

Circle of Security® Classroom Approach

A Relationship-Focused Professional Learning Model for Inclusive Practice

Program Overview

The Circle of Security® Classroom (COSP-C) is an evidence-informed, relationship-based professional development program designed to enhance educators' capacity to support children's social, emotional, and learning outcomes. Rooted in attachment theory and enriched by contemporary research in neurodevelopment, trauma, and cultural responsiveness, COSP-C equips educators to interpret behaviour as communication of underlying needs and to respond in ways that foster security, co-regulation, and belonging. This approach is particularly relevant in inclusive early childhood settings where children present with diverse developmental, social, and cultural profiles.

Why It Matters

- For many children, early learning services are their first care experience outside the home.
- Secure relationships with educators predict positive school engagement, resilience, and wellbeing.
- For neurodivergent children, the attachment system is fully intact, though expressions of need may look different. COSP-C helps educators identify cues and miscues, supporting regulation, communication, and belonging.

Program Focus

COSP-C follows the full **eight-chapter Circle of Security® model**, adapted for educators:

1. Welcome to Circle of Security – educators as attachment figures.
2. Exploring Children's Needs – commitment and the Hands mantra: Strong, Kind, and Committed.
3. Being With – recognising invisible children and responding to underlying needs.
4. Being With Infants – introducing the Curriculum of Feelings.
5. Path to Secure Hands – cues, miscues, and reflective practice.
6. Exploring Struggles – Shark Music, mean, weak, gone, and classroom challenges.
7. Rupture and Repair – supporting resilience through repair.
8. Summary and Celebration – consolidating reflection, practice, and commitment.

Neurodevelopmental Differences (Autism and ADHD)

Within COSP-C, behaviours that may appear repetitive, highly focused, or unconventional are reframed as meaningful opportunities for connection. Educators are encouraged to recognise these as invitations for shared attention and engagement rather than problems to be corrected. The program supports educators to cultivate delight and reciprocity with children whose communication styles diverge from neurotypical norms, including neutral affect or reduced eye contact. COSP-C also broadens strategies for providing comfort, acknowledging that some children may find physical touch overwhelming and instead benefit from sensory tools, predictable routines, or music. By strengthening confidence in identifying cues and miscues, educators reduce the risk of misinterpretation, minimise escalation cycles, and enhance opportunities for co-regulation and secure relational bonds.

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Trauma Informed Practice

COSP-C aligns with trauma informed principles by emphasising reflective practice, emotional attunement, and relational repair. The program recognises that educators, like children, bring their own histories of attachment and adversity into the classroom, which can influence their availability to children. The concept of “Shark Music” provides a framework for educators to notice and regulate their own triggers, supporting them to remain emotionally available and consistent. Rupture and repair are positioned as central to resilience, offering educators a structured process for rebuilding trust when relationships are strained. This benefits children with trauma histories by providing experiences of safety and predictability, while also supporting educator wellbeing through normalising struggle and highlighting opportunities for growth.

Culturally Responsive Practice

COSP-C is delivered through reflective dialogue rather than prescriptive techniques, allowing educators to integrate universal attachment needs with the cultural contexts of their practice. The program acknowledges that while attachment is a human universal, expressions of caregiving and teaching are shaped by culture, values, and lived experience. By drawing on the “cultural iceberg” model, educators are supported to reflect on both explicit and implicit aspects of cultural practice that influence relationships. This stance is consistent with the Diversity Informed Tenets for Work with Infants, Children, and Families, and fosters equity, inclusion, and responsiveness. COSP-C creates space for educators to critically examine their own beliefs and biases, while affirming cultural strengths and wisdom within the classroom community.

Outcomes for Children

- Increased sense of security, belonging, and connection.
- Improved regulation, social competence, and independence.
- Reduced disruptive behaviours and escalations.
- Long-term protection against the effects of stress and adversity.

Outcomes for Educators

- Greater capacity to connect with children whose behaviours or communication differ.
- Expanded strategies for supporting neurodivergent learners.
- Enhanced reflective practice and relational awareness.
- Stronger professional community and shared language.
- Increased job satisfaction through authentic connection.