



Being an Ally: Frequently Asked Questions

What are the requirements for the Circle Leader family?

Families are usually involved in Circles for three months before they are matched and become a Circle Leader.

These are the requirements for families:

- Complete a Circles orientation and a 12-week Circle Leader Training curriculum
- Attend Weekly Community meetings
- Develop their own goals to help them begin moving toward their “future story” and increased stability (financially, emotionally, spiritually—and in other resource areas)

How much time are you asking me to commit?

After you are matched with the Circle, you will have:

- one monthly meeting with your Matched Circle scheduled at a mutually convenient time, usually on the 2nd Tuesday
- one monthly meeting with other Circles and the staff to discuss systems barriers, and occasional Ally support sessions
- phone and in-person contact with your family as needed throughout the month
- the typical commitment is between 4-10 hours per month

How long will this relationship last?

When you chose to be matched with a family, we ask that you make an eighteen-month commitment. However, the length of the Matched Circle relationship depends upon the needs/desires of the Matched Circle itself. It may be as short as eighteen months and as long as a lifetime!

What support is available to me?

The staff provides a list of resources available to families, facilitates ally support meetings, and provides check-ins and troubleshooting around goals and barriers the Matched Circle encounters. Each Circle has a staff member assigned as a coach.

What if my family 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. In those situations where financial assistance is needed, we recommend that the entire Circle 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 new Circle Leader and his or her family. We can't emphasize this enough! Spend the first three months of the relationship building trust and friendship. Here are some other things you may choose to do, based on the goals of your Circles Leader: Assist the family with budgeting, assist in prioritizing their needs/wants, introduce the family to other people within associational world (work, church, organizations), meet with the children's teachers, accompany the family to meetings with social service agencies to resolve problems, and--again--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 I know of others who want to be Allies?

Circles relies heavily on word-of-mouth. We look forward to hearing from you about other possible Allies.

What if my family 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?

An Ally. . .

- Takes a vested interest in supporting a Circle Leader and her/his family in their transition off public assistance or under-employment and into self-sufficiency.
- Learns about and acknowledges the barriers, both social and internal, to getting out of poverty, while attempting not to support any patterns of dependency these barriers may have instilled.
- Gently nudges the Circle Leader out of any old behaviors or beliefs that do not serve his/her growth, holding out the inherent potential, gifts and talents of the Circle Leader.
- Explores his/her own biases around differences in socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, religion, and ability in an environment that is free of blaming.
- Is able to define and be honest about limits and boundaries. It is not useful to allow Circle Leaders to violate personal boundaries, e.g., around time and energy available for these relationships, as resentment will build and the relationship will suffer.
- Is willing to learn about roadblocks to getting out of poverty in Harvey County that may arise because of how social service, education, workforce and other systems operate and, if appropriate, supports Circle Leaders in advocating for system changes.
- Is willing to challenge his/her own patterns of isolation, learning when and how to access support for him/her self.