Becoming an Circle Ally

“No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship.”
- Dr. James Comer

Circle Allies are part of a team of friends and advocates who gather regularly to support a Circle Leader as he or she works toward achieving long-term economic self-sufficiency.

Allies become more informed about the causes and solutions to poverty, and build meaningful friendships across socio-economic lines.

Building a Circle

Steps that precede a Circle Match:

- The Circle Leader completes a 15-week Getting Ahead curriculum, Circles Orientation, and establishes financial and social support goals they want to accomplish as part of Circles.
- Circle Leader completes application and is selected to join Circles.
- Allies must complete Allies 101, a survey/application identifying interests, and Bridges Out of Poverty training.
- New Circle Leaders and Allies start attending weekly Community Meetings.
- Matches are made between Circle Leader and 2-4 Allies; the Circle starts meeting monthly.

Your Job as an Ally

- Befriend your Circle Leader. Learn about your Circle Leader’s goals and ask how you can be of help.
- Invest 6-12 hours a month for 18 months. This includes one monthly Inner · Circle Meeting with your Circle Leader and fellow Allies, attending at least one weekly Circles Community Dinner Meetings each month (dinner & childcare provided), as well as phone and in-person contact with your Circle Leader as needed.
- Do what you say you will do.
- Look to your personal circle of friends and colleagues for potential Ad-Hoc Allies. An Ad-Hoc Ally is a “task” ally available to offer support or a service (help change a tire, prepare a meal, drive someone to a job interview or doctor appointment, help with resumes, be a tutor, etc.)

Essentials for Being an Ally

- Confidentiality: What is shared in your Circle stays in your Circle. If your Circle Leader gives permission, you are free to share it with others. This would typically be for only the purpose of gathering information or help.
- Ground rules for the Circles community will be established and shared by the Guiding Coalition and must be honored by all Allies.
- No proselytizing: All participants are to be respected, as are their beliefs about faith. Discussions of faith should be non-judgmental and pressure-free. Under no circumstances should assistance be withheld because of differences of faith.

Tips for Being a Helpful Ally

- Be patient. Listen, learn, and offer. If you get frustrated, oftentimes this means your hidden rules (the rules you were raised with that are not yet understood by someone else) have been broken. Talk it over with someone and get perspective.
- Do not feel obligated to do something you do not want to do. There are many others who might want to help out. You and/or your Circle Leader can ask other allies.
- Your feedback will be more effective with Circle Leaders once you have a strong relationship. Strive for friendship first and what you say will eventually matter more.
- Remember, nobody needs to be rescued or fixed by you. Offer help without expectations.
Frequently Asked Questions on Becoming an Ally:

How much time are you asking me to commit?
The typical commitment is between 6-12 hours per month:
- one monthly meeting with your Circle scheduled at a mutually convenient time and place
- attend weekly Community Meetings at least once per month and as often as you’d like (dinner and childcare are provided); one of these meetings each month is dedicated to discussing systems barriers and another will be focused on Ally support
- phone and in-person contact with your family as needed

What are the requirements for the Circle Leader family?
Individuals are usually involved in Circles/Getting Ahead for three months before they are matched and become a Circle Leader. These are the requirements:
- Complete a Circles orientation and a 15-week Getting Ahead curriculum focused on financial self-sufficiency
- Attend Weekly Community meetings.
- Fulfill a reciprocity agreement in which they provide in-kind work to give back for the assistance they are being provided.

How long will this relationship last?
When you chose to be matched with a Circle Leader, we ask that you make an 18-month commitment. However, the length of the Circle relationship depends upon the needs/desires of the Circle itself. It may be as short as 18-month and as long as a lifetime!

What support is available to me?
The Circles Coach will be attending your first few meetings with your Circles Leader and Allies to support the start of your new relationship, will be available for consultation over the phone and in-person, provide resources available to families, facilitate ally support meetings, and provide check-ins and troubleshooting around goals and barriers the Circle encounters.

What if my Circle Leader needs and asks for money?
Allies are never expected to give money to the family, and they are particularly encouraged not to loan or give money to families early in the Circle relationship (i.e., first 6-months). In situations where financial assistance may be helpful, we recommend that the entire Circle team be consulted about the situation. The involvement of the Circle can help assure that the financial assistance doesn’t provide a temporary fix while avoiding the underlying issues the family must resolve.

What have Allies done that works?
Start with creating a friendship with your Circle Leader and his or her family. Assist the family with budgeting, assist in prioritizing their needs/wants, introduce the family to other people who can help (work, church, organizations), provide support during meetings with the children’s teachers, accompany the family to meetings with social service agencies to resolve problems, and become a friend who has genuine interest in the family.

Can I involve my spouse and children?
Yes! Many Allies incorporate social activities with their own family and new friends from the Circle.

What if my Circle Leader has a crisis in the evening or on a weekend?
First, you are not expected to manage crises alone after hours. In most cases, the family needs help to remain calm and identify what must be done immediately, versus what can wait until business hours. Here are some questions that you are encouraged to ask in response to a call about a crisis:
- Can you tell me more about this situation? (helps you understand the whole problem)
- Has this ever happened to you before? How did you manage the situation then?
- Who could help you with this problem?

Additional questions?
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