

Building Your Support Network: A Comprehensive Worksheet

Introduction

A robust support network is essential for emotional well-being, resilience, and recovery—especially during challenging times like grief, illness, or major life transitions. This 4-page worksheet is designed to help you identify, visualize, and strengthen the various sources of support available to you, ensuring you have the resources you need to thrive. Whether you're recovering from a difficult situation, managing stress, or simply seeking to build a more balanced life, this guide offers a structured approach to mapping out your support system. Use it as a personal tool or share it with a trusted friend or therapist to deepen your connections and fill any gaps in your network.

Section 1: Mapping Your Support System

A strong support network includes people, professionals, and resources you can turn to for help. This section guides you through identifying and categorizing your support sources, starting with your closest connections and expanding outward.

Inner Circle

Your inner circle consists of the 3-5 people you trust most and can rely on for deep emotional support. These are your go-to individuals during crises or times of need.

- **Prompt:** List 3-5 people in your inner circle (e.g., close friends, family members, or a partner). Include their names, relationship to you, and contact information (if comfortable). Describe why they're trustworthy and how they've supported you in the past.
 - **Example:**
 - **Name:** Sarah Johnson
 - **Relationship:** Best friend
 - **Contact:** 555-123-4567, sarah.j@email.com
 - **Why Trustworthy:** She's always listened without judgment during my tough times and offered encouragement.
 - **Past Support:** Helped me through a breakup by checking in daily and inviting me for coffee.
 - **Tool:** Use a table or spreadsheet to organize this information, adding columns for frequency of contact (e.g., weekly, monthly) and specific strengths (e.g., empathetic listener, problem-solver).

Write down your inner circle, ensuring each entry includes at least one specific example of support they've provided. Reflect on how often you reach out to them and whether you

could deepen these connections.

Expanded Support

Beyond your inner circle, you likely have additional supportive individuals—neighbors, coworkers, members of spiritual communities, or acquaintances—who can offer different types of help. This section broadens your network.

- **Prompt:**List 5-10 people or groups in your expanded support network. Include their names, relationships, and how they can help (e.g., listening, offering practical advice, providing a distraction).
 - **Example:**
 - **Name:**Mike Thompson
 - **Relationship:** Coworker
 - **How They Can Help:** Offers practical advice on work-related stress and occasionally invites me to lunch for a distraction.
 - **Name:**Community Yoga Group
 - **Relationship:** Spiritual community member
 - **How They Can Help:** Provides a sense of belonging and a calming activity to reduce anxiety.
 - **Tool:** Create a categorization system (e.g., emotional support, practical help, social connection) to clarify each person's role. Use a checklist to track how often you engage with them and note any new connections you could pursue.

Write down your expanded support list, including at least two specific ways each person or group could assist you. Consider how often you interact with them and whether you could strengthen these relationships.

Professional Support

Professionals—therapists, counselors, doctors, or support group facilitators—offer specialized help for specific needs. This section helps you identify current or potential professionals in your network.

- **Prompt:**List 2-5 current or potential professionals in your support network. Include their names (if applicable), roles, and contact information. Note if you need to find someone new and list resources to assist with that search.
 - **Example:**
 - **Name:**Dr. Emily Carter
 - **Role:** Therapist
 - **Contact:** 555-789-0123, emily.carter@therapy.com
 - **Status:** Current—helping me with anxiety management.
 - **Name:**New Support Group Facilitator
 - **Role:** Potential—need someone for grief support.
 - **Resources for Search:** Psychology Today (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/>), local community centers, or referrals from my doctor.

- **Tool:** Use a professional support tracker to log appointments, progress, and any gaps (e.g., “Need a financial advisor for budgeting stress”). Include a plan for reaching out, such as scheduling a consultation or attending a support group meeting.

Write down your professional support list, noting any gaps or needs. If you’re unsure where to start, research local or online directories (e.g., therapist databases, hospital resources) and set a timeline (e.g., “Find a counselor within two weeks”).

Hotlines

Crisis hotlines provide immediate, confidential support for urgent needs like domestic violence, mental health crises, or substance abuse. This section ensures you have quick access to these critical resources.

- **Prompt:**List 2-3 relevant crisis hotlines, including their names, purposes, and contact information (phone numbers, websites, or apps).
 - **Example:**
 - **Name:**National Domestic Violence Hotline
 - **Purpose:** Support for domestic abuse survivors.
 - **Contact:** 1-800-799-7233, <https://www.thehotline.org/>
 - **Name:**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
 - **Purpose:** Support for suicidal thoughts or mental health crises.
 - **Contact:** 1-800-273-8255, <https://988lifeline.org/>
 - **Tool:** Keep a physical or digital card with hotline numbers in your wallet, phone, or near your workspace for easy access. Test calling a non-emergency line (if available) to familiarize yourself with the process.

Write down your hotline list, ensuring each entry includes a brief note on when you might use it (e.g., “For immediate emotional support during a crisis”). Reflect on any barriers (e.g., stigma, accessibility) and how you can overcome them.

Online Resources

Websites, forums, and online support groups offer additional support, often anonymously or asynchronously. This section helps you identify digital resources that align with your needs.

- **Prompt:**List 2-5 websites, forums, or online support groups you find helpful. Include their names, purposes, and URLs or access points.
 - **Example:**
 - **Name:**Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA)
 - **Purpose:** Resources and forums for anxiety and depression support.
 - **URL:** <https://adaa.org/>
 - **Name:**Reddit r/SuicideWatch
 - **Purpose:** Peer support for mental health crises.
 - **URL:** <https://www.reddit.com/r/SuicideWatch/>

- **Tool:** Use a bookmark folder or app (e.g., Pocket) to save these resources for easy access. Join one online group this week and note how it feels to engage.

Write down your online resources, including how often you use them and any new ones you'd like to explore. Consider setting a goal (e.g., "Check the ADA forum weekly for tips").

Section 2: Visualizing Your Support Circle

A visual representation can make your support network tangible and help you see gaps or strengths. Follow these steps to create your "Support Circle" diagram.

Instructions for Building Your Support Circle

1. **Draw a Base Circle:** On a separate sheet of paper or digitally (using tools like Canva or Microsoft Word), draw a large circle and write your name in the center.
2. **Innermost Ring:** Around your name, write the names of your "Inner Circle" from Section 1. Use smaller circles or ovals to represent each person, connecting them with lines to your central circle.
3. **Outer Rings:** In further rings, add people from your "Expanded Support" list, then professional resources, spacing them outward based on their level of closeness or frequency of contact.
4. **Connecting Lines:** Use lines of varying thickness to connect yourself to different resources—thicker lines for stronger, more reliable support, and thinner lines for less frequent or newer connections.
5. **Resource Lines:** To the side, draw small circles for hotlines and online resources, connecting them to your central circle with dotted lines to indicate their availability but less personal connection.
6. **Color Coding:** Use different colored pens or markers for different types of support (e.g., blue for emotional support, green for practical help, red for professional resources, yellow for crisis hotlines).

Tool: Use a digital tool like Lucidchart, MindMeister, or a simple drawing app to create a professional-looking diagram you can update easily. Print or save it for reference.

Example: Imagine a circle with "Alex" in the center, surrounded by "Sarah" (best friend, thick blue line for emotional support), "Mike" (coworker, thin green line for practical advice), "Dr. Carter" (therapist, thick red line for professional support), and a dotted yellow line to "National Suicide Prevention Lifeline" (1-800-273-8255).

Section 3: Reflecting and Expanding Your Network

Now that you've mapped your support system, reflect on its balance, gaps, and potential for growth.

Reflection Questions

- Does your support circle feel balanced or lacking in certain areas?

- Example: “I have strong emotional support from friends, but I lack professional help for my anxiety—I need to find a therapist.”
- Are there people you could reach out to more frequently?
 - Example: “I haven’t talked to my neighbor Jane in months, but she’s a great listener—I could invite her for coffee.”
- Are there gaps in the types of support you need, and how can you fill those gaps?
 - Example: “I need practical advice on budgeting—I could join a financial support group or ask a coworker for tips.”

Tool: Use a reflection journal to answer these questions weekly, tracking changes in your network and feelings of support. Set specific goals (e.g., “Call Sarah once a week” or “Research therapists by next month”).

Ideas for Expansion

- **Leave Blank Spaces:** In your visual, leave open circles or lines for new supporters you might discover (e.g., new friends, professionals, or online communities).
- **Set Reach-Out Goals:** Commit to contacting one new person or resource each month (e.g., join a local club, attend a support group).
- **Diversify Support Types:** If your network leans heavily on emotional support, seek practical or professional help (e.g., a financial planner, a doctor for physical health concerns).
- **Regular Updates:** Revisit your support circle quarterly to add, remove, or strengthen connections based on your evolving needs.

Tool: Use a support network app like Circle of Friends or create a shared Google Sheet with your inner circle to track interactions and updates collaboratively.

Additional Notes

- **Balance Is Key:** A healthy support network includes a mix of emotional, practical, professional, and crisis support. Don’t rely on one person or type—diversify to avoid burnout.
- **Confidentiality:** Be mindful of sharing sensitive information, especially with expanded or online supports. Set boundaries to protect your privacy.
- **Self-Care:** Building a network takes energy—prioritize rest, exercise, and hobbies to maintain your well-being while expanding connections.

Further Resources

- **Books:**
 - *The Human Network* by Matthew O. Jackson – Insights on building and maintaining social connections.
 - *Daring Greatly* by Brené Brown – Strategies for vulnerability and building trust in relationships.
- **Online:**

- **SupportGroups.com** (<https://www.supportgroups.com/>) – Directory of online and in-person support groups.
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)** (<https://www.nami.org/>) – Resources for mental health support and hotlines.
- **Apps:**
 - *Circle of Friends* – A tool to visualize and manage your support network.
 - *7 Cups* – Free online therapy and peer support for emotional well-being.
- **Hotline Directories:** Check 211.org for local crisis hotlines or visit MentalHealth.gov for national resources.

Final Thoughts

Building a strong support network is a journey, not a destination. This worksheet empowers you to map, reflect on, and expand your connections, ensuring you have the resources you need to navigate life's challenges. Start today by completing your support circle, reaching out to one person, or exploring a new resource. With consistent effort, your network can become a lifeline for well-being and growth.