NMAIMH competencies addressed

Theoretical Foundations
- Infant & young child development
- Infant/young child & family centered practice

Direct Service Skills
- Observation & listening
- Responding with empathy

Working with Others
- Building and maintaining relationships
- Empathy & compassion

Many individuals in New Mexico, representing various sectors of the early childhood service community, have participated in the Circle of Security™ trainings. This is an example of providing training across early childhood systems so that providers have a common understanding, language and vocabulary to use when working with children and families, and when collaborating with each other.

As home visitors working with families as part of the NM Home Visiting Program, we can incorporate concepts from the Circle of Security™ (COS) framework into our visits with families. To begin with, a foundational component of the model (which is also at the core of the NM Home Visiting Program) has to do with “being with.” As a home visitor, how you are with the families you work with is the bedrock of successful home visiting. We are figuratively holding families, much like the hands on the circle in the COS model. The hands are hands of support, safety, and nurturance. We become the “secure base” that caregivers can rely on and venture out from. In the same way that babies thrive from being held protectively, lovingly, and supportively, the parents we work with will become more confident and open to growth and development in their role as parents when we “hold them” by being predictable, trustworthy, and accepting.

This secure base helps trust to develop between the caregiver and home visitor. In the same way that a toddler is able to move away from a parent and explore her environment in a secure and confident manner, knowing that mom or dad is close at hand, parents are able to think about and reflect on their relationship with their child when they are figuratively “held” by the home visitor. When this happens the parent can venture out into uncharted waters, led by the home visitor. Talking about feelings or past experiences that can impact the parent-child relationship can be scary for some.
The “being with” offered by the home visitor includes being accepting and supportive. A nurturing approach to the work that focuses on parental strengths and commenting on what is working, helps to build trust. Within these safe hands, parents become more willing to take a closer look at themselves and their interactions with their child, and think about how they can grow and offer new positive opportunities to enhance their child’s growth.

The parallel process invites us to reflect on how these hands of support that we offer helps parents to “fill their bucket” and build their capacity to “hold” their child. Through providing a “secure base” to parents we also encourage the confidence to explore their relationship with their child. However, it is important to remember that this takes time. This is where consistency plays an important role. In the same way that a child learns to trust his parents because they are always there to comfort him, feed him, change his diaper, and take joy in his every accomplishment, parents must experience that same level of consistent, positive attention over time from the home visitor.

For those parents where trust might be an issue because of negative past experiences with other adults, or with their own parents (around attachment), the consistent “being with” and “holding” that the home visitor offers may be rejected at first. This can be confusing to the home visitor, especially when the same approach opened the door to trust fairly quickly with other parents. It is during these times that the home visitor can return to the safe hands of her supervisor during reflective supervision and get her cup filled. This will help the home visitor to be able to go back to that family, continue to offer safe, supportive hands, knowing that it may take more time for this parent to get to that place of trust.

The Circle of Security™ approach offers home visitors an overlay to home visiting that gets at the heart of relationship based practice. The hands that hold is the foundational metaphor on which everything else is built.

**Talking points for supervisors**

- Supervisors can ask home visitors, “What are the specific things that they do to become supportive hands for parents that helps them feel safe and supported?”
- For supervisors, prior to meeting with home visitors for reflective supervision sessions, visualize being those safe, nurturing hands found in the Circle of Security™ model in preparation for your reflective supervision session.
- For home visitors, use the same visualization technique before meeting with parents for a home visit. Take a moment in your car before your visit to close your eyes and visualize being those COS hands for the parent you are about to be with.

**References/Additional Resources**

Circle of Security™