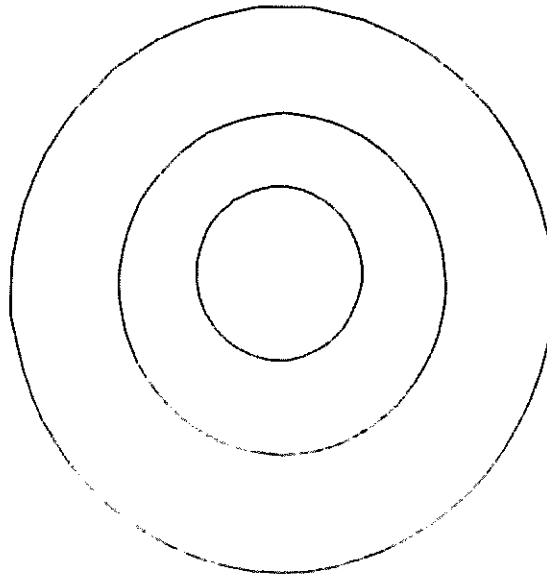


## Environmental Circles of Support (ECOS)

*The Environmental Circles of Support (ECOS) process builds on Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective and is a visual representation of a family's resources. It's a powerful strategy to learn about the family partner's network of support. You can discuss how they may surround themselves with positive, supportive people and to determine if they may need to access additional resources. Similar to the resource mapping process, all areas of life are observed, but this strategy is shorter and has a stronger evaluative nature in assessing the degree of supportiveness held by each life element.*

- In the innermost circle of the graphic, the family partner lists immediate family members based on how they define their family.
- In the middle circle, people from the informal circle of support are listed. This includes friends, extended family members, neighbors, etc.
- The outer circle is used to list professional service providers such as educational, human services, and health providers, and religious leaders etc.
- The family partner is then asked to determine whether each person is a positive or more negative part of his or her life. Supportive is seen as someone that acts supportive, that has good communication that feels empowering, helpful, or nurturing. Less positive and more negative is viewed as someone who is unsupportive, promotes dependency, acts controlling, and sends negative messages. The positive relationships have a solid line drawn between them and the parent, the negative relationships are signified by a broken line.
- Talk about who on the diagram might be a resource to support the parent and to help with family identified concerns or goals. The family may decide that new resources need to be found.



### ***Family Resource Map***

*The focus on family and not professionally identified needs and aspirations as the target of intervention recognizes the family's rightful role in deciding what is most important and in the best interest of the family unit and its members. (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988)*

To develop goals, we need to take a courageous look into the future. Setting goals is essentially a part of a visioning process. During stressful times, this needs to take place within a supportive environment. In the goal setting process with Head Start families, we are looking to build relationships and to share initiative with the family partner, using a whole family approach. One way to accomplish this is to develop a *Family Resource Map* jointly with the family at a family visit. *Family Resource Mapping* is a cooperative visioning tool. Its purpose is to involve the family directly and in a conversational way in developing a picture of their support and resource network within the larger family and community as a basis for ongoing partnerships.

*Family Resource Mapping* is empowering by sharing the action with the parent. It honors the use of practical language as one that is utilized by many of our families. Mapping utilizes visual processing, the mode preferred by most of our population.

*Family Resource Mapping* empowers families by giving them an active role in linking their various strengths and uncovering areas to be strengthened. It is practical, visual, and hands-on. It emphasizes the role of the Family Service as that of partner rather than expert. Families involved in this process walk away with a sense of their strengths, can identify each team player in the partnership process with program and community staff, and an awareness of areas to explore further. The mapping process leads to a Family Partnership Agreement including a plan with specific short and long term goals developed in partnership with Head Start staff. Families actually "see" the pieces as they fit into the puzzle.

The mapping process needs to be flexible in order to respect the family's wish for the degree of disclosure and to allow for true involvement by the family. The family and the staff member should feel free to be creative and vary the process to fit the family's individual desires.

- 1) The Staff member describes the purpose of the visit and the task. The purpose is to develop a picture of the family's supports and resources in the community. This process will help plan for maximum support from the home, Head Start and community for their child. A Family Partnership Agreement then is based on this information. A minimum of one parent and a maximum of all family members will be involved in the mapping. The staff member brings a large sheet of paper and various markers to the activity. Additional large paper and markers may be offered to children if they get distracted with the process.

One way to explain the purpose of the activity is to use the metaphor of a trip. Head Start is embarking on a trip of sorts with the Head Start child, and we want to arrive at the

same destination that the family has in mind for the child. This is best accomplished if we have the same map to get to that place.

It is often easiest to explain the process of mapping if we share the beginning of our own map or of another (anonymous) family. It is helpful to share a few challenges in that example as well to set the tone that *all* families experience challenges.

- 2) In the center of a large sheet of paper, the parent(s) with support of the staff member draw a (any) shape to represent their family. The family decides who is to be included in the family, most likely this will entail all who live in the household. Some families like to include pets. Neatness is not an object. Circles (or other shapes) could be arranged on the paper by geographic location and not by quality of interpersonal relationship to keep the process simpler and less threatening. Family members not living in the home are added as well.
- 3) At this point, two “parking lots” are drawn on the paper. These parking lots serve to park observations that are made during the mapping process. This way, important observations are not lost, yet we don’t get side-tracked from developing the map by getting “stuck” on discussing a particular emotional or emergent concern. One of the parking lots is placed in one corner of the paper, and the other is placed in another corner of the page. The parking lots may be labeled “Questions and Concerns” and “Things that are going well”.
- 4) Different shapes in different colors are then drawn for members of the extended family and others important to the family such as close friends, baby-sitters, etc. You may choose to write into each shape what the person does for the family or family member (i.e., fishing, transportation, etc.). Then, possibly using a different shape or color, add people or services with whom the family has a paid relationship, such as childcare, doctors, counselors, etc.
- 5) If not included in the previous step, community services that the family utilizes are included with another shape. These include garbage removal, sewer, water, gas, electricity, and other community services such as educational, health, transportation, nutritional and financial support programs. The staff member may need to suggest various services to be considered.
- 6) A different shape is chosen to draw additional places where family members go and things they like to do. This may include workplace, childcare, Head Start, church, library, grocery store, local clinic, dentist, guidance clinic, the pool, 4-H, Little League, Scouts, recreational activities, hobbies, and anything else not yet mentioned in previous steps.
- 7) The parents are asked to add any other sources of support that have not been included. As items are added to the map, the staff member makes nonjudgmental observations and encourages the family member to expand, explain and comment on the way that this

person, agency or service does or does not lend support to the family and thus to the child.

As a variation and if the parent wishes, lines between individual parts of the map can be drawn. These lines can express the quality of the link between the parts of the system. Some may choose thick lines to express strong support, or squiggles to express conflict. Dotted lines may indicate less influential connections between parts of the system, etc. It will become apparent that individual family members have different relationships to other parts of the family support network.

- 8) The staff member encourages the family to examine the entire system as the map becomes more complete. Areas of greatest strengths in the system are identified, as well as links that could be strengthened and areas that could be kept in mind for support. These are noted on the parking lots. Any goals or changes that family members are interested in are noted in rough draft on a corner of the map. The staff member will help the family to be as specific as possible both with the map and with goals.
- 9) Once the map is done, goals can be listed separately and formalized if desired. The staff member along with the family should guide the process toward a specific plan. Community support services, information and resources included or needed on the map can be explored.

The *Family Resource Map* can be the Family Partnership Agreement or part thereof. Goals can be translated onto a form after the mapping is completed. It details the goals set with and by the family and helps them understand family strengths and goals as they take ownership for their own growth. It also allows the staff member to be a partner with the family, by supporting family identified goals.

The resulting *Family Resource Map* may be updated and reviewed in future meetings with the family to make the process visible, to remain family guided and to help all team members recognize changes and to show progress. This activity may also lead to others helping the family examine various roles and interrelationships within the family system.

The *Family Resource Mapping* process in itself appears to be a motivator toward greater self-understanding and change for the family. It helps parents to reflect on and connect with their personal support network.

*Family Resource Maps* provide essential information for service planning, allow for active input for families, facilitate a helpful process for the family to examine their strengths, relationships with others, social support network, community services, etc. They guide the family through a problem-solving process complete with goals and a plan. They allow the staff member to help match up the family with program activities and to get an initial commitment to the latter.

Following is a list of the areas that could be included in developing a *Family Resource Map*. This list is an "internal" reference for staff, and should not be brought to a *Family Resource Mapping* session.

**SOCIAL NETWORK**

***Informal***

*Family / Household Members*  
*Family Routines*  
*Discipline*  
*Chores / Responsibilities*  
*Extended Family*  
*Adult Friends*  
*Children's Friends*  
*Supportive People (e.g. child care)*  
*Cultural Affiliations*

***FORMAL***

*Church*  
*Self-help Groups*  
*Family Programs*  
*Counseling Agencies*  
*F.A.S.T.*  
*Family Resource Center*  
*Coffee Meetings*

**SERVICES WE USE / PLACES WE GO**

**EDUCATION**

Child's School / Preschool  
Learning Activities at Home  
Reading  
Literacy  
PTA  
Programs for Children with Special Needs  
Head Start  
Parent Education / Classes  
GED / HSED  
Colleges  
Internet Services

**HEALTH RELATED**

Doctor / Clinic  
Dentist  
Mental Health Providers  
Insurance Agency  
Medicaid / Medicare Agency  
Nutritionist / Family Living Agent  
WIC / Food Share / Food Stamps  
Well Child Clinic  
Health Moms Healthy Kids  
Diet / Nutrition  
Immunizations

**HOUSING**

Bank  
Landlord  
Utility Companies  
Telephone Companies

**EMPLOYMENT / FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

Parental Employment  
Child Support  
Government Programs  
Bank  
Budgeting

**OTHER COMMUNITY RESOURCES / PLACES**

Grocery Store  
Department Store  
Youth Organizations / 4-H / Scouts  
Library

**THINGS WE DO**

Recreation Activities / Health Club / Bowling / Pool League, etc.  
Restaurants  
Community Activities  
Family Outings  
Remodeling  
Hobbies

## Questions and Prompts to Process the Family Resource Map

### *Sharing the Story:*

- ✓ *Tell me* about your map! (Use active listening)
- ✓ What do you notice about your map? What parts surprised you?
- ✓ Look at your map, how is it *different* than one year ago?
- ✓ What is on your map *a lot*? How does that feel?
- ✓ What is on your map just *a little*? What do you think about that?

### *The family's evaluation of the current situation:*

- ✓ What parts of your map do you *like*? (Marvel together, celebrate!)
- ✓ What are you *missing* on your map, are there parts you wished you had?
- ✓ Are there any "pieces" on your map that you *wished were not there*?

### *Observing strengths to be maintained and concerns to be addressed:*

- ✓ Review the "parking lot" with *things going well*, and talk about how these things help, and how you can use them.
- ✓ Review the *concern/barriers* "parking lot", how do they affect you?

### *Addressing family identified concerns using existing resources:*

- ✓ Pick one of these concerns and ask yourself:
  - Is anything *already on* your map that can help with this concern?
  - Could *remove or "contain"* a part of your map to help the concern?
  - Can you *add* something to your map or change something to address the concern?

Look at your map, what do you think will *change* in the near future? How so, and when? Think about changes ahead for your family, how would you change your map to be ready for these life changes?