



# The Circle of Security: Roadmap to building supportive relationships

A Research in Practice Series title  
Robyn Dolby

# Contents

1	Introduction
4	Putting the roadmap to work
7	Building emotional links
9	Planning for individual children
24	The Circle of Security and reflective practice
27	Helping children who are difficult to connect with
31	Conclusion
32	References and further reading
33	Acknowledgements
34	Links to the <i>National Quality Standard</i>
35	Links to children's services competencies

# Introduction

## The Circle of Security helps you to look beneath children's behaviour to discover their genuine relationship needs

The Circle of Security protocol (Cooper, Hoffman, Powell & Marvin, 2005) is an evidenced-based early intervention for parents/carers and children. Its core components now also exist in an education program for parents and caregivers (Powell, Cooper, Hoffman & Marvin, 2013) which focus on the relationships that give children emotional support.

Central to the program is the Circle of Security roadmap, which helps parents, educators and other carers to follow children's relationship needs and understand how to become more attuned to their emotional communications. Part of the 'curriculum of feelings' in an early childhood context is to give children the opportunity to grow in an environment where feelings can be expressed and are accepted and responded to in a relaxed manner.

## Early childhood practitioners and the Circle of Security

The Circle of Security is a way of thinking about children that enables carers and educators to look beyond a child's immediate behaviour and think about how to meet their relationship needs. This approach fits well with early childhood education and care practice in which the quality of the relationships you make with children, the way you support their relationships with peers, and the partnerships you develop with their families are crucial.

The Circle of Security helps you observe the different ways that children seek your support and make use of your help. It assists you in understanding children—even when their behaviour is causing distress to you and their peers—and in planning how to meet their needs. The Circle of Security helps you to look beneath children's behaviour to discover their genuine relationship needs.



The Circle of Security encourages educators to take a behavioural translation approach to understand children's behaviour.

## The Circle of Security roadmap

The Circle of Security roadmap draws a very clear link between attachment and learning and applies to children of all ages. The below diagram shows a circle held between two hands. One hand supports the top half of the circle, showing the secure base of support children need for play and learning. Children's underlying needs for exploration are summarised in the box in the top half:

*'Watch over me'* (to see that I am safe).

*'Delight in me'* (so I can look into your face and see what I look like to you, and find you are happy to be with me).

*'Help me'* (just enough so I can do it by myself).

*'Enjoy with me'* (join my interest).

The hand supporting the bottom half of the circle represents the safe haven children return to for connection when they have had enough of exploring. Their underlying needs in relation to attachment are shown in the box in the bottom half:

*'Protect me'* (because I am feeling scared).

*'Comfort me'* (when I am upset).

*'Delight in me'* (found on both sides of the circle because it is so important for children).

*'[Help me to] Organise my feelings'* (so I can make sense of how I am feeling).

The Circle of Security authors point out that while most educators recognise that children need help in organising their external world (or their behaviour), for many the idea that children need help organising their internal world (or feelings) is a new one.

