

FUTURE FAMILIES AND FAMILIES OF CHOICE

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This lesson focuses on the experience of Black Men who have Sex with Men (BMSM) and the role that Families of Choice play in their own health and wellness. This includes considering developing Future Families. Participants will examine the role constructed Families of Choice play in health and wellness as well as consider positive attributes they wish to replicate in their Future Family.

Though not required, this lesson is best utilized in conjunction with the lesson “Families of Origin: Constructing a Genogram.”

KEYWORDS

Boundaries
Community
Mental Health
Relationship Styles
Relationships
Sexual/Relationship
Values
Social Supports

THEME

Family &
Relationships

FORMAT

Workshop

TIME

100 minutes





PREPARATION

The facilitator(s) should use this section to prepare for the lesson.

WHY THIS LESSON IS IMPORTANT FOR BLACK MEN

The intersectionality of racism and homophobia/biphobia presents unique challenges for Black Men who have Sex with Men (BMSM).

Social supports, specifically families, have been found to serve as protective buffers to these forms of oppression. However, researchers (Saleh, van den Berg, Chambers, & Operario, 2016) have found that the majority of BMSM report limited ability to depend on their families for emotional or material support. Indeed, the “participants revealed a pervasive sense of resignation regarding the willingness and capacity of family members to provide assistance, guidance or advice” (Saleh et al, 2016, p. 553). It is well documented that the limited support of family increases greater financial hardships and social discrimination, which have been associated with greater HIV risk (Ayala, Bingham, Kim, Wheeler, & Millett, 2012; Lauby, Marks, Bingham, Liu, Liau, Stueve, & Millett, 2012; Schneider, Michaels, & Bouris, 2012).

The need for examining Families of Choice and intentional Future Family construction is critical for the health and wellness of BMSM. Regardless of their context, constructed families are assets that should be capitalized upon for HIV prevention and overall health and wellness. This lesson will allow participants to both reflect upon the impact that their Family of Choice has on their health and wellness decisions coupled with considerations about constructing their Future Families.

GOALS

Participants will:

- Explore the impact that their Families of Choice have had upon their health and wellness decisions.
- Examine what positive attributes they would like to create in their Future Families.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

- Develop an eco-map of their Family of Choice.
- Verbally describe at least two positive dynamics of their Family of Choice presented in their eco-map, specifically in relation to themselves.
- Verbally describe at least two positive attributes that they wish to replicate in their Future Families.

TIME

STEPS 1-3	Introductions and Opening Activity	15 min.
STEPS 4-5	Introducing Eco-Maps	45 min.
STEP 6	Cultural Reflections Chat	30 min.
STEPS 7-9	Closing Activity	10 min.

REQUIRED BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE FOR EDUCATORS

Educators teaching this lesson should possess:

- A licensable mental health degree
- Five years of significant clinical experience
- Five years of significant teaching experience with adults
- Specific knowledge of:
 - » Family therapy dynamics
 - » Black culture
 - » Queer Culture
 - » Intersectionality
- Affect management skills in group settings

KEY TERMS

Eco-Map: a tool that identifies family resources using pictures. Areas of concern and strength are constructed to assist in crafting a picture of the family’s world. Information is drawn using circles as a snapshot in time. This includes natural familial and community resources.

Intersectionality: This refers to the ways in which race, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, religion, and other locations of social group membership impact lived experiences and social relations (*Harris & Bartlow, 2015*). Also refer to Kimberle Crenshaw’s Ted Talk: ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality

FACILITATION PREP

The facilitator(s) should complete the following tasks before the lesson starts:

- ❑ This lesson is the follow-up to the “Families of Origin” lesson, available on the SWAG Toolkit website. It is strongly recommended that you complete that lesson plan with your group prior to this one.
- ❑ This lesson includes a slide presentation, “Families of Choice: Constructing an Eco-Map” which can be found on the SWAG Toolkit website. Review the slides at least one day prior to the session to become familiar with its contents.
- ❑ Check your space 60 minutes in advance to ensure that a computer, projector, and projector screen are available, and that the presentation can be seen and navigated properly. If not, print out the presentation as a handout for each participant.
- ❑ If space allows, arrange chairs in a semi-circle facing the front of the room.
- ❑ This lesson includes an activity in which a volunteer is asked to share personal information about significant relationships in their life. Often, there are willing participants. If no one volunteers, consider showing this eco-map video instead: [youtube.com/watch?v=uMKfTcY9Eww](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMKfTcY9Eww). Be sure to have it cued up in advance, so that it is ready to play if necessary.
- ❑ If you created the Family Guidelines from the Families of Origin lesson plan, please re-hang the original sheet, or recreate the list on a new sheet of flip chart paper.

MATERIALS

The facilitator(s) should have the following materials for the lesson:

- ❑ Name tags
- ❑ Three balls of yarn—one red, one yellow, and one green
- ❑ Flip chart paper
- ❑ Markers
- ❑ Writing utensils (*one per participant*)
- ❑ “Families of Choice: Constructing an Eco-Map” slide presentation
- ❑ Computer
- ❑ LCD projector, screen, and connector cables

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

This lesson can be conducted in a variety of settings with a variety of participants. Ideally, two facilitators would be useful to the session, although one person can facilitate it just as effectively. *(Be sure to assess the qualifications of each facilitator, and provide enough discussion time in advance to cover sharing the training floor.)*

HANDOUTS

Each participant should be provided with the following printed materials:

- ❑ H1, “Eco-Map Worksheet”
- ❑ End-of-Session Evaluation

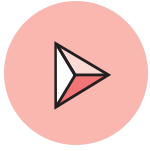
RESOURCES FOR FAMILY THERAPY DYNAMICS, INTERSECTIONALITY, BLACK & QUEER CULTURE

Books:

- McGoldrick, M. & Hardy, K. (2008). Re-visioning family therapy: Race, culture, and gender in clinical practice (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Minuchin, P., Colapinto, J., & Minuchin, S. (2007). Working with families of the poor (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Nichols, M. P., & Davis, S. D. (2017). Family therapy: Concepts and methods (11th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Sue, D. W. (2010). Microaggressions in everyday life: Race, gender and sexual orientation. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons.
- Carter, B., & McGoldrick, M. (1999). The expanded family life cycle. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. Chapter 1: Family Life Cycle.

Videos and Websites:

- Black Genealogy: Self Liberator & Therapeutic Tool, at [youtube.com/watch?v=sGapMcmmJew](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGapMcmmJew)
- Multicultural Family Institute, at multiculturalfamily.org
- The Urgency of Intersectionality, at [ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality](https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality)
- Ted Talk video playlists on LGBT, at [ted.com/topics/lgbt](https://www.ted.com/topics/lgbt)
- Sexual & Gender Diversity Genograms: A Tool to Transcend Hetero-, Cis-, and Mono-Normativity in Practice, at [slideshare.net/SpectraWorkshops/queer-genograms-workshop-poly-conf](https://www.slideshare.net/SpectraWorkshops/queer-genograms-workshop-poly-conf)



PROCEDURE

The facilitator(s) should follow the steps in this section to facilitate the session, and use the margin for notes and prompts.



Introductions and Opening Activity

STEP 1

Welcome participants to the session, and thank them for coming. Conduct brief introductions (name, pronouns) with the group as needed, or conduct an affective check-in, asking participants to briefly share what emotions they might be bringing with them to the session, and/or those they may need to let go before getting started. If they haven't yet, instruct each participant to make sure they have a nametag.

STEP 2

Optional :

Conduct a brief review of the Families of Origin session by asking participants to reflect on their previous experiences. Review any remaining questions, comments, or concerns participants have about the related Genogram activity.

STEP 3

Explain to participants that today's session will extend from previous content by encouraging them to think about other types of family—families that are chosen versus biologically created, and family structures that they wish to create, preserve, and nurture. If you completed the Families of Origin lesson prior to the present session, review the Family Guidelines established at that time and reconfirm commitment. *(If you did not create Family Guidelines, create them at this time, using the Community Agreements lesson plan, if necessary.)*



Introducing Eco-Maps

STEP 4

Distribute a copy of Handout H1, "Eco-Map Worksheet" to each participant, instructing them not to complete it until you have had a chance to explain and model the exercise. Explain to participants that it can be referenced throughout the following presentation and activity.



STEP 5

Open the slide presentation included with this lesson, Slides S1, “Families of Choice: Constructing an Eco-Map”. Proceed through the slides as follows:

**SLIDE 1** Title Slide

Introduce that participants will be constructing an eco-map of their Families of Choice today.

SLIDE 2 The Impact of Systems on Identity

Encourage participants to briefly think of all the aspects of their identity, and to consider that if broken down into different areas, one could likely be found in at least four different places:

1. Primary;
2. Secondary;
3. Organizational; and
4. Cultural.

Point out each of these circles on the slide and explain that each reflects both how people identify themselves and impacts how they present themselves to the world. As one example, explain that certain “Big D-Diversity Factors,” such as Race, Age, Religion, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Ability, etc., can be found in the Primary circle. Explain that the interactions of all of the spheres reveal the level of sophistication that all people embody on a daily basis.

Solicit any questions participants have about the circles before moving on.

SLIDE 3 Systems

Explain to participants that while much of our identity is defined by how we view ourselves, and the labels we give ourselves, much of it is also informed by our environment and the experiences we have with people, places, and things outside of ourselves. Explain that in our families, this includes four levels in our environment:

1. The Micro System (Immediate Family and Self);
2. The Mezzo System (Extended Family);
3. The Exo System (Community); and
4. The Macro System (Larger society and Culture).

Invite participants to provide examples of types of relationships that exist at each level. *(Be prepared to provide 2–3 examples if participants do not have any.)*

SLIDE 4 Family Systems Map

Explain to participants that, similar to the previous two slides, the particular “Systems Theory” on the present slide begins by looking at the Micro System, representing the daily interactions we have with our immediate family. Explain that these could include things like mealtime habits and/or entertainment rituals, communication patterns, etc.

Move to the Mezzo System by highlighting the role that our extended family (e.g., aunts/uncles, grandparents) can play in our lives.

Explain to participants that the Exo System reflects broader community influences, such as one’s neighborhood, social groups and organizations, or religious community. Encourage participants to consider how the Micro, Mezzo and Exo system levels can overlap in Families of Choice, based on our interactions with our communities and how important they are in our lives.

Point out the Macro System of the map, and ask for a show of hands among participants of those who know what it refers to. Solicit 1–2 responses before explaining that it represents broader, wide-reaching, even global impacts. Highlight the AIDS epidemic as one example of a global force that affects healthcare, economics, resource availability, insurance premiums, stigma, etc. Explain that one way to distinguish a Macro system factor is its ability to affect the other levels in the circle. Invite participants to share any other examples of Macro system factors that have the same or similar level of influence. Other examples you may wish to share if they are not offered include: Media, Government, Capitalism, etc.

Point out the lists “Vertical Stressors” and “Horizontal Stressors”. Explain that each represents stressors that impact the system levels, but do so in different ways. Note that ‘vertical stressors,’ impact all four Micro- to Macro-Systems in one moment in time (e.g. oppression, loss of community, family emotional incident, domestic violence, addiction-related incident, disabilities, etc.). Explain that, at the same time, ‘horizontal stressors’ impact all four systems consistently over some length of time (e.g. developmental transitions, untimely death, accidents, loss of job, war, generational poverty, natural disasters, etc.).”

SLIDE 5 A 3-D Eco-Map to Map Families of Choice

Explain to participants that the upcoming activity will allow one volunteer participant to create a 3-D eco-map to “map” their Families of Choice.

Read the description of Eco-Maps as written on the slide and **solicit** any questions. **Explain** that everyone will participate, but only one person’s map will be created. **Encourage** participants to consider whether or not they would want to volunteer as main participant later.

SLIDE 6 Eco-Map Factors

Explain to participants that all the lists on this slide represent various eco-map factors that can be included in the construction of a Family of Choice eco-map.

Solicit any questions participants may have about the concepts included.

SLIDE 7 Eco-Map Example

Present the eco-map example by highlighting the role the primary central circle plays as well as the role and size of the circles as they reflect the importance of external influences. In particular, **note** that the primary circle may reflect non-biological members, including romantic partners, sexual partners, friends, and community members. **Solicit** any questions participants may have.

SLIDE 8 Map Your Family of Choice!

Determine who the volunteer will be to be the main participant for the 3-D eco-map exercise. (*If you do not get anyone to volunteer, **play** the video on Eco-Maps discussed in the Facilitation Prep section of this lesson, and then move to Slide 10.*)

Remind participants that you will be asking them to discuss their Family of Choice to some degree in front of the other participants. **Solicit** verbal consent to ask questions before you proceed.

Once verbal consent has been attained, **request** that the volunteer share what they would describe as their Family of Choice. **Consider** using the questions below to prompt the volunteer:

1. “Who are some of the most important people in your current life?”
2. “Is there a romantic or married partner involved in this eco-map? If so, what role have they played in your life?”

3. “What resources do you find support you when you are most in need?”
4. “Can you think of a time when you needed a friend the most? Where might you place them in your eco-map?”
5. “What about ‘systems’ or ‘Exo-system community members’? What systems have played a role in your Family of Choice eco-map? Faith community? Extended family? Employment? Bartender? Social Worker? Physician?”

For each significant individual they name, **ask** them to select a fellow participant to represent that person or entity on their 3D eco-map. **Instruct** them to have that participant stand or sit in an area of the room in a way that reflects the relationship the volunteer has with that individual, agency, or group. As each individual is placed onto the map, **give** the volunteer a strand of colored yarn representing the type of relationship they believe they have with that individual, corresponding to the following relationship types:

- Red yarn = Stressful Relationships
- Green yarn = Strong Relationships
- Yellow yarn = Tenuous Relationships

Make sure the yarn is long enough to extend from the volunteer to the individual it represents. **Instruct** each participant to hold the yarn at opposite end from the volunteer, and continue holding it until all individuals within the volunteer’s eco-map have been placed.

SLIDE 9 Process

Once the volunteer has constructed their 3-D eco-map with fellow participants, **invite** participants to observe the map in entirety. After several seconds, **give** participants permission to return to their seats, and then **ask** the volunteer the following Discussion Questions:

1. “What was this like?”
2. “Are there areas of strength that you noticed in your Family of Choice?”
3. “Are there gaps that you noticed that you would like to fill?”
4. “Consider what kind of family you might like to create in the future, that is, your ‘Future Family’. What aspects of your Family of Choice would you like to replicate and/or nurture in your Future Family?”

After the volunteer has shared their thoughts, **open** discussion up to the larger group with the following Discussion Questions:

1. “What did you notice about areas of strengths in their Family of Choice?”
2. “Were their gaps you identified that they didn’t? If so, what were they?”

Close out this part of the activity by thanking the volunteer for their courage and willingness to share parts of their life. *(If you have created Community Agreements with the group, **use** this time to remind participants of any agreements related to observing confidentiality.)*

SLIDE 10 Now It's Your Turn!

Instruct participants to begin drawing their Family of Choice eco-map using the handouts they were given earlier. **Encourage** participants to use as much of their own knowledge of their family as they can. **Allow** participants 20 minutes to construct their eco-map. **Circulate** around the room as participants work, answering questions as they are raised, and keeping people on track as they get distracted.



STEP 6

Cultural Reflections Chat

After 20 minutes, **instruct** participants to stop and then reconvene the large group. Pose at least five of the following the following Discussion Questions:

1. “What was it like trying to complete the handout? What emotions, if any, came up for you?”
2. “Were there any Family of Choice patterns that surprised you? If so, what were they?”
3. “Were there any dynamics of your eco-map that you would consider positive?” (*__ participants to find at least two.*)
4. “Are there any relationships on your map you would like to change?” (*Another way you might wish to ask this question is “How differently would you like your eco-map to look in 5, 10, or 20 years?”*)
5. “Think about your eco-map and the messages each circle has taught you about how to be in the world. Can you identify any culturally-specific messages or patterns of strength that could have impacted you as a Black same-gender-loving man?”

6. “What impact might cultural messages or patterns from your eco-map have had on your sexual decision-making?”
7. “If you could replicate anything from your eco-map in your future family (e.g., future marriage partners, children, grandchildren, etc.), what would you continue, and why? What steps might you take to keep those dynamics going?”



Closing Activity

STEP 7

Ask if anyone has any outstanding questions about the lesson. Respond to these as necessary. Distribute a copy of the End-of-Session Evaluation to each participant. Allow participants 5–7 minutes to complete the evaluation, and collect them as they are completed. After five minutes, invite any participants who have not completed the evaluation to do so after the next activity.

STEP 8

Ask each participant to reflect upon their experience during this session. Have each participant check out by answering the following question:

- “What is one source of support from your Family of Choice that you choose to remember or will remember when dealing with hardships in this world?”

STEP 9

Once everyone has shared, thank participants again for participating, and then adjourn the session.



HANDOUT

ECO-MAP WORKSHEET

The eco-map helps to identify family resources at-a-glance. Areas of strength and concern are presented to assist in creating a picture of the family’s world. Information is gathered in circles. Eco-maps are a snapshot in time. Periodically update changes in connections to resources—especially natural familial and community resources to maximize usefulness of the tool. The list below helps spur questions and generate deeper discussion about resources and strengths during the initial visit.

Extended Family

- Who is in the area that can be a support for you
- What kind of relationship

Income

- Financial status
- Sources of income
- Budgeting

Friends

- Close—Supportive—Conflictive
- Where located
- What kind of contact - frequency

Recreation

- What do you do for fun
- What do you do for relaxation
- What would you like to do
- Interests and/or hobbies
- What have you done in the past

Religion/Spirituality

- Spirituality &/or religious affiliation growing up
- What kind of experiences did you have
- With what activities were you involved
- Current spiritual beliefs & religious affiliations

Medical/Health Care

- ALL family members: physical illness or disease
- Effects of chemical use
- What kind of insurance
- Effects of chemical use
- Access to medical care
- Psychological illness, disease

Social Services/Resources

- County or Tribal/Financial Services/Child Welfare
- Names of workers
- Neighborhood centers
- Agencies/counseling involved with in the past
- Positive or negative experiences

Work/School

- Employment—past/present
- What work are you interested in pursuing
- What type of skills, vocation
- Degree or school until what grade
- Positive or negative experiences

Neighborhood

- How long at present home
- What is your neighborhood like
- Do you feel safe in your home/neighborhood
- Where did you grow up, and what was it like

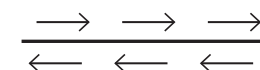
Identify significant people and fill in empty circles as needed. When showing connections, indicate their nature with a descriptive word or by drawing different kinds of lines:

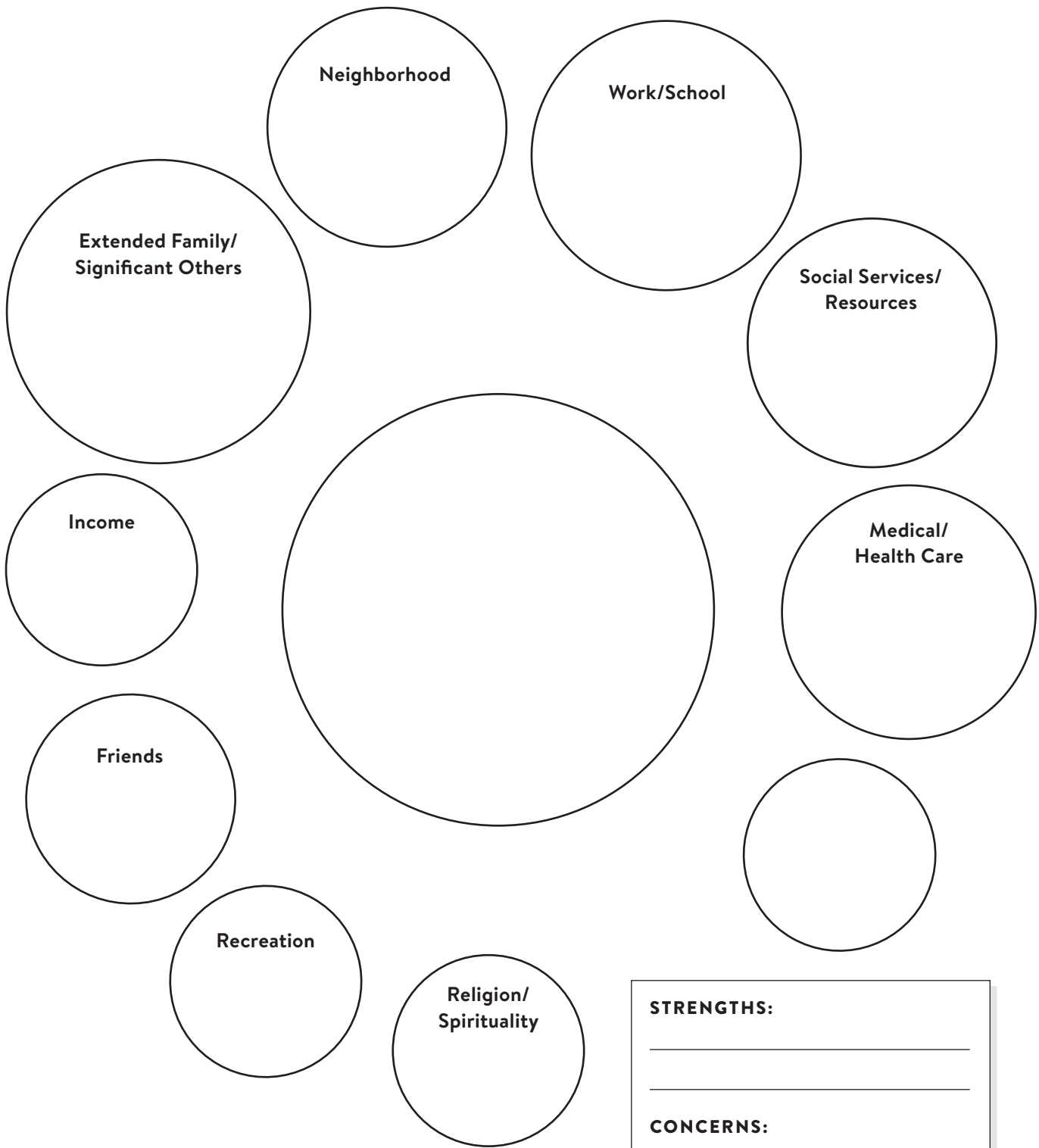
 **Strong connection**

 **Tenuous connection**

 **Stressful connection**

Draw arrows along the connections to signify the flow of energy and resources:





STRENGTHS:

CONCERNS:

