

## GUIDEBOOK

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# Circle of Security (Group)

Review: [Foundations for Life](#), July 2016

**Circle of Security (COS) was developed to increase attachment security among socially disadvantaged children between the ages of one and five.**

It is delivered by masters-qualified (or higher) psychologists to groups of six parents who attend 20 90-minute group sessions. The sessions make use of an individualised treatment plan developed for each parent-child dyad on the basis of their interaction during Ainsworth's Strange Situation (or the MacArthur Preschool Strange Situation) and the mother's responses to the Circle of Security Interview (COSI). These assessments are used to identify a 'linchpin' issue (ie a set of problematic attachment behaviours), and strategies are developed to help parents reflect on their behaviours through the use of video-feedback guidance used in the 20 group sessions.

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Evidence  
rating: 2

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Cost rating: 2

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## EIF Programme Assessment

Circle of Security (Group) has **preliminary evidence** of improving a child outcome, but we cannot be confident that the programme caused the improvement.

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Evidence  
rating: **2**

### What does the evidence rating mean?

**Level 2** indicates that the programme has evidence of improving a child outcome from a study involving at least 20 participants, representing 60% of the sample, using validated instruments.

This programme does not receive a rating of 3 as its best evidence is not from a rigorously conducted RCT or QED evaluation.

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## Cost rating

A rating of 2 indicates that a programme has a medium-low cost to set up and deliver, compared with other interventions reviewed by EIF. This is equivalent to an estimated unit cost of £100–£499.

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Cost rating: **2**

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## Child outcomes

According to the best available evidence for this programme's impact, it can achieve the following positive outcomes for children:

**Supporting children's mental health and wellbeing**

Increased attachment security - based on **study 1**

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## Key programme characteristics

### Who is it for?

The best available evidence for this programme relates to the following age-groups:

- Toddlers
- Preschool

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### How is it delivered?

The best available evidence for this programme relates to implementation through these delivery models:

- Group

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### Where is it delivered?

The best available evidence for this programme relates to its implementation in these settings:

- Children's centre or early-years setting
- In-patient health setting
- Out-patient health setting

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### How is it targeted?

The best available evidence for this programme relates to its implementation as:

- Targeted selective

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*Note: There is a distinct home-visiting version of Circle of Security; this Guidebook entry, and the evidence described here, applies only to the Group version.*



## Where has it been implemented?

Australia, Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Romania, United States

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## UK provision

This programme has not been implemented in the UK.

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## UK evaluation

This programme's best evidence does not include evaluation conducted in the UK.

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## About the programme

### What happens during delivery?

#### How is it delivered?

- Circle of Security (Group) is delivered by a mental health professional (QCF-7/8) to groups of six families.
- Circle of Security (Group) is delivered over 20 sessions, of 1.5 hours' duration each.

#### What happens during the intervention?

- The sessions make use of an individualised treatment plan developed for each parent-child dyad on the basis of their interaction during Ainsworth's Strange Situation (or the MacArthur Preschool Strange Situation) and the mother's responses to the Circle of Security Interview (COSI).
- These assessments are used to identify a 'linchpin' issue (ie a set of problematic attachment behaviours), and strategies are developed to help parents reflect on their behaviours through the use of video-feedback guidance used in the 20 group sessions.
- The first two sessions provide parents with an overview of attachment theory and children's basic attachment and exploration needs.
- The following 18 sessions are devoted to each of the six parent/child dyads, with each caregiver being the focus of three sessions. These sessions make use of videotaped segments of each parent interacting individually with their child, which are used to facilitate dialogue between the parents.

### What are the implementation requirements?

#### Who can deliver it?

- The practitioner who delivers this programme is a mental-health professional with QCF-7/8 level qualifications.

## What are the training requirements?

- The practitioner has 70 hours of programme training. Booster training of practitioners is not required.

## How are the practitioners supervised?

- It is recommended that practitioners are supervised by one programme developer supervisor (qualified to QCF-7/8 level).

## What are the systems for maintaining fidelity?

- Training manual
- Other printed material
- Face-to-face training
- Supervision
- Accreditation or certification process

## Is there a licensing requirement?

*Not available*

## How does it work? (Theory of Change)

### How does it work?

- Circle of Security (Group) is based on the assumption that the quality of the attachment relationship between caregiver and child in the first years of life is central to a child's later functioning.
- Positive and sensitive parent/child interactions increase the likelihood of a secure parent/infant attachment relationship.
- Parents experiencing multiple hardships and/or an insecure attachment relationship in their own childhood are less likely to develop positive representations of their infant, reducing their ability to develop a secure attachment relationship.
- Parents are supported to form positive representations of their infant and provide an appropriately nurturing and sensitive caregiving environment.
- In the short term, parents develop positive representations of their infant, their sensitivity increases and the infant is more likely to develop a secure attachment.
- In the longer term, children will develop positive expectations of themselves and others, demonstrate improved mental health and be at a reduced risk of child maltreatment.

### Intended outcomes

Supporting children's mental health and wellbeing Preventing child maltreatment

### Contact details

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The Centre

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## About the evidence

Circle of Security's most rigorous evidence comes from a pre-post study, which was conducted in the USA.

### Study 1

**Citation:** Hoffman et al (2006) | **Design:** Pre-post

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**Country:** United States

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**Sample:** 75 Head Start mothers with a preschool-aged child

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**Child outcomes:**

Increased attachment security

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**Other outcomes:**

None measured

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Hoffman, K.T., Marvin, R.W., Cooper, G., & Powell, B. (2006). Changing toddlers' and preschoolers' attachment classifications: The Circle of Security Intervention. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 74*, 1017-1029.

Available at <http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/ccp/74/6/1017/>

## Other studies

The following studies were identified for this programme but did not count towards the programme's overall evidence rating. A programme receives the same rating as its most robust study or studies.

Cassidy, J., Ziv, Y., Stupica, B., Sherman, L.J., Butler, H., Karfgin, A., Cooper, G., Hoffman, K.T. & Powell, B.H. (2010). Enhancing attachment security in the infants of women in a jail-diversion program. *Attachment and Human Development, 12*, 333-353.

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## Guidebook

The EIF Guidebook provides information about early intervention programmes that have at least preliminary evidence of achieving positive outcomes for children. It provides information based on EIF's assessment of the strength of evidence for a programme's effectiveness, and on detail about programmes shared with us by those who design, run and deliver them.

The Guidebook serves an important starting point for commissioners to find out more about effective early interventions, and for programme providers to find out more about what good evidence of impact looks like and how it can be captured. As just one of our key resources for commissioners and practitioners, the Guidebook is an essential part of EIF's work to support the development of and investment in effective early intervention programmes.

Our assessment of the evidence for a programme's effectiveness can inform and support certain parts of a commissioning decision, but it is not a substitute for professional judgment. Evidence about what has worked in the past offers no guarantee that an approach will work in all circumstances. Crucially, the Guidebook is not a market comparison website: ratings and other information should not be interpreted as a specific recommendation, kite mark or endorsement for any programme.

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[How to read the Guidebook](#)

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[EIF evidence standards](#)

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[About the EIF Guidebook](#)

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## EIF

The Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) is an independent charity and a member of the What Works network. We support the use of effective early intervention for children, young people and their families: identifying signals of risk, and responding with effective interventions to improve outcomes, reduce hardship and save the public money in the long term.

We work by generating evidence and knowledge of what works in our field, putting this information in the hands of commissioners, practitioners and policymakers, and supporting the adoption of the evidence in local areas and relevant sectors.

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[www.EIF.org.uk](http://www.EIF.org.uk) | [@TheEIFoundation](https://twitter.com/TheEIFoundation)

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