

Permission Circle Formation Guide

Creating Local Networks of Conscious Navigation

What Is a Permission Circle?

A Permission Circle is a small group (4-8 people) that meets regularly to practice the Four Permissions together - creating local support networks where families navigate cognitive change through conscious accompaniment rather than managing alone.

Permission Circles are **peer support groups, not therapy groups**. Members share experiences, practice the Four Permissions framework, and create community around conscious navigation. This is mutual accompaniment - everyone both gives and receives support.

Core Principles

Mutual Accompaniment: Everyone has something to offer and something to receive **No Expert**

Required: Lived experience and the Four Permissions framework provide the guidance

Confidentiality: What's shared in circle stays in circle **Choice in Sharing:** No pressure to share more than feels comfortable **Different Destinations:** Each family's journey is unique - no prescribed

outcomes **Support Not Solutions:** Listen deeply, avoid giving advice unless specifically requested

Who Can Form a Permission Circle?

- Families facing cognitive change (any stage)
- Friends supporting someone through cognitive transitions
- Healthcare workers seeking community around dignified care
- Community members interested in cultural transformation around aging
- Mixed groups combining different perspectives and experiences

You don't need to be an expert to facilitate a Permission Circle. The framework provides the structure, and shared experience creates the wisdom.

Getting Started: Your First Circle

Finding Your People (2-3 weeks)

Start with one other person who shares interest in conscious navigation through cognitive change. Permission Circles can begin with just two people and grow organically.

Invitation Approaches:

- Share your Four Permissions PDF with friends and see who resonates
- Post in local community centers, libraries, or faith communities
- Connect through healthcare providers who know about the framework
- Use social media community groups focused on caregiving or aging
- Ask: "I'm starting a small group for families facing cognitive change. We'd practice supportive approaches together rather than managing alone."

Sample Invitation Message: "I'm forming a small support circle for families navigating cognitive change using the Four Permissions framework - tools for honoring both loss and possibility. We'd meet [frequency] to share experiences and practice conscious accompaniment together. Interested in learning more?"

Initial Setup Meeting

Before Your First Circle:

- Review the Four Permissions framework together
- Establish meeting logistics (time, place, frequency)
- Discuss confidentiality agreements
- Set group size limits (4-8 people maximum)
- Agree on basic participation guidelines

Meeting Structure Templates

Opening (10 minutes)

Check-in Round: Each person shares briefly:

- How they're feeling today
- One thing they're grateful for
- Any immediate concerns or celebrations

Permission Reminder: Read aloud one of the Four Permissions (rotate each meeting)

Main Focus (40-50 minutes)

Choose one format per meeting:

Permission Practice Sessions

Alexandria Meeting: Share what you're grieving and what you're protecting **Abilene Meeting:** Identify false destinations you're refusing or being pressured toward **Ithaca Meeting:** Share moments of beauty, wonder, or meaningful connection from your week **Opening Door Meeting:** Celebrate unexpected capacities or emerging gifts you've noticed

Story Sharing

- Read portions of Betty's journey and discuss what resonates
- Share family stories that demonstrate the Four Permissions in action
- Practice "story medicine" - finding meaning within challenge

Practical Support

- Problem-solve specific challenges using "What would love do?" approach
- Share resources, referrals, or practical tips
- Plan group activities (meaningful place visits, creative expression)

Learning Together

- Explore one section of the Four Permissions framework in depth
- Watch videos or read articles about conscious approaches to cognitive change
- Invite guest speakers (healthcare providers, other families, Indigenous wisdom keepers)

Closing (10 minutes)

Commitment Round: Each person shares:

- One insight from today's circle
- One commitment to themselves for the coming week
- Appreciation for the group

Closing Words: "Different destinations are possible when we navigate together"

Meeting Frequency Options

Weekly: Intensive support during crisis periods or major transitions **Bi-weekly:** Sustainable long-term rhythm for ongoing accompaniment **Monthly:** Lighter connection for those wanting community without intensive commitment **Seasonal:** Quarterly gatherings for those needing occasional connection

Virtual Options: Video calls for those unable to meet in person, hybrid meetings combining in-person and virtual participants

Facilitation Guidelines

Rotating Facilitation

Each meeting, different member facilitates using these guidelines:

Facilitator's Role:

- Keep time and gently guide structure
- Ensure everyone who wants to share has opportunity
- Redirect if conversation becomes advice-giving rather than listening
- Hold space for difficult emotions without trying to fix
- Remind group of confidentiality and choice in sharing

Not the Facilitator's Role:

- Provide therapy or professional counseling
- Give medical advice or override healthcare recommendations
- Solve everyone's problems or have all the answers
- Carry emotional responsibility for other members

Difficult Moments Protocol

When Someone Is in Crisis:

- Listen without trying to fix
- Ask: "What would be most supportive right now?"
- Offer practical help (rides, meals, phone calls)
- Suggest professional resources if needed
- Follow up individually after the meeting

When Advice-Giving Dominates:

- Redirect: "Let's listen to understand rather than solve"
- Remind: "Each family's journey is unique"
- Ask: "What's it like to be heard without receiving suggestions?"

When Sharing Becomes Too Heavy:

- Acknowledge: "This sounds incredibly difficult"

- Redirect: "What's one small thing that could provide comfort today?"
- Offer: "Would you like us to just witness this with you?"

Virtual Circle Considerations

Technology Needs:

- Reliable video platform (Zoom, Teams, etc.)
- Written agreement on confidentiality even in virtual space
- Protocol for technical difficulties
- Option for phone-only participation

Virtual Engagement Strategies:

- Shorter meetings (45 minutes maximum)
- More structured sharing (time limits)
- Break into smaller breakout rooms for intimate sharing
- Use shared documents for group notes or resources

Resources for Your Circle

Essential Materials:

- Four Permissions framework (printed copies for each member)
- Copy of "The Squirrel Who Forgot" story for comfort during difficult meetings
- Basic facilitator rotation schedule
- Local resource list (healthcare providers, legal services, respite care)

Optional Enhancements:

- Betty's story excerpts for inspiration
- Place-based meeting options (parks, meaningful locations)
- Creative materials for art expression
- Journal prompts for individual reflection between meetings

Red Flags: When to Seek Professional Help

Permission Circles provide peer support, not professional intervention. Encourage members to seek additional help when:

- Safety concerns arise (for person with cognitive changes or caregiver)
- Depression or anxiety significantly impacts daily functioning
- Family conflict escalates beyond circle's capacity to support
- Substance use becomes coping mechanism
- Caregiver burnout reaches crisis levels
- Complex medical or legal decisions require professional guidance

Having a professional resource list ready helps circles support members in finding appropriate additional help.

Growing Your Circle

Natural Growth:

- Members invite friends who might benefit
- Split into two circles when group exceeds 8 people
- Connect with other Permission Circles for special events
- Partner with local organizations for awareness events

Community Building:

- Host information sessions about the Four Permissions approach
- Participate in caregiver fairs or community health events
- Connect with healthcare providers who might refer families
- Share success stories with permission from members

Sample Meeting Agendas

First Meeting Agenda

Opening (15 minutes)

- Introductions: name, why you're here, what you hope for from circle
- Review Four Permissions framework together
- Establish meeting agreements

Main Focus (30 minutes)

- Each person shares their current situation briefly
- Identify which Permission feels most relevant right now

- Discuss meeting logistics and preferences

Closing (15 minutes)

- Commitment to attend next meeting
- Exchange contact information
- Appreciate courage of showing up

Alexandria-Focused Meeting

Opening (10 minutes)

- Check-in round
- Read Alexandria permission aloud

Main Focus (40 minutes)

- Share: "What am I being invited to grieve right now?"
- Share: "What essential self needs my fierce protection?"
- Listen without giving advice
- Witness each other's courage in facing loss

Closing (10 minutes)

- One word describing how you feel after being witnessed
- Commitment to one act of self-preservation this week
- Closing appreciation

Practical Support Meeting

Opening (10 minutes)

- Check-in round focusing on practical challenges

Main Focus (40 minutes)

- Resource sharing (services, products, strategies that help)
- Problem-solving using "What would love do?" approach
- Plan group activities or mutual aid
- Calendar coordination for member support

Closing (10 minutes)

- Appreciation for practical wisdom shared
- Commitment to follow through on offered support
- Reminder that asking for help is brave

Sustaining Your Circle Long-Term

Preventing Burnout:

- Rotate facilitation responsibilities
- Take breaks when needed
- Celebrate small victories and milestones
- Remember that even "unsuccessful" meetings build connection

Maintaining Focus:

- Return regularly to Four Permissions framework
- Balance sharing with learning
- Include joy and creativity alongside challenge
- Remember different destinations are possible

Handling Changes:

- Members may leave when their situations change
- New members may join at natural transition points
- Circles may evolve in focus or intensity over time
- Some circles naturally conclude after serving their purpose

The Ripple Effect

Each Permission Circle creates ripples of cultural change. When families practice conscious navigation together, they model alternatives to isolation and predetermined decline. Healthcare providers notice calmer, more resourceful families. Communities see aging as opportunity for wisdom rather than burden.

Your circle joins a growing network of families worldwide who refuse to accept that cognitive change must mean the end of meaning, connection, and joy. Through mutual accompaniment, different destinations become not just possible but inevitable.

Remember: You don't need perfect knowledge to start. You need willingness to accompany each other through uncharted territory, guided by the Four Permissions and sustained by love that

recognizes each person's essential worth regardless of cognitive changes.

Different destinations are possible when we navigate together.

For additional support in forming your Permission Circle, visit accompaniment.ca or email [contact information]. We provide consultation for new circles and connection with the growing network of Permission Circles worldwide.