

Circle of Security (Group)

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

Note on provider involvement: This provider has agreed to EIF's terms of reference, and the assessment has been conducted and published with the full cooperation of the programme provider.

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.

Evidence
rating: 2

Cost rating: 2

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.

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.

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.

Cost rating: **2**

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

Key programme characteristics

Who is it for?

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

- Toddlers
- Preschool

How is it delivered?

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

- Group

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

The programme may also be delivered 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

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

UK provision

This programme has not been implemented in the UK.

UK evaluation

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

Spotlight sets

EIF does not currently include this programme within any Spotlight set.

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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

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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

Country: United States

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

Timing: Post-test

Child outcomes:

- Increased attachment security

Other outcomes:

- None measured

Study rating: 2

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/>

Study design and sample

The first study is a pre-post study.

The study was a pre-post only study. Outcomes were assessed before the intervention was delivered and 10 days after the 20-week intervention was delivered. This study was conducted in the US, with a sample of mother and preschool child (average age 32 months) dyads participating in either a Head Start or Early Head Start programme in the US.

Measures

Child attachment was measured using the Ainsworth Strange Situation (expert observation of behaviour) for children younger than 24 months of age. For children between 24 and 60 months, child attachment was measured using the MacArthur Preschool Strange Situation (expert observation of behaviour)

Findings

This study identified statistically significant positive impact on one child outcome.

This includes:

- Increased attachment security

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 - **This reference refers to a quasi-experimental design, conducted in the USA.**

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.

[How to read the Guidebook](#)

[EIF evidence standards](#)

[About the EIF Guidebook](#)

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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