Introduction to Connection Circles (CCs)

A connection circle is a visual tool that shows the relationships between variables in a story or complex situation. When using a connection circle consider:

What are the key factors or variables in this story?
What are the cause and effect relationships between the variables?

Instructions:
1. Use a template or draw a circle on a piece of paper.
2. Choose elements from the story or situation that meet these criteria:
   • They are important to the changes in the story.
   • They are nouns or noun phrases.
   • They increase or decrease in the story.
3. Write your elements around the circle. (Select no more than 5–10)
4. Look for causality. Find elements that cause another element to increase or decrease.
   • Draw an arrow through the circle from the cause to the effect.
   • The causal connection must be direct.
   • Label the arrowhead with a “+” or a “-”
      A “+” (plus sign) indicates that a change in the first factor becoming greater or less causes the second element to change in the same direction.
      A “-” (minus sign) indicates that a change in the first element causes the second element to change in the opposite direction.
      You can use different colored pencils to indicate “+” vs. “-”.
5. Find all possible causal connections. Some links may be based on actual data, and some may be simply a hypothesis. Try to draw at least one causal arrow into and out of each element.

In connection circles, you can trace closed loops of cause and effect, also called feedback loops or causal loop diagrams.

See more about using Connection Circles at www.clexchange.org/gettingstarted/connectioncircles.asp

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Connection Circle Template with Guidelines

1. Draw a large circle and list 5-10 important elements (that can increase and decrease) around the circle.

2. Identify an element that causes another element to increase or decrease.

3. Draw an arrow through the circle from the cause to the effect. Make sure that the causal connection is a direct one.

4. Identify polarity (+ or –) of link and label at the arrowhead.

5. Continue to identify elements with causal connections.

6. Identify feedback loops and tell emerging “stories.”