

Support Circle: A Workshop on Death, Dying, and Caring



Companion Sea

Support Circle: A Gathering on Death, Dying, and Caring

Welcome to the Support Circle Workshop

This workshop is offered by **Companion Sea** (companionsea.com), a doula practice based in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Created by **Charlene Vacon, PhD** — author, caregiver, and end-of-life doula — this gathering is designed to help people begin gentle conversations about support as we grow older, care for others, and face the reality of death and dying.

The **Support Circle Workshop** provides a warm, accessible space to explore what support really means — emotionally, spiritually, practically, and physically. It's for anyone wishing to reflect more intentionally on how we give and receive care across life's most tender thresholds.

Through quiet reflection, group sharing, and creative mapping exercises, participants will deepen their understanding of their own needs, build insight into their support networks, and begin imagining new ways to show up for themselves and others.

This workshop can be offered by doulas, caregivers, professionals, or community members. No special expertise is required — just an open heart, a willingness to listen, and a desire to bring kindness into the spaces where care is needed most.

To learn more or explore additional offerings from Companion Sea, visit

 companionsea.com

Circles of Experience

Join us for a gentle and meaningful circle where we explore the support we may need — and the support we can offer — in the face of death, dying, and grief.

Together, we'll reflect on how care moves through our lives, create personal maps of support, and hold space for honest, compassionate conversation. This circle is open to anyone on their journey of contemplating mortality, caregiving, or simply wishing to walk alongside others with more intention.

Through conversation, quiet reflection, and creative exercises, we'll begin to name what nourishes us — spiritually, emotionally, physically, and practically — and how we might show up for those we love.

All are welcome. No experience required. Just bring your open heart.



Here's an idea for a Support Circle Gathering invitation for Spring. Use your creativity to make one for your event or copy and paste the text above into your invitation format (social media, letters, etc.).

Circles of Experience

Planning a gathering on creating circles of support

The point of a Circle Gathering is to create space that allows people to begin to think and talk about tender subjects. The Support Circle Gathering focuses on death, dying, and caring by focusing on the very productive area of the support people need and provide. People will also think about those around them who may need support, and potentially how we can each and all participate in supporting those around us.

This workshop is intended for young people and adults anywhere on their journey of contemplating death and dying, although it's likely not a wise choice for younger children or those nearest to death.

Gathering Plan

Opening – Welcome, meditation,

Circle Work – Guided conversation, activities, reflection

Closing – Sharing, gratitude, gentle ending

Materials

- Pencils, pens
- Markers, coloured pencils, etc. (optional)
- Worksheets for every participant (4 “take-home” pages)
- Writing surfaces (hard cover books, tables, clip boards)

Circles of Experience

Workshop Agenda: Creating Our Support Circles

Duration: 2 hours

Ideal Group Size: 6–20 participants

Audience: Youth and adults exploring death, dying, and compassionate care

1. Opening: Welcome & Grounding (20 minutes)

Purpose: Set the tone, build safety, and arrive together in the space

- **Welcome & Intros** (10 min)
- **Guided Meditation** (10 min)

2. Circle Work: Conversation & Exploration (25 minutes)

Purpose: Gently open discussion and explore the concept of support

- **Opening Prompt** (5–10 min)
 - "What does *support* mean to you right now — and has that changed over time?"
 - Pair & share or open floor depending on group size
- **Brief introduction to the idea of Circles of Support** (5 min)
 - Touch on Ring Theory, the four domains, and why mapping this is meaningful
- **Invite people to begin the worksheet activity** (5–10 min transition)
 - Let people know you'll move from discussion to reflection in the next phase

3. Personal Reflection: Worksheet Activities (45 minutes)

Purpose: Deepen individual insight into support needs and relationships

a. Take-Home Worksheet: Four Domains of Support (20 min)

Group discussion.

- Handout worksheets and templates as needed
- Explain that we'll be working with four domains
- Check to see if the four domains resonate with participants
- Open discussion about what is in each domain

b. Drawing Your Rings of Support (10–15 min)

This can be a partnered or solo activity.

- Introduce Ring Theory and provide instructions
- Prompt journaling, note-taking or light sketching (freehand is fine!)
- Optional group check-in: "What surprised you?"

Circles of Experience

c. Mapping Your Support Domains – the Support Wheel (10 min)

Solo reflective activity.

- Simple visual map: “Me” at the center, four spokes
- Encourage people to name key supporters in each area
- Tell participants this is for them, they will not need to share it
- Final Prompt to close activity4. Closing: Integration & Sharing (30 minutes)
- **Purpose:** Reinforce insights, create connec: “Who do I *wish* I had here?”
- To close the activity, invite participants to share anything that their feeling or thinking about their support circle

4. Sharing from the circle (15-20 min)

Purpose: Integrate insights through shared reflection

- Invite those who want to share something they noticed or learned
- Reflection prompts:
 - “What surprised you about your wheel or rings?”
 - “Did any gaps or strengths become clearer?”
 - Final closing prompt “What’s one support you’d love to receive, but have never named out loud?” (can be shared aloud or written privately)

5. Final Words (5-10 min)

Purpose: Confidence to continue reflection, participate more fully support relationships

- Thank participants for their openness
- Remind them this is just the beginning of an evolving practice
- Invite them to keep their worksheets and revisit them
- Offer yourself as a resource if appropriate (or point to others)

Optional Add-Ons (Time Permitting or for Extended Versions)

- Creative decorating of worksheets or maps
- Resource table with books, pamphlets, or grief tools
- Leave-behind cards with journaling prompts or affirmations
- Closing ritual (e.g., lighting a candle, saying a word of thanks, a circle breath)

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Opening Welcome: Arriving in the Circle of Support

- Invite participants to gather around in a circle with you.
- Introduce yourself and why you're here. Talk about your ground rules for an open discussion where people withhold judgement of one another from the space.
- Invite participants to share their names and why they are here, or perhaps what they are hoping to welcome/learn/ponder/reflect upon today.
- With gratitude, guide participants in the opening exercise, a "guided meditation." If you don't know anything about meditation, call it a prayer or an incantation. Read the script or use your own words to invite openness, feeling, and meaningful experience.

Circles of Experience

Opening Meditation: Arriving in the Circle of Support

Invite people to sit comfortably. A few deep breaths together can be helpful before you begin.

Close your eyes, or lower your gaze if that feels better.
Let yourself feel the support of the chair beneath you...
the floor beneath your feet...
and the quiet company of those around you.

Notice your breath.
There's nothing to change — just let it come and go.
Inhale... and exhale.
You are here.

Bring to mind someone who has supported you —
in grief, in challenge, or simply with love.
This could be someone living or gone.
Human, animal, or even a place.
Notice how their support made you feel —
Was it a word? A touch? Just their presence?
Let yourself rest in that memory for a moment.

Now bring awareness to your heart —
to whatever you are carrying today.
There may be sorrow.
There may be peace.
There may be mystery.
Let it all be welcome here.

As we open this conversation together,
remember that you are not alone.
You are part of many circles.
Held. Witnessed. Supported.

When you're ready, take one deeper breath.
Wiggle your fingers or toes.
And gently return to the room.

Circles of Experience

Circle Work: Creating Our Circles of Support

✿ Opening Prompt (gentle conversation starter)

"What does 'support' mean to you right now — and has that changed over time?"

Invite people to talk in small groups or within the larger group, depending on the size of the group.

Circle Work: Circles of Need in Dying

Supplies:

- Pencils or pens for everybody, plus more. They break, don't work, get chewed on by the dog...
- Single-sided print-outs (8.5x11) of the 4 worksheets for everybody, plus one for you.
- If you're feeling fancy, clipboards or other surfaces so people can do their work neatly and focus on their intentions rather than how to write on their laps.

Provide each participant with the handouts ("takehome worksheet"). I hope that people will take them home and continue to reflect, and I think saying "takehome worksheet" will reinforce that.

While you're at it, give them a pen, too.

Explain the 4 different areas (or quadrants) of the circle of needs: emotional, practical, spiritual, and physical. If these 4 needs don't speak to you, maybe you have different needs. From where I sit, these are what resonate with my experience.

You may want to write these needs on a whiteboard or easel. Or just speak about them. People have paper now, so they can take notes.

Circles of Experience

Creating Our Circles of Support

Take-home worksheet 1

Spiritual Support

Support that nourishes the spirit, offers meaning, and connects us to something beyond ourselves — whether that's religious, philosophical, or deeply personal.

- Reading sacred or meaningful texts aloud (e.g., Bible, poetry, nature writing, etc.)
- Playing music or sounds that soothe or uplift (chants, hymns, singing bowls, birdsong)
- Facilitating rituals, prayer, or guided meditation
- Offering presence in silence, reverent conversation, or spiritual companionship
- Honouring beliefs or customs around death, dying, and what comes after

What might help me feel connected, rooted, or held in meaning?

For example:

- I need space to create — painting, writing, or crafting helps me process.
- I'd like someone to read me poetry or passages from books I love.
- I want to listen to music that moves me — especially choral, folk, or traditional.
- I'd appreciate a friend who will pray with me, or for me.
- I need reminders that nature is still doing its thing — walks, sunlight, fresh air.
- I want someone who'll sit with me in silence without needing to talk.
- I'd like to light candles, burn incense, or smudge with someone.

My reflections:

Circles of Experience

Creating Our Circles of Support

Take-home worksheet 2

♥ Emotional Support

Support that holds space for feelings, grief, memories, fears, and the full emotional experience of dying and caregiving.

- Deep listening without trying to fix or solve
- Sharing meaningful memories or stories
- Gentle humour, lightness, or moments of joy when appropriate
- Sitting in silence with someone who needs to cry, rage, or be still
- Helping process or write letters, legacy messages, or say goodbyes

What might help me feel safe, loved, and able to express my feelings?

For example:

- I need someone who will just *listen* — not fix, not cheer me up.
- I want to be around people who can handle tears or silence.
- I'd love to share memories and stories — even the funny or messy ones.
- I need to be told it's okay to be scared, or angry, or sad.
- I want someone who can laugh with me, when that's what I need.
- I might need help writing letters or messages to people I love.
- I want someone to help me name my fears out loud and still stay present.

My reflections:

Circles of Experience

Creating Our Circles of Support

Take-home worksheet 3

Physical Support

Support that tends to the body, comforts the senses, and eases physical burden.

- Offering comfort touch: holding hands, a gentle massage, brushing hair
- Preparing nourishing, easy-to-eat food and drinks
- Helping with positioning, warmth, or cool cloths for comfort
- Creating a calm sensory environment (dim lights, soft blankets, familiar smells)
- Assisting with mobility or physical needs (bathing, tidying) with gentleness and dignity

What might help me feel physically comfortable, cared for, and less burdened?

For example:

- I'll need help with meals — warm, familiar foods I don't have to think about.
- I'd love someone to bring me tea or keep a water bottle nearby.
- I'd like help getting cozy — with blankets, warm socks, or adjusting pillows.
- I may need someone to help me bathe or brush my hair with gentleness.
- I want someone to tidy the room around me without asking questions.
- I need breaks during the day — naps, quiet moments, soft lighting.
- I might feel better if someone can rub my feet or hold my hand.

My reflections:

Circles of Experience

Creating Our Circles of Support

Take-home worksheet 4

Practical Support

Support that addresses the logistics, day-to-day tasks, and end-of-life planning that can feel overwhelming.

- Running errands, pet care, housekeeping, meal prep
- Helping organize documents or fill out paperwork (e.g., advance directives, wills)
- Coordinating visitors or creating quiet time boundaries
- Making phone calls or managing updates to extended circles
- Supporting final wishes: organizing a playlist, memory boxes, or vigil space

What might help me manage life's details or prepare for what's ahead?

For example:

- I need help making a will or advance directive — I don't want to do it alone.
- I'd like someone to make a list of passwords or account info with me.
- I want help planning my celebration of life — music, food, the vibe.
- I may need someone to manage updates for others so I don't have to.
- I want someone to take over grocery runs or walk my dog.
- I'll need help organizing visitors — making sure I have quiet time, too.
- I might need a ride to appointments or someone to take notes for me.

My reflections:

Circles of Experience

Activity 1: Drawing Your Rings of Support

Based on Ring Theory

Supporting in, complaining out...


For more on ring theory: [Circle of Grief: Supporting In While Complaining Out | Psych Central](#)

Supplies:

- If you printed the take-home worksheets on single sided paper, have folks use the other side of the pages for this. Otherwise, you'll need enough plain paper to give everyone a sheet.
- Pens, pencils, or markers

Instructions:

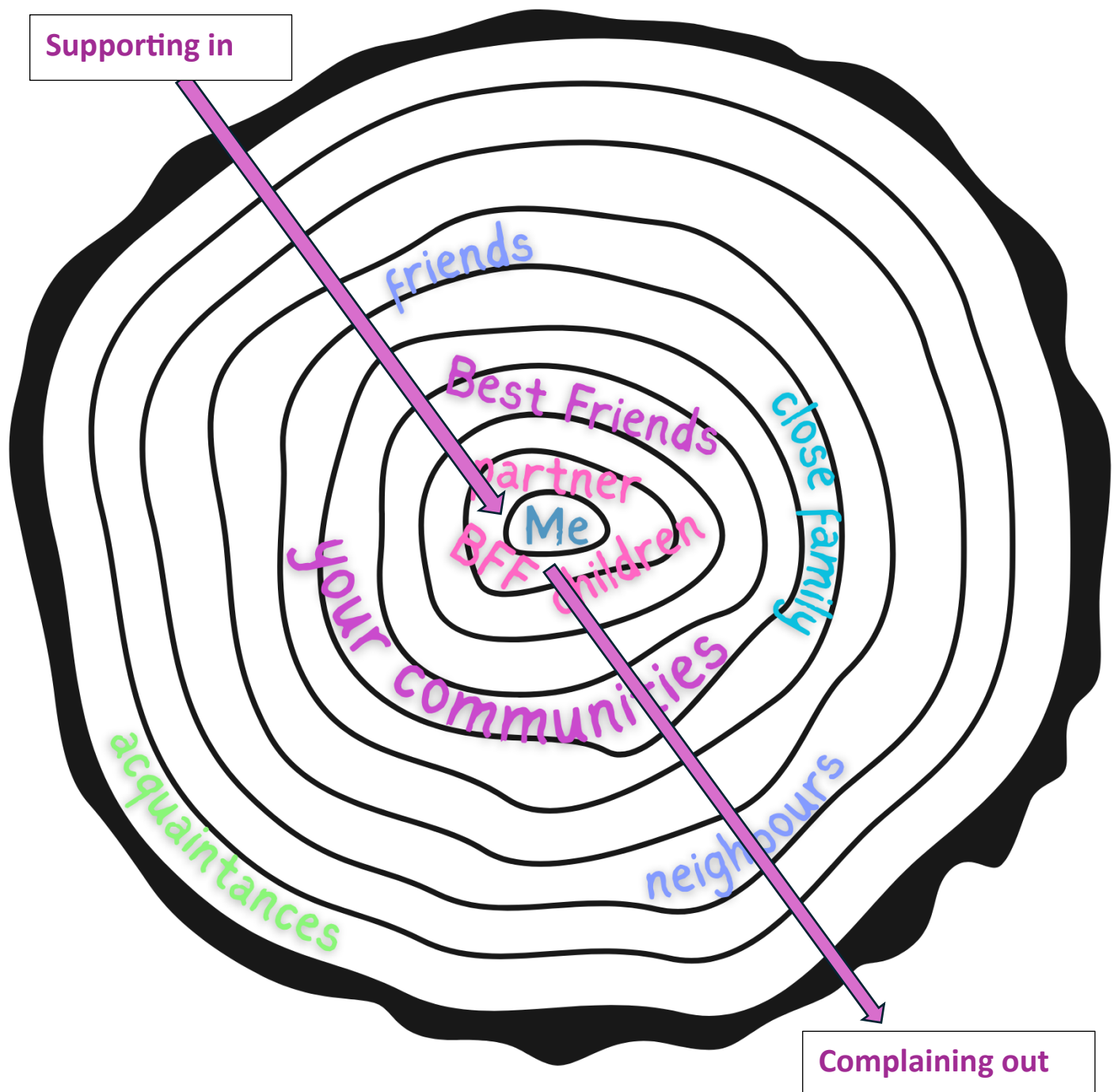
1. **Draw the cross section of a tree or a large spiral (a bullseye?)** — with 3–4 concentric rings. See the next pages for examples.
2. **Label the centre “Me.”**
3. Label or name each ring outward:
 - Inner Rings: Closest supports (spouse, best friend, parent, etc.)
 - Middle Rings: Extended supports (friends, community, colleagues)
 - Outer Rings: Broader network (neighbours, acquaintances, support groups)
4. Supporting in, complaining out – discuss why
5. Reflect or journal:
 - Who do I turn to most often?
 - Who feels emotionally or practically “close” even if we’re not related?
 - Where might I need to build more support?

 *Optional prompt for group discussion:*

“What surprised you about your rings? Did you notice gaps, strengths, or unexpected supports?”

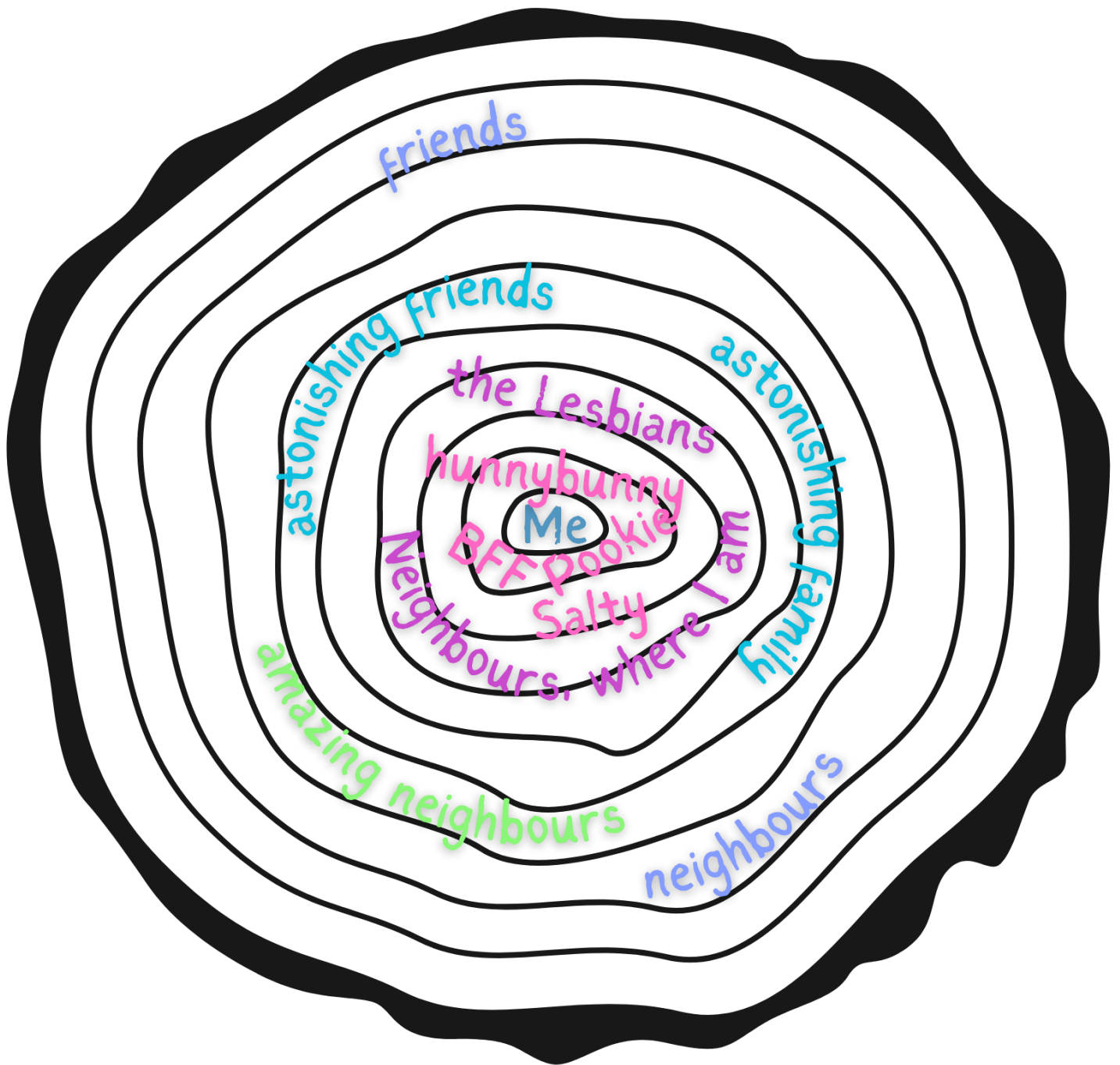
Circles of Experience

Categories of support “people” – share this idea with participants



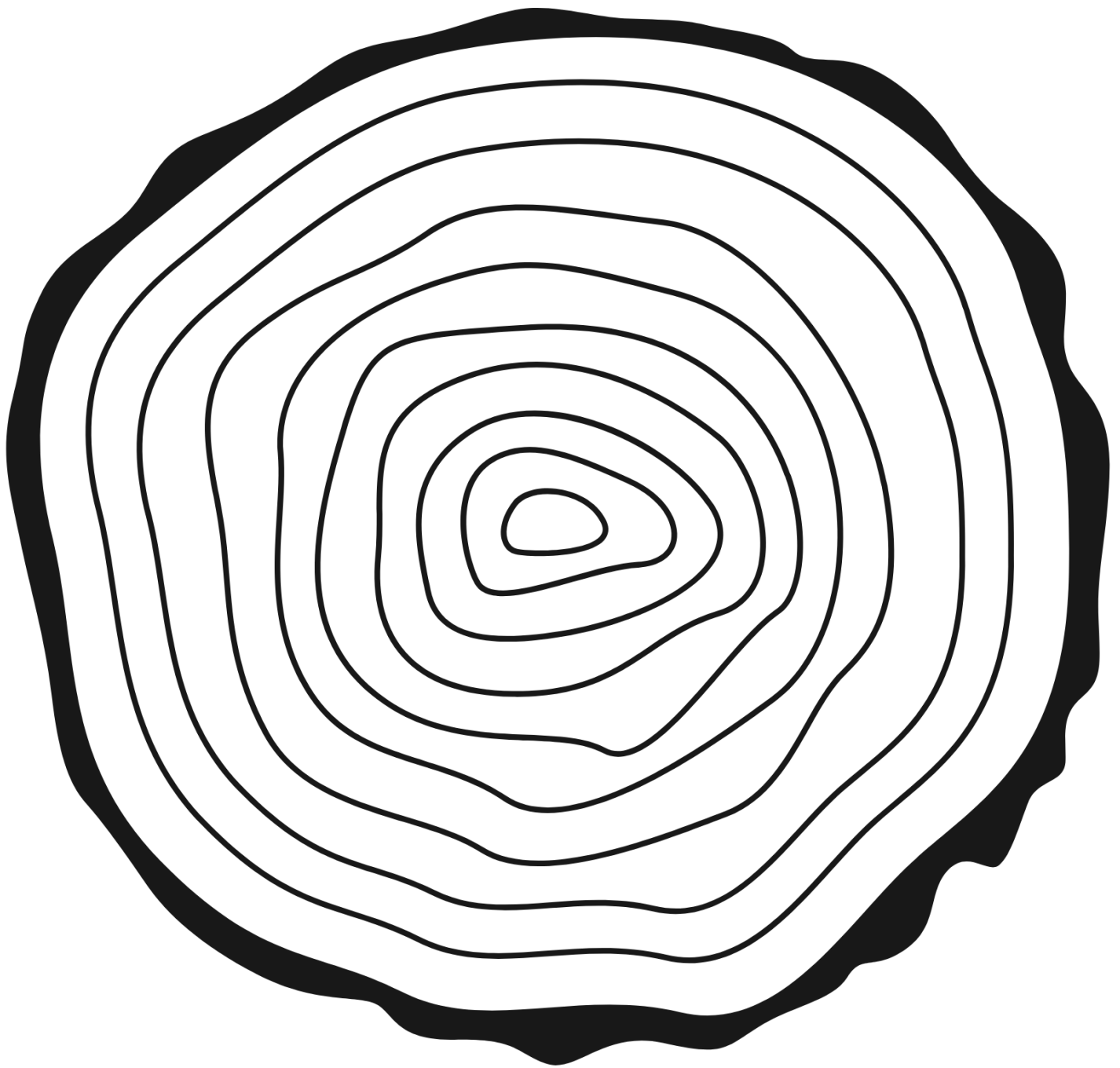
Circles of Experience

Your support circle is your support circle. It doesn't have to look like the example or like anyone else's. Since you've done this exercise, you'll see that thinking about it and getting your best ideas down are two important first steps.



Circles of Experience

Put yourself in the middle. Who are the people who will support you closest, most often, or most fervently during your dying and death? Who will support you from more of a distance or with lesser contact?



Circles of Experience

Activity 2: Mapping Your Support Domains

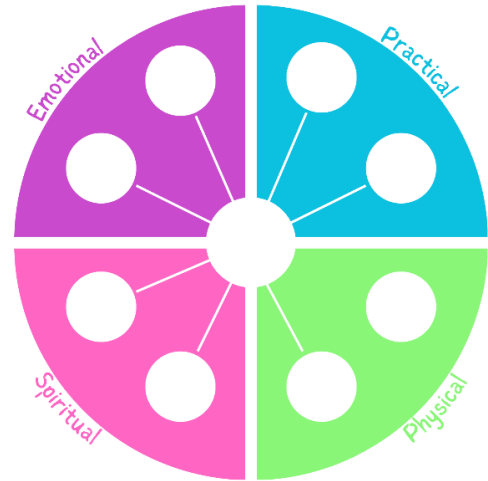
Support Wheel: Spiritual, Emotional, Physical, Practical

Supplies:

- Blank sheet to draw on for each participant (or use the back of the worksheets, or use the template below).
- Pens, pencils
- colouring tools (optional)

Instructions:

1. In the center, write “Me.”
2. From there, draw lines to four labeled areas.
3. For each domain, write:
 - What kinds of support you need or value
 - Who in the circles of your life might offer that kind of support. Start with a couple key people in each domain.
 - Any gaps or questions you have about how to ask for it



Example:

Spiritual

- Need: creative space, reading/knowledge, time in nature
- Support: Maybe Penny (for nature walks), no one yet for reading
- Gap: Might ask Rob to help make time for art

Practical

- Need: groceries, organizing documents
- Support: Neighbour Sam (errands), Lisa (forms and emails)

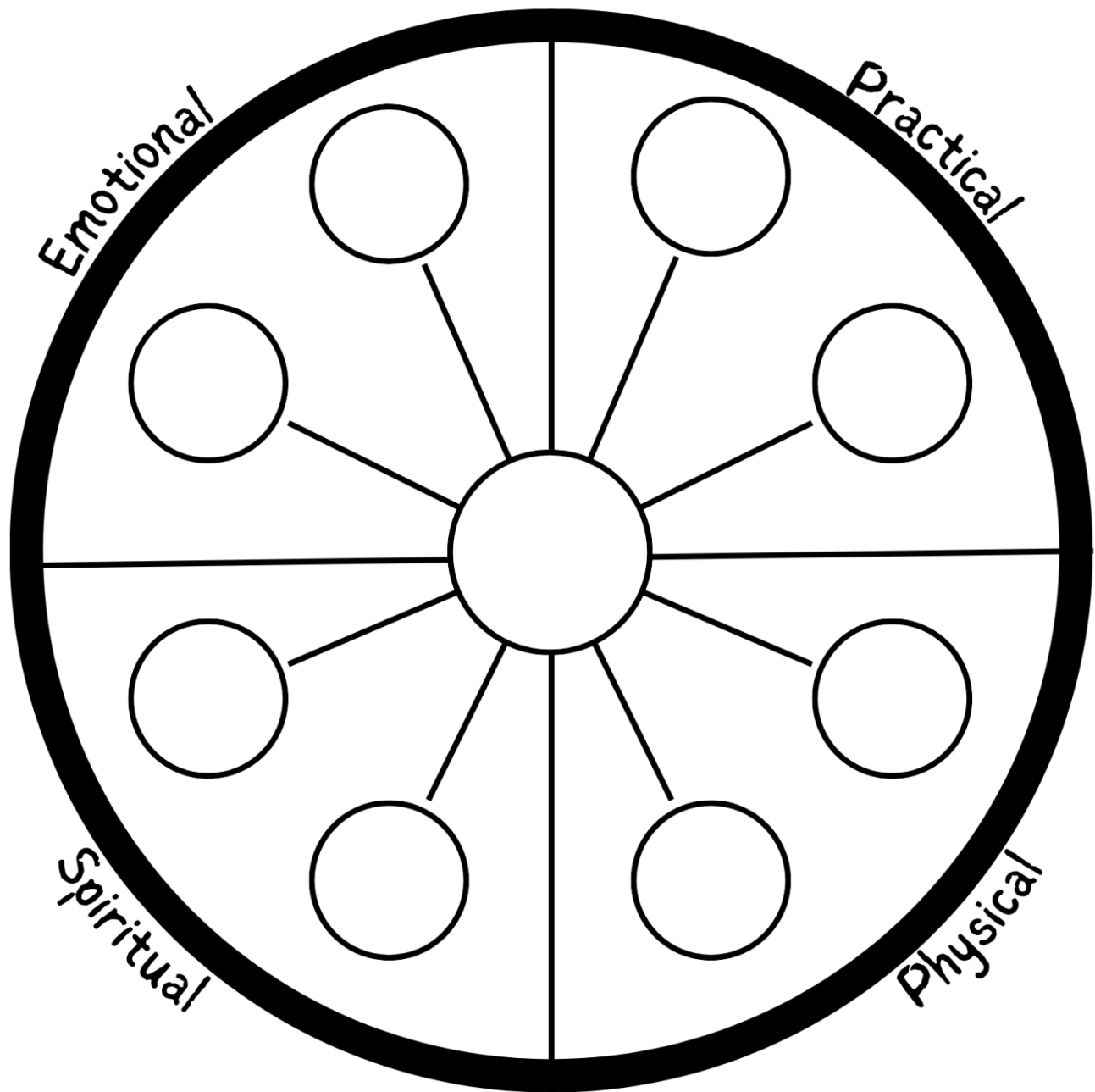
Reflection prompts:

- “Are some of the same people showing up in more than one domain? Could I invite more support from someone in a specific area?”
- “Do I have people in mind — even if I haven’t asked yet?”
- : “Who do I *wish* I had here?”
- To close the activity, invite participants to share anything that their feeling or thinking about their support circle

Circles of Experience

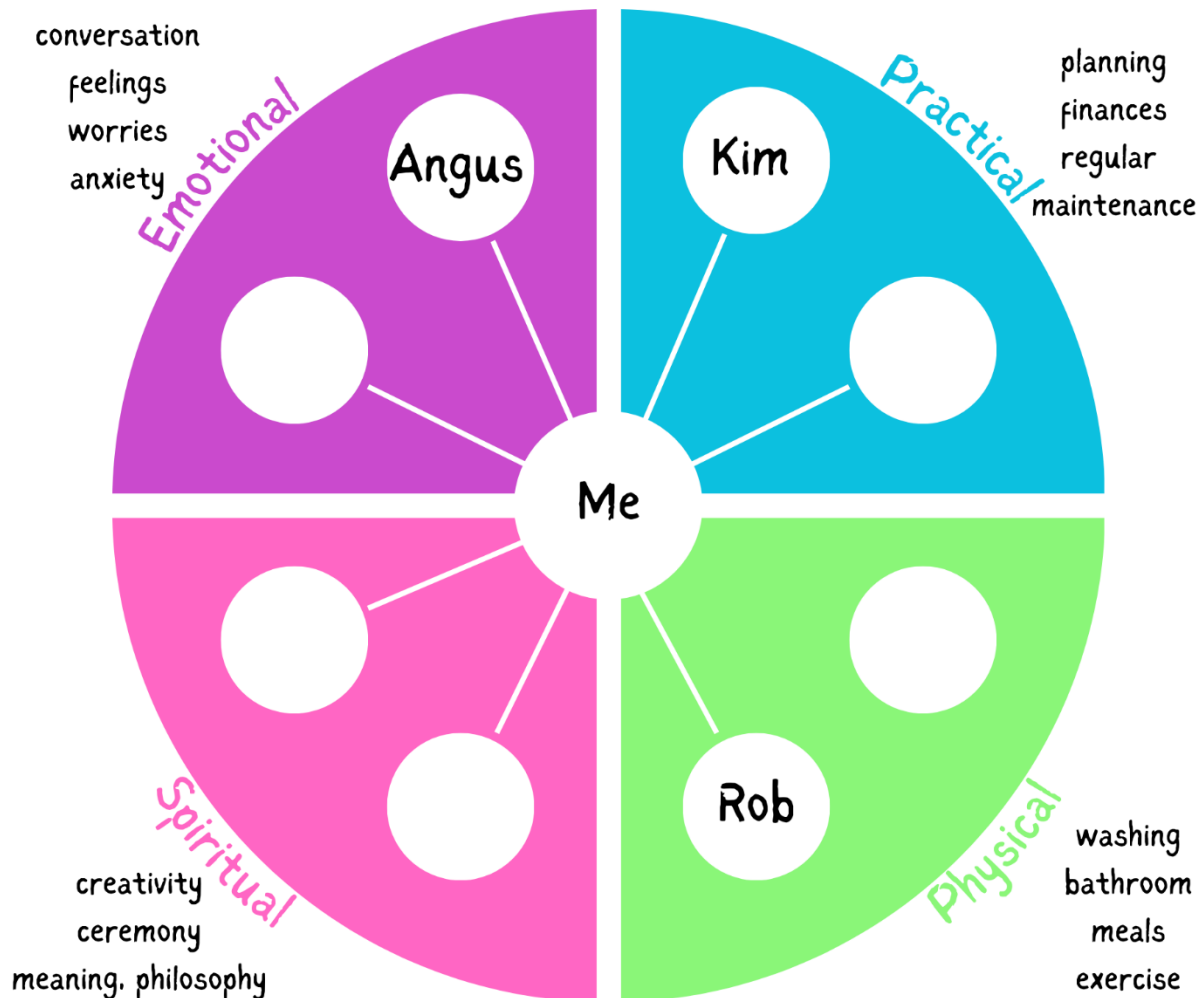
Support Wheel

You will need different kinds of support. Consider who you would want to support you in different ways. One person may support you in many ways or only one. Write the names down of people you think you'd like to support you. Reflect on your choices.



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Support Wheel example



Circles of Experience

Closing this Circle: Integrating Your Insight

Express your feelings and hopes for the participants.

Offer what support you can.

Suggest that this is an exercise to continue, and that participants will revisit ideas about their support circles many times.

Optional Creative Takeaway

Invite people to take their support map or rings home and decorate them over time — adding colour, texture, or symbols as they continue to reflect. Some might want to keep it private; others might use it to initiate conversations with loved ones.

Reflection or Sharing Option

You could invite people to turn their reflections to sharing with the group, turn to a partner or journal about these prompts. Sharing with the group is a good way to end so that we're reinforcing the circle as we are about to conclude.

Reflections for sharing:

- “Was there a surprise in who showed up in your rings or wheel?”
- “What surprised you about your wheel or rings?”
- “Did any gaps or strengths become clearer?”
- A reflection for leaving: ask people to write on their worksheets, “What’s one support you’d love to receive, but have never named out loud?” (can be shared aloud or written privately)