

EXERCISE: MY CONTROL CIRCLE

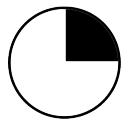
What This Exercise Is For

When you're living in a hoarded home, it's easy to feel powerless. You can't make your parents change. You can't magically clean the entire house. You can't fix everything that's wrong. And that's not your fault or your responsibility.

This exercise helps you see clearly what IS in your control so you can focus your energy where it actually matters—on the things you can change.

Time Needed

15-20 minutes



Energy Level

Medium



What You'll Need

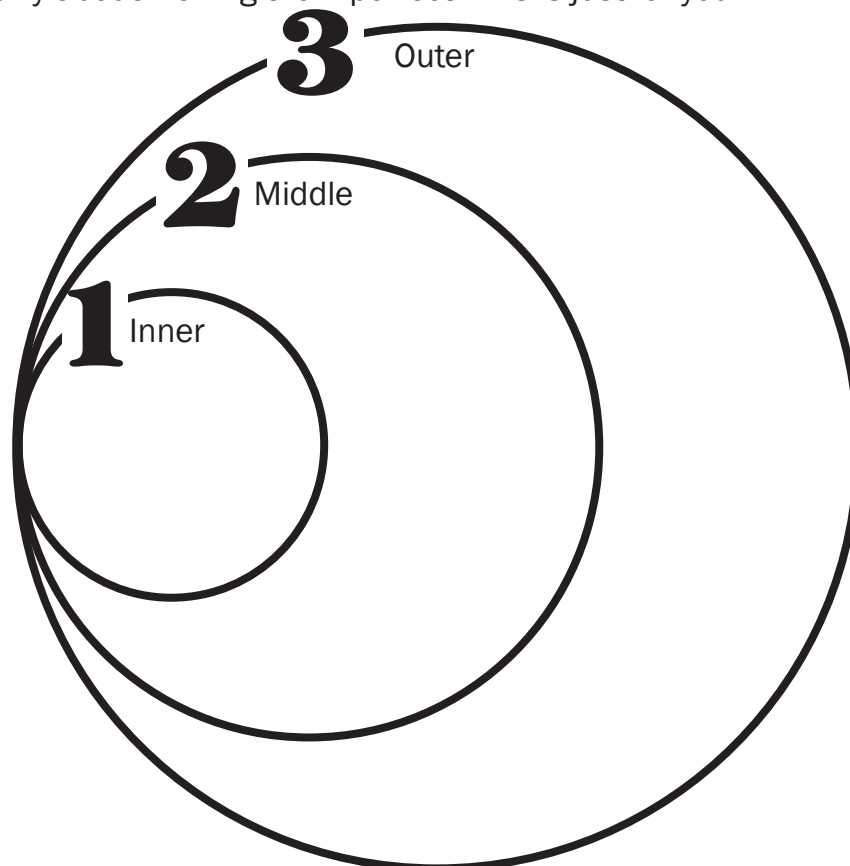
Paper and something to write with

How It Works

You're going to draw three circles, one inside the other. Each circle represents a different level of control in your life.

Step 1: Draw Your Circles

On your own paper, draw three circles, one inside the other, or print and use the circles below. Don't worry about making them perfect. This is just for you.



Step 2: Fill In CIRCLE 1 - Full Control

This is the inner circle—things you have FULL control over. These are choices only YOU make. No one else can stop you from doing these things (even if they make them harder).

Write in Circle 1: List 5-7 things YOU have full control over right now.

Examples to consider:

- My attitude and how I respond to situations
- Whether I keep my backpack organized
- What I do with my own trash (even if I have to dispose of it outside my home)
- How I treat my own belongings
- Whether I ask for help
- My personal hygiene routine
- What I choose to focus on
- How I spend time in my own room
- Whether I make my bed
- What I tell myself about my situation
- My goals and plans for the future
- Whether I save money (even small amounts)
- How I take care of my mental health
- Setting boundaries about my personal space

Note: Some items in Circle 1 may require creative solutions if your parent restricts certain activities (like throwing away trash or giving away belongings).

Step 3: Fill In CIRCLE 2 - Some Influence

This is the middle ring—things you can INFLUENCE but not fully control. These are things where your actions matter, but other people or circumstances also play a role. You can affect the outcome, but you can't guarantee it.

Write in Circle 2: List 5-7 things you have SOME influence over.

Examples to consider:

- How cluttered my bedroom gets (you can control your stuff, but you may not be able to control what others put there or what you're allowed to throw away)
- How calm or stressful home feels (you can manage your reactions, but not others' moods)
- Whether I can have friends over (you can ask and keep your space clean, but parents may say no)

- How much the kitchen gets cleaned (you can clean, but others might re-clutter)
- My relationship with family members (you control your behavior, not theirs)
- Whether homework gets done on time (you can try, but home chaos may affect this)
- Getting enough sleep (you can have a routine, but noise/stress may interfere)
- Whether I can use certain rooms or areas (you can clear space, but ultimate access may be blocked)
- Finding important items when I need them (you can organize, but others may move things)

Step 4: Fill In CIRCLE 3 - No Control

This is the outer ring—things you have NO control over. These are things that are completely outside your power to change right now. Accepting this isn't giving up—it's being realistic so you don't waste energy on things you can't fix.

Write in Circle 3: List 5-7 things you have NO control over right now.

Examples to consider:

- Whether my parent(s) stop hoarding
- Whether my parent(s) allow me to clean or declutter
- The overall state of the house
- How much clutter is in common areas
- My parent's mental health
- Whether my family has enough money
- What other people think about my home
- My family's willingness to get help
- Whether Child Protective Services gets involved
- The past and what's already happened
- When I'll be able to move out (age requirements, financial reality)
- Whether my parent(s) acknowledge there's a problem and/or seek help

Step 5: Reflect

Look at your three circles. Then answer these questions:

1. **Which circle do you spend the most mental energy on?** (Most people living in hard situations spend way too much energy on Circle 3, the things they can't control. That's exhausting and doesn't lead to change.)

2. **Are there things in Circle 1 that you have control over but face barriers to doing?** (For example, you control throwing away trash, but may need to find ways to do it that work around restrictions.)

3. **What's one thing from Circle 1 (full control) that you could focus on this week?**

4. **Is there anything you put in Circle 3 (no control) that actually belongs in Circle 2?** Sometimes we feel more powerless than we actually are. Double-check.

5. **What's one thing in Circle 3 you need to accept and let go of for now?** This doesn't mean you don't care. It means you're not going to drain yourself trying to control the uncontrollable.

Using Your Control Circle

- **Keep this somewhere you can see it when you're feeling overwhelmed or powerless.**
- **When you're stuck or frustrated, ask yourself:**
 - "Which circle is this in?"
 - "Am I spending energy on something I can't control?"
 - "What's ONE thing from my inner circle I could do right now?"
- **Update it as things change.** As you get older, more things will move from Circle 3 to Circle 2, and eventually to Circle 1. When you're 18 and can move out, a LOT shifts. That's a good thing!

Accessibility Considerations

This exercise involves drawing circles and writing lists. If you have fine motor difficulties, you can: use voice-to-text to create lists instead of drawing, have someone else draw the circles while you direct them, or simply think through the categories without writing anything down. If you have cognitive or executive function challenges, you might work through this with a helper who can ask you the questions and sort items into circles with you. The goal is understanding what you can and can't control—however you get there is fine.

Important Reminders

- **You are not responsible for fixing the hoarding.** That's in Circle 3.
- **Focusing on Circle 1 isn't selfish.** It's survival and self-preservation.
- **Some influence (Circle 2) is still worth effort;** just don't expect guaranteed results.
- **Accepting Circle 3 doesn't mean you don't care.** It means you're choosing to put your energy where it can actually make a difference.

Real Talk

Living in a situation where so much is outside your control is incredibly hard. It's unfair. You didn't choose this. And acknowledging what you CAN'T control doesn't fix that unfairness.

But here's what it does: it helps you stop beating yourself up for not being able to fix everything. It helps you see that you DO have power, even if it's limited right now. And it helps you survive until you have more control over your circumstances.

You're doing the best you can with what you've got. **That's enough.**