

Circle of Control, Influence & Concern

The Circle of Control, Influence, and Concern is a cognitive and emotional regulation tool that supports perspective-taking and problem-solving. It encourages you to categorise aspects of a situation into three domains: direct control, direct and indirect influence, and external concerns that we can't control. Engaging in this reflective process can reduce stress, increase clarity, and promote more intentional responses rather than reactive ones, alongside the identification of values and boundary setting.

The completed circle on the following page gives examples of things that can lie within each of the three domains, and is a helpful point of reference for this reflective activity.

The below exercise is a simple yet powerful way to help you zoom out, gain clarity, and notice where your energy may be most helpful in a situation where you feel stuck. It encourages a shift in perspective—supporting you to see new possibilities, reduce overwhelm, and gently identify what you may be able to let go of within the identified situation.

Tip: complete this activity in an environment that feels comfortable, and allow your self 5-10 minutes to engage in the task fully.

Step 1: Notice and name what's worrying you or what you feel stressed/stuck on.

At the top of your blank circle (just outside it), write down the identified situation that is currently causing you to feel stressed, worried, angry—any discomforting emotion. Take a moment to check in with your body and emotions as you do this. Notice if your nervous system feels tense, activated, or shut down, and allow yourself a few breaths to settle.

Step 2: Fill in the Circle using the three rims.

1. **Circle of Control** (inner rim):
 - Reflect upon: What parts of this situation can I directly control?
 - Write these items in the inner rim.
2. **Circle of Influence** (middle rim):
 - Reflect upon: Is there anything I can influence—either directly or indirectly?
 - Write these items in the middle rim.
3. **Circle of Concern** (outer rim):
 - Reflect upon: What are the things that I cannot control or influence within this situation?
 - Write these items in the outer rim.

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Step 3: Reflect

- As you complete this exercise, it is not uncommon if some items shift between rims. You may realise that something you first believed was outside your control is actually influenceable—or you may see that something you've been trying to manage is better placed in the outer rim.
- Pause to check in with your body, thoughts, and emotions as you reflect. If you sense any activation, tension, or discomfort, take a moment to breathe and offer that part of you some gentle care.

Values

Once your circles feels complete, take a moment to look at the inner and middle rims through the lens of your values.

- What matters most to me in this situation?
- How do I want to show up here, based on my values rather than stress or fear?
- Which actions in my control or influence align with who I want to be?

Your values can guide you with what actions and direction you decide to take next.

Identify Boundaries

This exercise may also highlight places where boundaries could support your wellbeing.

- Are there actions or responsibilities in the outer rim that you've been trying to control or hold onto?
- Is there something, or someone, you may need to step back from or alternatively, move towards?
- What limits or expectations would protect your energy and align with your values?

Consider what boundaries may be helpful for you to set, communicate, or honour- either with others or within yourself.

Step 4: Keep it visible

Your circle can serve as a daily guide or reminder for where to focus your energy. Place it somewhere private, like in a journal, on the inside of a cupboard door/bedside table or take a photo of it with your phone.

Gentle reminder: This exercise is about noticing and naming, not judging. It isn't about fixing everything all at once, but about gaining clarity, reconnecting with what matters (our values), and understanding where your energy is best placed as you reflect upon what you can control, acknowledge what you can influence, and offer compassion to what lies outside your control.

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CIRCLE OF CONCERN

NATURAL DISASTERS

WEATHER

GLOBAL CRISES
(WAR, PANDEMICS)

BEING MADE
REDUNDANT

CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE

MY PRODUCTIVITY/RESULTS
AT WORK/SCHOOL

OTHER PEOPLE'S ACTIONS

NATIONAL DEBT

THE ECONOMY/
UNEMPLOYMENT

WHERE I WORK

CIRCLE OF CONTROL

OTHER PEOPLE'S
THOUGHTS

GOVERNMENT
POLICY

CYBER SECURITY

MY CHILDREN'S
FUTURE

WHO I VOTE FOR

SPORTS RESULTS

DEATH

MY COMMITMENTS

MY REPUTATION

THE MEDIA

TRAFFIC

OTHER PEOPLE'S CHOICES

MY RELATIONSHIP
WITH OTHERS

MY PAST DECISIONS/
CHOICES

WORLD PEACE

MY SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE

STRANGERS BEHAVIOURS

CELEBRITIES BEHAVIOURS
AND OPINIONS

STRANGERS COMMENTS ON
FORUMS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MYSELF

MY ATTITUDE / MINDSET
MY REACTIONS*
MY MOOD*
MY DECISIONS
MY WORK ETHIC
MY ACTIONS / BEHAVIOUR*
MY THOUGHTS*
MY WORDS
MY BOUNDARIES

* AT TIMES IT MAY FEEL LIKE WE DON'T HAVE CONTROL OVER THESE ELEMENTS, BUT WITH CONSISTENT SELF COMPASSION AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE NERVOUS SYSTEMS SURVIVAL RESPONSES, WE CAN LEARN TO HAVE GREATER CONTROL/CHOICE WITH OUR INTERNAL RESPONSES AND DEVELOP STRATEGIES TO REDUCE DYSREGULATION WHICH CAN LEAD TO FEELINGS OF LACK OF CONTROL

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CIRCLE OF CONTROL