



Circles of Support a program of the

Relationship & Safety Guidelines for Volunteers and Core Members

Participants in Circles of Support (COS) are careful to maintain open communication, safe boundaries, respect, and credibility between all Circle participants, including volunteers, Core members, and the Circles' coordinators. Volunteers are to act and communicate in a professional, courteous, and positive manner that reflects the mission, vision, and values of COS.

The following guidelines protect the physical and emotional safety of the Circles of Support participants and their relationships.

1. **Background Checks:** Upon the submission of an application to become a volunteer as a Circle participant, a background check will be obtained via the Consolidated Court Automation Program (CCAP) system and the Wisconsin Department of Corrections Sex Offender Registry. Individuals with criminal records are not excluded as volunteers, but a further interview will occur to ensure that they are not likely to endorse pro-offending thinking or minimize behaviors instead of holding a Core member properly accountable.
2. **Training/Orientation:** All volunteers must attend orientation and training programs before participation in a Circle.
3. **Confidentiality:** Volunteers adhere to strict confidentiality rules. A core member's privacy is respected and what is discussed within the Circle is not shared with people outside of the Circles of Support program. This protects the Circle as a place where Core members are free to be open and honest.
4. **Emotional Safety:** if at any time a volunteer or Core member feels uncomfortable or unsafe, they will express their concerns to the group or the program coordinating committee (circlesofsupport@lacrossejailministry.org).
5. **Physical Safety:** Core members will be 18 years or older and will be deemed not to be a safety risk to volunteers. As a match is being considered between a Core member and a circle, any information legally allowed concerning the background of the Core member will be shared with the circle. The Core member strives to live an offense-free life and to notify the circle if they are having difficulty doing so. If the Core member reveals to the Circle that they have violated the terms of their probation or have engaged in illegal activity, the Core member will be counseled to self-report to their probation officer. However, volunteers have a legal "duty to warn" in case of a life-threatening danger to themselves or someone else, the volunteer will call 911 for help. This is a legal responsibility of anyone working in a helping role. Other resources for a Core member in crisis (not life-threatening) are the La Crosse County Crisis Team, 608-784-4357 or the National Suicide and Crisis Line, 988.
6. **Conflict of Interest:** if a conflict of interest arises between a core member and a volunteer, the circles program coordinating committee will be contacted to decide what

steps are needed. Some examples of conflict-of-interest situations are: □ A Core member applies for a job; the supervisor for the job happens to be one of the circle volunteers. □ Close family members of a volunteer and Core member become romantically involved. □ A core member applies for services which must be approved by the spouse of one of their circle volunteers.

7. Volunteers and Core members:

- Maintain healthy relationship boundaries They do not get romantically involved or socialize outside of the circle relationship while the core member is in the circle. If it is a faith community circle, this does not include faith community events.
- It is advised that volunteers do not give or exchange articles, gifts, phonecards, or rides. During the meeting food or drink may be provided. If it is a faith community circle, requests can be made to the faith community leaders who can follow their policies and procedures.
- Circle meetings are to be held in pre-arranged locations in the community where no alcohol is served. Events and activities are to be approved by the circle.
- If a core member should show up for a meeting inebriated, they will be advised the circle will not meet with them in that condition.
- Circles should consist of no fewer than 3 or more than 4 volunteers in addition to the core member. A core member would not be assigned to a circle where all volunteers are of the opposite gender from the core member.

8. Handling Conflicts: if an issue were to arise between a Core member and a volunteer(s), this would be discussed within the circle group or with the help of the circles coordinating committee. Core members and volunteers will never, under any circumstance, interfere with or confront each other outside of the circle activities.

9. Handling Concerns about another volunteer: if any volunteer feels concerned that interactions between a fellow volunteer and core member outside the circle might be unhealthy, risky, or inappropriate, these are addressed either directly in the circle or with the program coordinating committee.

10. If the core member has a concern with a volunteer, they can contact the chaplain by phone at 608-785-9772 who refer them to a member of the program coordinating committee. Or they can email: circlesofsupport@lacrossejailministry.org. These concerns will be brought to the program coordinating committee.