for parents.

1. For more resources go to: <http://circleofsecurity.net/>
2. Near the top find "For Professionals" and choose "Handouts"
3. Then, read and adhere to the stipulations by clicking "I Agree" near the bottom.



## Summary

- We are "hard-wired" for relationships.
- Our past experiences often shape our relationships.
- Our relationships can affect our health.
- Relationships are either healthy or unhealthy.
- There are tools available to help you to develop healthy relationships.

## Summary

- Circle of Security is a relationship-based parenting program.
- The circle has always been in plain site.
- The circle teaches parents to understand their emotions.
- The circle gives parents healthy tools to use to improve their relationships.

## Check it Out!

- A more in depth video about Circle of Security conducted by Dr. Neil Boris, child psychiatrist, will be available in late April.
- Go to [www.cpeip.fsu.edu/mma](http://www.cpeip.fsu.edu/mma) to view.

## Any Questions?

## Resources

- Child Trauma Academy
- The Amazing Human Brain and Human Development
- Attachment Theory John Bowlby
- Circle of Security International Facilitator Manual by Cooper, Hoffman, & Powell