

stepping back: transitioning when people leave the circle

There will come a time in some Circles of Support when a primary supporter or Circle member will make a conscious decision to stop attending Circle of Support meetings. This may be due to unforeseen circumstances or part of a long term strategy.

To guarantee the longevity of the Circle, you need to consider the impact the withdrawal will have on the Circle and how the Circle is currently functioning. If the Circle of Support is unable to support the person without a parent or primary supporter, it may not be time to stop contributing to the Circle. In order for the Circle to continue without the primary supporter, it is imperative that all member of the Circle feel the Circle of Support:

- Adopts and upholds the guiding principles.
- Works collaboratively.
- Meets with the person on a regular basis and respects the relationship each member has with the person.
- Maintains an environment where the person feels comfortable to express their feelings.
- Continues to achieve goals for and with the person.

transition planning

Planning the withdrawal of a primary supporter or Circle member is necessary to achieve a sustainable Circle. These steps should be used as a guide to assist everyone through the transition.

1 consult the focus person

- The member withdrawing should discuss it with the Circle.
- Ask the person how they feel about their Circle. Ensure that they feel supported.
- Discuss the transition plan and what the Circle will be like after the Circle member has withdrawn.

2 give warning

- Announce the withdrawal well in advance.
- Set a date to stop attending meetings.
- Share as much knowledge as the Circle needs in order to fully support the person.
- Gradually decrease involvement in action items, contribution and meeting attendance.

3 find a replacement

- Consult with the person regarding who they would like in their Circle.
- Follow the process of finding and inviting Circle members
- Encourage prospective Circle members to attend a meeting or Circle event.

4 handover

- Invite the new Circle member and have them attend meetings.
- Guide the new Circle member in the functions of the Circle.
- Handover any notes or necessary information that will assist the person in their role.

5 keep in touch

It is advisable that a primary supporter continue to contribute to the Circle after withdrawal, though in less direct ways. Creating an efficient communication strategy will support and sustain autonomy of the Circle to accomplish its functions. The communication strategy should consider the following:

- **Communication method:** Create an efficient method of communication, e.g, emails, phone, calendars etc..
- **Select relevant items of discussion:** Acknowledge that the Circle will in course have different items of discussion without the parents or family present. Be aware of the person's privacy and allow the Circle to be selective about what is communicated.
- **Receiving minutes and communication:** Keep up to date through minutes and email communication. Contribute information when requested or when it is necessary.
- **Update conversations:** Arrange to have one person in the Circle update the family or primary supporter over the phone or by email after each meeting.