



3. Changing perspectives to achieve clarity and focus

How to clarify what you can do, and what you need to let go of, in order to manage anxiety

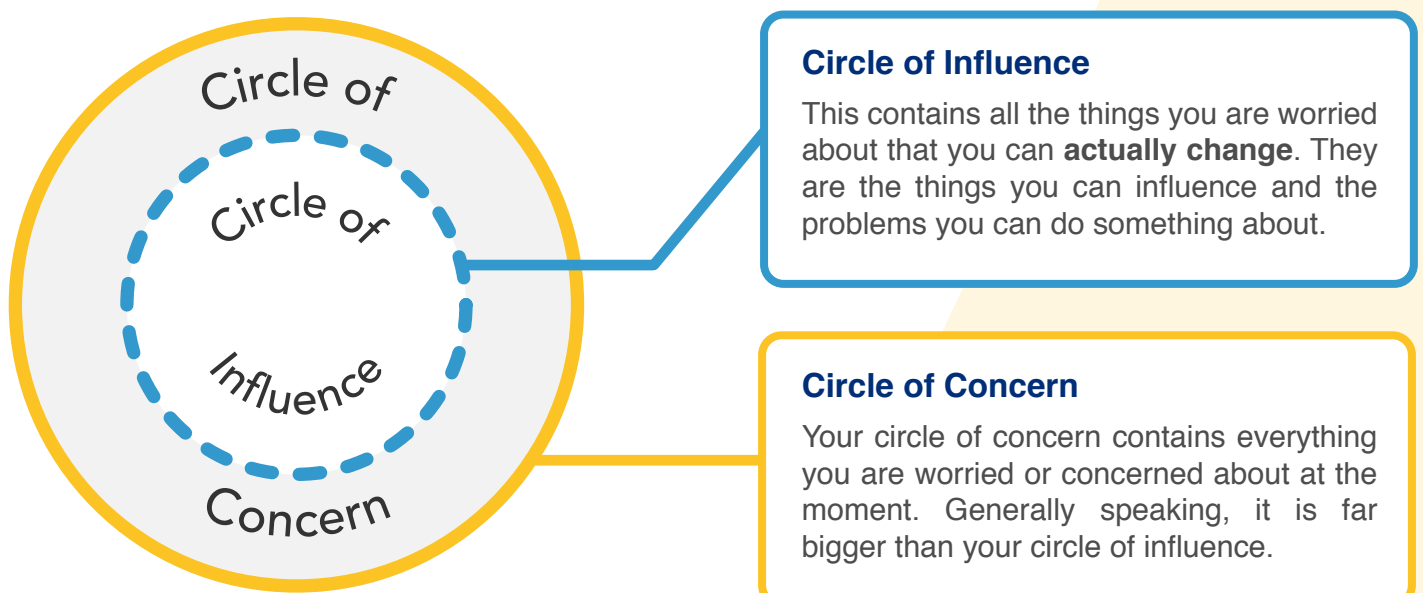
Stephen Covey first developed the concept of the **Circle of Influence** and **Circle of Concern** in his book, 'The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People'. He recognised that, as human beings, we have control over three things; what we think, what we say, and how we behave. And, to be honest, most of us struggle to control ourselves! Part of our life's mission could be seen as learning to understand and manage our own selves, so that we can better achieve the things that matter to us and to those around us.

Circles of Influence and Concern

The magic of this simple concept is that it helps us to **focus on the things we can do and influence**, which are within our ability to make a difference, increasing our sense of proactivity, agency and contribution. These are the things in our **circle of influence**; our friends, family, work colleagues and our daily tasks.

We have many other concerns and worries which actually sit in our **circle of concern**, once we stop and look at them through the lens of this tool. These are the things about other people that we can't "control", issues at work and even bigger picture concerns like the economy, Brexit (remember Brexit?!) and how soon this pandemic will be over.

Recognising that we can have very little influence over certain things, visually putting them into our circle of concern on this tool can **release anxiety, take a huge metaphorical weight off our shoulders, and give us more energy** to focus on the important things that we can influence, which sit in our circle of influence.

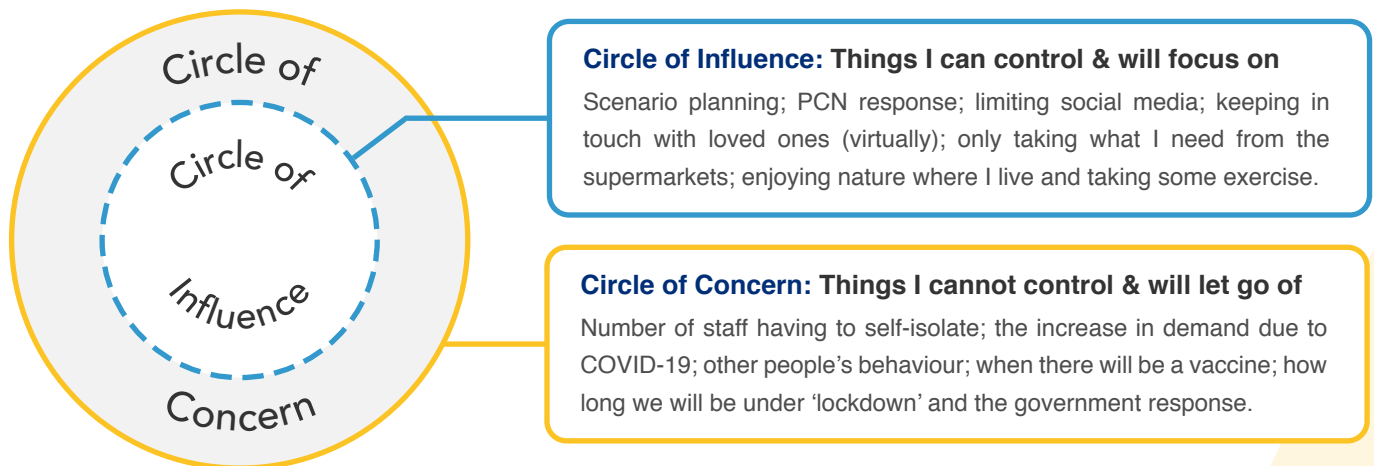




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Using this tool

Draw your own simple circle of influence and concern, like the one below, and then follow the steps below. To help you with this exercise, we have given an example of the things you could put in each circle.



- Take a moment to note the challenges and problems which are causing you concern at the moment. Where do they sit for you currently; in your circle of influence, or your circle of concern?
- Draw them into the tool and notice what effect they have on you currently.
- Are you holding them too close, when there really is little you can do directly to impact them? If so, move them further out into your outer circle of concern.
- Now choose one of the concerns that are currently in your circle of influence.
- Think about what you would like to be different about it and focus on what you can do.

Developing a considered, practical response to the most important things in your circle of influence will expand that circle metaphorically and help you to feel stronger and more proactive.

Another option: Concern & Influence Table

You can also look at it by charting your thoughts, as below, which works well to help with planning. It's the simplicity of the visual concept of the 2 circles tool which seems to work so well for people.

Challenge or Problem	Area: Circle of Concern or Influence	Initial Response	Considered Response
Possible ongoing staff sickness and absence	Originally Circle of Concern. Move to focus on Circle of Influence activities	Anxiety, lots of venting and catastrophising	Develop a collaborative plan of action for a sickness rota