PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL WORKSHEET · RELATIONAL INTEGRITY SERIES

Who Gets Closer?

Navigating the development and placement of people in relationship growth — through relational circles, attachment, emotional needs, interdependence, and self-disclosure

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Academic Research Solutions, Inc. · GraceRoot Institute

Love can be extended to every circle.
Trust is earned over time.
Access is assigned on the evidence.

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How to use it: work Parts 1–7 once to learn the framework, then use Part 8 for each person whose place in your life you are unsure about. The worksheet is designed for individual reflection, group psychoeducation, or use alongside a therapist.

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PART 1

Before You Place Anyone

Closeness is a privilege extended on evidence, not a prize awarded for chemistry.

Have you ever told someone your life story on the second coffee, and then spent the next six months wondering why it felt so exposed when they repeated a piece of it at a cookout? Or have you ever kept a genuinely safe person at arm's length for years, only to realize late in the game that they had been showing up the whole time? Most people have lived some version of both, and it is not because they lack intelligence or discernment. It is because the decision about who gets closer is usually being made by something other than evidence — by a hunger that has gone unmet, by an attachment pattern learned long before adulthood, by the warm feeling of being chosen, or by the fear of being hurt again.

This worksheet brings five frameworks into one conversation so that placement decisions can be made with an "eagle eye" rather than a "chicken head." A chicken pecks at whatever is directly in front of it; an eagle at 3,000 feet sees the lay of the land, the patterns, and the options. Each part below answers a different question in the order the questions naturally arise:

Framework	The question it answers	What it protects against
Relational Circles	Where does this person belong right now?	Giving inner-circle access to people who have only earned acquaintance-level trust
Emotional Needs	What am I hoping this person will provide?	Placing people by the size of my hunger rather than the size of their track record
Attachment	How fast — or slow — do I tend to move people?	Rushing people inward or pushing safe people outward by reflex
Interdependence	Is the exchange between us fair and cooperative?	Relationships that cost more than they give, or that quietly become competitions
Self-Disclosure	Is what we share reciprocal and gradual?	One-sided vulnerability, oversharing, and disclosure that outruns trust

The pattern Jesus modeled

It can feel uncharitable for a believer to sort people into circles, as if loving one's neighbor requires giving every neighbor a key to the house. Scripture paints a different picture. Jesus taught the crowds, sent out seventy-two (Luke 10:1), chose twelve (Mark 3:14), brought three — Peter, James, and John — up the mountain and into Gethsemane (Mark 9:2; 14:33), and had one disciple leaning against Him at the table (John 13:23). He loved every one of those circles, and yet John records something striking about the eager crowds in Jerusalem who believed when they saw the signs:

> *"Jesus, however, would not entrust himself to them, since he knew them all."*
> JOHN 2:24 (CSB)

Love was not withheld from the crowd; access was. That distinction is the backbone of this entire worksheet, because it frees us to be generous with kindness while being careful with trust. As the saying goes in the clinic and in the pews alike, the church is a hospital — hurting people are present everywhere, and hurting people are susceptible to hurting others, so we choose wisely whom we share our personal lives with.

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THREE WORDS TO KEEP STRAIGHT

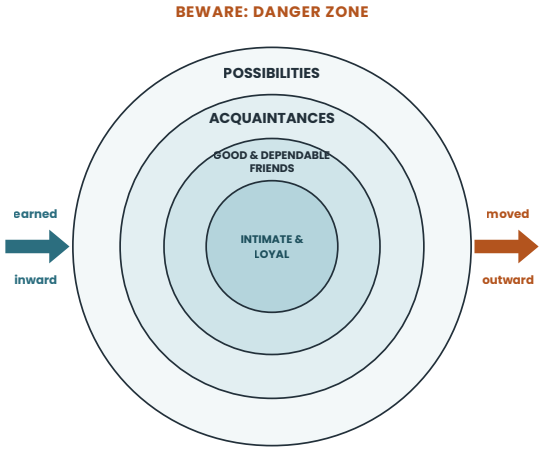
Love is a posture of goodwill that can be offered to everyone, including people in the outermost circle. **Trust** is a prediction about how someone will handle what matters to us, and predictions are built from evidence over time. **Access** is the amount of our heart, time, information, and influence we hand over, and access should follow trust rather than run ahead of it.

> *"Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life."*
> PROVERBS 4:23 (CSB)

PART 2

The Circles and What Each One Carries

The closer to the center, the more trust has been demonstrated — and the more responsibility the relationship holds.



Relationship Circles model © K. Kaplan & R. Rosenberg (2016), HumanMagnetSyndrome.com — redrawn with attribution

The circles are not a ranking of human worth. They describe **how much access a relationship can safely carry at this point in time**. People can move inward as consistency accumulates, and they can be moved outward when behavior changes — without anyone being declared a villain.

The arrows point in both directions on purpose. A relationship that never moves is not necessarily healthy; it may simply be unexamined. Seasons change, people grow, and sometimes people stop being safe. Movement is expected; what matters is that the movement follows evidence.

THE DANGER ZONE

Outside the circles are people whose behavior has shown that access would cause harm: deception, coercion, exploitation, contempt, repeated boundary violations, or no accountability. Love from a distance — and, where needed, prayer from a distance — is still possible. Access is not.

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The Placement Matrix — what each circle can carry

This table is the hub of the worksheet. Every later part feeds one of its columns.

Circle	Disclosure depth (Part 6)	Needs it can reasonably carry (Part 3)	Exchange pattern (Part 5)	Evidence required to move inward (Part 7)
Possibilities	Public facts and preferences; the outer layer of the onion	Courtesy, basic respect, shared activity	Light, low-stakes; no dependence	Respectful in small things; no pressure to speed up
Acquaintances	Opinions, interests, light history	Belonging in a group, friendly encouragement	Some give-and-take; costs are small and noticed	Consistency across several situations; words match actions; keeps small confidences
Good & Dependable	Hopes, struggles, some hurts; moderate vulnerability	Support when struggling, honest feedback, being listened to	Reciprocal and mostly cooperative; fairness is talked about	Handles vulnerability carefully; repairs after conflict; respects limits without punishing them
Intimate & Loyal	Fears, failures, the "façade" layer — what we hide from most people	Being known and accepted with faults; forgiveness; deep safety	Positive interdependence; each promotes the other's growth	Proven over time and across hardship; accountable when wrong; trusted with the hard truth and returns it in love
Danger Zone	None beyond what safety requires	None — needs are redirected elsewhere	Competitive, coercive, or exploitative	Not a matter of time; requires genuine, observable change, often with outside accountability

KEY PRINCIPLE

Movement inward is earned through **consistent behavior over time** — not through emotional intensity, shared trauma, charisma, spiritual language, or how badly a need wants to be met.

PART 3

What Am I Bringing? — Needs, Wants & Desires

Unmet needs are powerful placement engines. They will move people inward faster than the evidence allows.

Everyone walks into a relationship carrying something they hope to receive, and that is not a flaw — it is how God designed human beings to live in community. The trouble begins when we cannot clearly name what we are carrying, because an unnamed need tends to grab the nearest warm person and hand them the job. Distinguishing a need from a want and a desire helps us decide whether a person is being placed because of who they have shown themselves to be or because of what we are hungry for.

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NEED

Something essential for healthy functioning and existence — safety, belonging, respect, being treated as a person of worth.

WANT

A momentary preference that shifts with mood and circumstance — company tonight, a compliment today, a particular outing.

DESIRE

A longing with more weight and staying power than a want; it persists until it becomes reality — marriage, a best friend, a ministry partner.

When a need, want, or desire goes unmet, it often shows up as sadness, loneliness, hurt, disappointment, or a sense of worthlessness. Maslow's familiar pyramid — physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization — is a helpful reminder that relational needs sit on top of more basic ones. A person whose housing or safety is unstable will understandably reach harder for anyone who offers security, which is exactly when the circles are most likely to collapse.

WHY DEPENDENCE ON OTHERS LEAVES US VULNERABLE

When fulfillment depends entirely on another person or on circumstances, we are exposed to repeated hurt and disappointment, and we overlook our own ability and resources to meet our needs. Healthy approaches include: **assert** the need clearly so it can be heard; **acknowledge** the resources available; **position** yourself in the right environment, situation, or company; and **act** toward the goal.

Exercise 3A — Which circle can carry this need?

Mark an **X** beside the needs that feel unmet right now. Then, in the last column, write the *innermost circle* that could reasonably be asked to carry that need, using the Placement Matrix. Notice whether you have been asking someone in an outer circle to carry an inner-circle need.

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X	Emotional need	Who am I currently leaning on?	Circle that can carry it
	To be treated with respect, even in disagreement		
	To be included and to feel I fit with others		
	To be encouraged in my efforts and growth		
	To be listened to and understood		
	To be believed when I share my side of a situation		
	To be supported when I am hurting or vulnerable		
	To be known with my faults and still accepted		
	To be forgiven when I have done wrong		
	To have someone who believes in my abilities		
	To experience appropriate, affectionate touch		
	To know I am accepted and loved by God		God first — no human circle carries this alone
	_____		

Looking at what I marked: which need has been driving my placement decisions the hardest?

PART 4

How Do I Move? — Attachment and Pace

Attachment does not decide who is safe; it decides how fast we act before we know.

Attachment patterns develop early, as we learn whether closeness brings comfort or danger, and they travel with us into every friendship, marriage, workplace, and church community. They are not life sentences, and they are not diagnoses. They are tendencies — the default speed and direction at which we move people through the circles when we are not paying attention. Knowing our default lets us slow down where we rush and lean in where we flinch.

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Pattern	Core fear or pull	How it distorts placement	Correction	Regulated statement
Secure	Balanced connection and independence	Usually paces well; may over-accommodate when tired or flattered	Keep requiring consistency even when it feels good	"I can stay open and still look for consistency."
Anxious	Abandonment; pulled toward closeness	**Possibilities → Inner Circle** too fast; overshares early; seeks reassurance instead of watching behavior	Slow emotional access; let consistency arrive before vulnerability	"I'm still getting to know you, so I'm pacing this."
Avoidant	Vulnerability; pulled toward self-reliance	**Inner Circle → Acquaintance**; keeps safe people outside; reads closeness as threat	Allow gradual, safe vulnerability; tell safety apart from control	"I want connection — I just need to pace it."
Disorganized	Both closeness and distance feel dangerous	Chaotic movement in and out; difficulty reading safety	Use written, structured decisions; anchor in observable behavior, not feelings	"I'm reacting quickly; I want to slow this down."

WHERE ATTACHMENT MEETS THE OTHER FRAMEWORKS

Anxious patterns tend to **over-disclose** (Part 6) and tolerate **high costs** to keep a connection (Part 5). Avoidant patterns tend to **under-disclose** and quietly withdraw rather than negotiate fairness. Disorganized patterns can do both in the same week. The need driving the pace (Part 3) is often the clearest clue about which pattern is in charge.

Exercise 4A — My pace

Circle the pattern that best describes your default, knowing it may differ across relationships:

Secure | Anxious | Avoidant | Disorganized | It depends on the relationship

Have I moved anyone inward faster than the evidence supported? What was I hoping they would give me?

Have I kept a safe person farther out than their track record warrants? What was I protecting myself from?

What does my body or mind usually do right before I rush in or pull away? (an early warning sign)

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F.E.A.R. check: Is the fear behind my pace *False Evidence Appearing Real*, or am I responding to *Faith-filled Evidence (Approaching) Reality*? What alternative interpretation of this person's behavior could also fit the facts?

PART 5

Weighing the Exchange — Interdependence

Every relationship we choose involves something received and something spent. Wisdom keeps an honest ledger without turning people into transactions.

Interdependence exists when the accomplishment of our goals is affected by the actions of others. The deeper a relationship moves into the circles, the more interdependent it becomes: interaction is more frequent and lasts longer, mutual influence grows, and the two people share more of life's activities. That is precisely why the inner circle needs the strongest evidence — the more influence someone has over our goals, the more their character matters.

REWARDS WE SEEK

Love · information · status · goods · money · services — and, relationally, belonging, encouragement, and being understood.

COSTS WE PAY

Time · energy · conflict · disapproval from others · lost opportunities — and, relationally, self-silencing, anxiety, and loss of self-respect.

THE OUTCOME EQUATION

$$\text{Outcome} = \text{Rewards} - \text{Costs}$$

…measured against three standards: **my own standards** for this kind of relationship, **my past experiences**, and **the alternatives** currently available to me.

That last phrase matters more than it first appears. A person with painful relational history can rate a costly relationship as "good" simply because it hurts less than the last one, and a person who believes there are no alternatives will tolerate costs they would advise a friend to walk away from. The equation is only as honest as the standards we bring to it.

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Two directions a relationship can grow

POSITIVE INTERDEPENDENCE (COOPERATION)

I reach my goals as you reach yours, so we promote each other's efforts. It is sustained by three processes: **substitutability** — one person's actions can stand in for the other's; **inducibility** — openness to influencing and being influenced; and **positive cathexis** — genuine emotional investment in the other person and the shared goal. It grows most easily where there is common ground and agreed norms for handling conflicts of interest.

NEGATIVE INTERDEPENDENCE (COMPETITION)

I perceive that I can reach my goals only if you fail to reach yours, so we obstruct each other's efforts. It is often fed by **perceived inequity**, which distresses both the under-benefited and the over-benefited partner, and by attempts to restore equity by taking rather than negotiating. Left unaddressed, self-interest turns into oppositional interaction and the relationship fragments.

THREE FAIRNESS RULES HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS NEGOTIATE

- **Equity** — contributions and outcomes are proportional (financial, emotional, mental, social, spiritual).
- **Equality** — each person is treated as having equal right to access, opportunity, and ownership in the relationship.
- **To each according to need** — we acknowledge that needs differ and agree together on how they will be met.

> **A CHRIST-CENTERED CAUTION**
>
> Weighing rewards and costs is not permission to treat people as investments. Scripture calls us to give generously without expecting return (Luke 6:35). The ledger is not a price tag on a person; it is information about whether a relationship can safely carry the access it currently has. A relationship can be loved generously from the Acquaintance circle while its costs are kept small.

PART 6

The Layers — Self-Disclosure & Communication Climate

Disclosure is how people travel through the circles. The question is whether both people are traveling together.

Social penetration theory compares getting to know someone to peeling an onion: the outer layers hold public facts and preferences, and the inner layers hold hopes, fears, failures, and the things we tell almost no one. As both people share thoughts, feelings, preferences, ambitions, hopes, and fears that the other does not already know, intimacy grows and each person feels understood, validated, and nurtured. The layers of the onion map almost exactly onto the circles — which means disclosure is both a *sign* of where someone is placed and a *vehicle* for moving them.

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RECIPROCAL DISCLOSURE

Each person shares at roughly the depth the other has shared. Mutual disclosure is associated with greater liking, closeness, and perceived similarity. When one person reveals far more than the other, the one who disclosed more is left carrying more vulnerability.

GRADUAL DISCLOSURE

Depth and breadth increase slowly over time, across a widening range of topics. Gradual pacing gives the evidence time to arrive before the most sensitive information does.

PLACEMENT WARNING SIGNS IN DISCLOSURE

Someone pressing for inner-layer information early; someone collecting your disclosures while revealing little of their own; someone using what you shared as leverage, gossip, or a weapon in conflict. These are not merely awkward moments — they are evidence for the Danger Zone column.

WHAT SHAPES HOW MUCH WE DISCLOSE

The **nature of the relationship** (a roommate versus a stranger), the **risks** involved, and four common fears: **indifference**, **rejection**, **loss of control**, and **betrayal**. These fears are not always false alarms — sometimes they are discernment doing its job — so the F.E.A.R. question from Part 4 applies here too.

COMMUNICATION CLIMATE — HOW THE OTHER PERSON RECEIVES WHAT I SHARE

Response	What it sounds like	What it suggests about placement
Disconfirming	Dismissing, interrupting, mocking, ignoring — messages that I am devalued or irrelevant	Not safe for deeper disclosure; consider moving outward
Recognition	Confirms that I am present and exist in the conversation	Courtesy level — appropriate for outer circles
Acknowledgment	Verbal or nonverbal signs that confirm what I said or how I felt	Growing safety; consistent with Acquaintance → Dependable
Endorsement	Recognizes my feelings as understandable even without agreeing with my perspective — without taking emotional responsibility for my feelings	Confirming climate; a marker of Dependable and Inner Circle relationships

THREE AREAS THAT COMPLICATE DISCLOSURE

- **Blind spot** — what others can see in me that I cannot yet see in myself. Inner-circle people are often the ones trusted to speak into it.
- **Façade** — what I know and keep hidden: mistakes, embarrassing moments, family history, intimate details. These belong only in safe, long-term relationships.
- **Unknown self** — what is hidden from both me and others. It cannot be disclosed until it is discovered, which is why a well-rounded self-concept is a prerequisite for healthy disclosure.

Where has my disclosure stopped being reciprocal or gradual, and what happened next?

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PART 7

Checking the Evidence — Relational Integrity

Observe patterns, not potential.

Potential is what someone *could* become; pattern is what they have repeatedly *done*. Many painful placements happen because we fell in love with a person's potential and handed them the access that only a pattern should earn. The check below gathers the evidence from every earlier part into one place. It is intentionally simple, because the moment of decision is rarely the moment we feel most clear-headed.

> *"Whoever is faithful in very little is also faithful in much."*
> LUKE 16:10 (CSB)

The Relational Integrity Check

Score each item for one person: **0** = rarely or not yet observed · **1** = sometimes · **2** = consistently, across different situations and over time.

Marker	Observable question	0	1	2
Psychological safety	Do they respect my thoughts, even when we disagree?			
Emotional safety	Do they handle my vulnerability carefully and keep confidences?			
Consistency	Do their actions match their words over time?			
Boundary respect	Do they honor my limits without pressure, sulking, or punishment?			
Accountability	Do they take responsibility and repair when they are wrong?			
Reciprocity	Is disclosure and support flowing both ways (Part 6)?			
Cooperation	Do they promote my goals rather than compete with them (Part 5)?			
Confirming climate	Do they acknowledge or endorse my feelings rather than dismiss them?			
	Total (out of 16)			

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Total	Placement guidance (a starting point for reflection, not a verdict)
13–16	Evidence supports Good & Dependable or Inner Circle, provided it has held across time and hardship.
8–12	Evidence supports Acquaintance or Good & Dependable. Keep observing before deepening access.
4–7	Evidence supports Possibilities or Acquaintance. Limit disclosure and keep costs small.
0–3, or any red flag	Consider the Danger Zone, regardless of total. Any coercion, deception, exploitation, threats, or violence outweighs every other score. If safety is at risk, contact a trusted professional or local emergency services.

A NOTE ON SCORING HONESTLY

If a score was hard to give, ask: *How do I know? What specifically have I seen? What would someone who loves me — and who is not afraid of upsetting me — say about this person?* When a need is loud (Part 3), we tend to round up. When fear is loud (Part 4), we tend to round down.

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PART 8

Placement Review — One Person, Start to Finish

Copy these two pages for each relationship you are unsure about.

Name or relationship: _____ Personal Professional Ministry Family

Circle where they currently sit in my life: _____

1 **Needs.** What am I hoping this person will provide? Is that a need, a want, or a desire — and can their current circle carry it?

_____

_____

2 **Pace.** Am I moving this person at my attachment default or at the speed of the evidence?

_____

3 **Exchange.**

Rewards of this relationship	Costs of this relationship

Compared with my standards, my past, and my alternatives, the outcome is: Rewarding Balanced Costly The pattern feels mostly: Cooperative Competitive

4 **Disclosure.** Who has shared more, at what depth, and how was it received?

Balanced I share more They share more Moving too fast

Climate when I share: Disconfirming Recognition Acknowledgment Endorsement

5 **Evidence.** Relational Integrity Check total: _____ / 16 Red flags observed:

_____

6 **Decision.** Based on the evidence, I will:

☐ Invite inward one step ☐ Hold where they are and keep observing ☐ Move outward one step
☐ Place in the Danger Zone

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7 **Practice.** One concrete change in access (time, information, influence, or availability) I will make, and the boundary statement I will use:

8 **Markers.** How will I know whether this placement is working? What would I need to see to revisit it — and when will I revisit it?

BOUNDARY STATEMENTS BY TYPE

Emotional	"I'm not ready to share that yet."	**Access**	"That level of involvement doesn't feel right for me yet."
Time	"I'm not available for that right now."	**Communication**	"I need respectful communication to keep talking about this."

PART 9

Accepting the Placement — Acceptance Is Not Conceding

You cannot place someone wisely while arguing with who they have shown themselves to be.

Acceptance is the recognition of reality as it is presented, not contingent upon personal agreement or upon a want, need, or desire. That definition is especially important here, because the hardest part of relational placement is rarely the analysis — it is the grief of admitting that someone we hoped would be inner-circle has only demonstrated acquaintance-level trust. It is tempting to treat that admission as losing, as giving up on them, or as being unloving. It is none of those things.

ACCEPTING A PLACEMENT MEANS

- Seeing the relationship as it actually is
- Acknowledging what the evidence shows
- Recognizing what I can and cannot control in another person
- Positioning myself to move forward wisely

IT DOES NOT MEAN

- Approving harmful behavior
- Withdrawing love or goodwill
- Ruling out future growth or repair
- Conceding that I am unlovable or that relationships never work

The ideal relationship vs. the real relationship

The gap between the *ideal self* and the *real self* fuels shame and anxiety; the same is true of relationships. When we keep relating to the person we wish someone were, rather than the person they consistently are, we feel constantly disappointed — and we keep handing them access their real pattern cannot carry. Honest placement closes that gap. It also works in reverse: sometimes the real relationship is better than the one our fear expected, and acceptance means letting a safe person closer.

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Living with the tensions — relational dialectics

Even well-placed relationships contain pulls in opposite directions. These tensions are normal, never fully resolved, and worth managing on purpose:

Autonomy – Connection	The need for closeness alongside the need for my own space and identity
Novelty – Predictability	The need for spontaneity alongside the need for steadiness and routine
Openness – Closedness	The desire to be known alongside the desire for privacy

Strategy	What it looks like
Neutralize	A compromise in which neither person's need is fully met
Separation	One side is favored or the two sides alternate — e.g., autonomy during the week and connection on weekends
Segment	Different needs are met in different spheres of life, with different people or events
Reframe	The two poles are seen as supporting each other — space makes closeness richer, and closeness makes space feel safe

Which relationship am I struggling to accept for what it currently is? What would acceptance — not conceding — look like there?

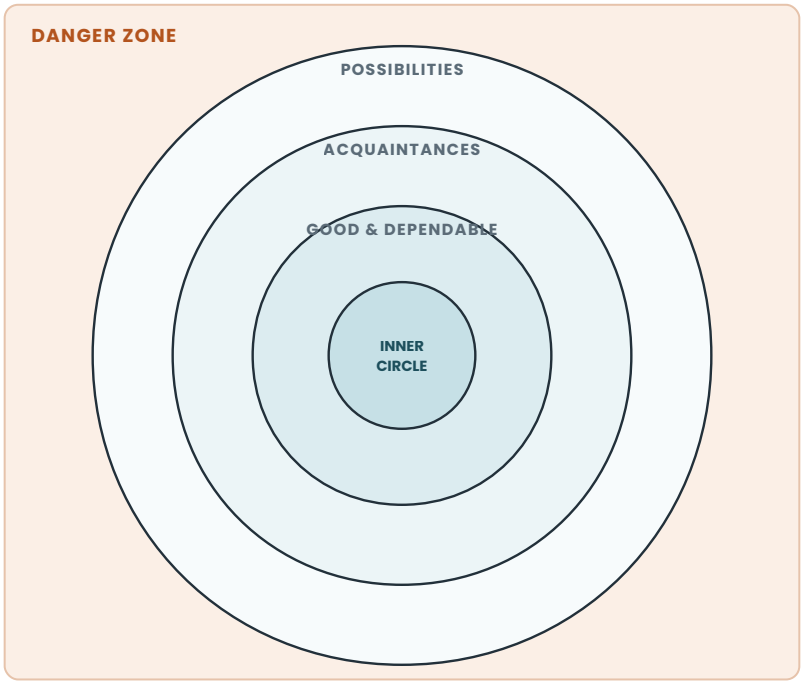
Which tension shows up most in one of my close relationships, and which strategy do we usually use? How has that worked?

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PART 10

My Circle Map & Needs Action Plan

Write names in pencil. Placement is a season, not a sentence.



Needs Action Plan

No one should rely entirely on others to meet their needs. For your top unmet needs from Part 3, write one or two steps you can take yourself, the circle-appropriate person or setting you will draw on, and a target date. Your therapist or group facilitator can help identify steps.

Unmet need	Steps I can take	Circle-appropriate person, group, or setting	Target date
	A. B.		
	A. B.		
	A. B.		

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Follow-up: What happened when I took these steps? How did meeting part of the need myself change how I placed people?

PART 11

Commitment & Self-Reflection

Generous with love. Careful with trust. Honest about access.

Considering everything in this worksheet, what are the critical issues that make my relationships lean toward dependence, avoidance, or healthy interdependence?

STATEMENTS TO REMEMBER — CHECK THE ONES I NEED MOST

- ☐ Closeness is earned by consistency, not intensity.
- ☐ I can love someone and still limit their access.
- ☐ Moving someone outward is not the same as condemning them.
- ☐ My hunger is not evidence.
- ☐ My fear is not always evidence either.
- ☐ I can meet part of my own needs.
- ☐ Disclosure should travel at the speed of trust.
- ☐ Acceptance is seeing clearly, not giving up.
- ☐ Placement is a season, not a sentence.
- ☐ God's love for me is not placed in any circle — it is the center.

"I will allow relational closeness to develop on demonstrated trustworthiness — not emotional urgency, unmet need, or fear — and I will extend love to every circle while guarding the access of my heart."

Signature _____ Date _____

Not everyone who claps for you belongs at the table,
and not everyone who is quiet at the table is far from your heart.

Watch the pattern. Wait for the evidence. Then open the door.

> *"The one who walks with the wise will become wise, but a companion of fools will suffer harm."*
> PROVERBS 13:20 (CSB)

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Integrated from Dr. Donetta D. Quinones's psychoeducational materials (Academic Research Solutions, Inc.): *Satisfying Unmet Emotional Needs*; *Interdependence in Relationships*; *Interdependent Communication in Relationships*; and the *Relational Integrity Workbook* (Relationship Circles & Attachment-Based Boundaries; Acceptance Is Not Conceding).

Theoretical foundations: Relationship Circles model, K. Kaplan & R. Rosenberg (2016), used with attribution · Attachment theory (Bowlby; Ainsworth; Main & Solomon) · Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) · Social exchange and interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) · Cooperation and competition / social interdependence (Deutsch, 1949; Johnson & Johnson) · Social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) · Confirming and disconfirming communication (Sieburg; Cissna & Sieburg) · Johari Window (Luft & Ingham, 1955) · Relational dialectics (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Scripture quotations from the Christian Standard Bible (CSB).

This worksheet is educational and is not a substitute for individualized clinical care. If a relationship involves threats, coercion, or violence, prioritize safety and seek professional or emergency help.

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