Ecomaps Practice Guide

Practice Guidance Aim

The aim of the guidance is to ensure that everyone understands what an Ecomap is; why we use them, and when and how to complete them and how they are different to a genogram.

What is an Ecomap?

In our work with children and families Ecomap is a tool that we can use to show the relationships of an individual on a personal and social level; it helps to understand all the systems at play in an individual's life. An Ecomap differs from a genogram which is a visual picture of the family and shows the child or young person's network; however, it differs from an Ecomap in that it does not include support networks from outside of the family.

Ecomaps give a very detailed picture of:

- o Family dynamics
- o Important relationships for the child or adult
- o The support network that is in place
- o Where the gaps in support are

Completing an Ecomap can be seen as an 'intervention' in its own right. It is a strength based, person centered piece of work that can be done in direct work with children, young people and adults. It helps to build relationships between practitioners and individuals as it promotes working together through discussion and exploration to identify current support in place and the strength of those existing relationships. It can be used across all of our services in all areas of our work and is not a social work specific tool

As a visual tool it can help practitioners, children, young people, parents/carer's to see who they can go to for help and support and also promotes discussions around family's and other important people to help you, the practitioner to have a better understanding of children and young people's lived experiences and why someone is important to them. This assists us as practitioners with our early planning and interventions especially where there is limited support.

An Ecomap can be of particular benefit when working with young people as it helps them to work out the type of support they want and need. Sometimes young people may feel alone but this tool can help them to understand who is already around them.

It also assists the young person to identify where they don't have the support they need and help you as a practitioner to look at where the support is lacking in order to strengthen this.

How to complete an Ecomap

Practitioners can complete an Ecomap following discussions with individuals, however, it is a really powerful tool to use directly with individuals and ask them to draw it.
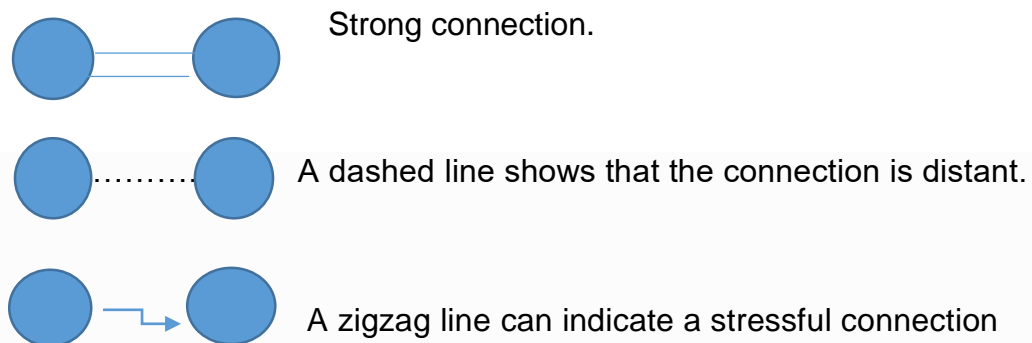
Ecomaps can be quite simple, especially if you are doing this with a child or young person.

The person who is the focus of the ecomap goes inside a large circle at the centre of the chart. Smaller circles around the middle circle represent different relationships, groups, orgnaisations and other relevant factors in the individual's life.

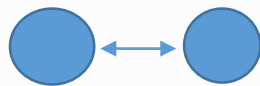Information often put on an ecomap can include:

- o Extended Family Members
- o Friends
- o Sources of income and financial status
- o Medical and health care information
- o Employment details
- o School
- o Religious affiliations
- o Services involved
- o Recreation interest and hobbies
- o Neighbourhood details

Lines connect the smaller circles to the centre circle. The type of line provides information about the connection. For example, a double line shows that there is a strong positive connection between the two.

Strong connection.

A dashed line shows that the connection is distant.

A zigzag line can indicate a stressful connection

The thickness of the line can be used to show the intensity of the relationship.

Arrows at the end of the line show which way the influence goes. If a relationship is mutually positive and strong the line has an arrow on both ends. If the influence flows only one way, the arrow is on one end. For example, if the person receives a service like health or social care, the arrow would only point to the person in the middle as this is not a reciprocal arrangement.
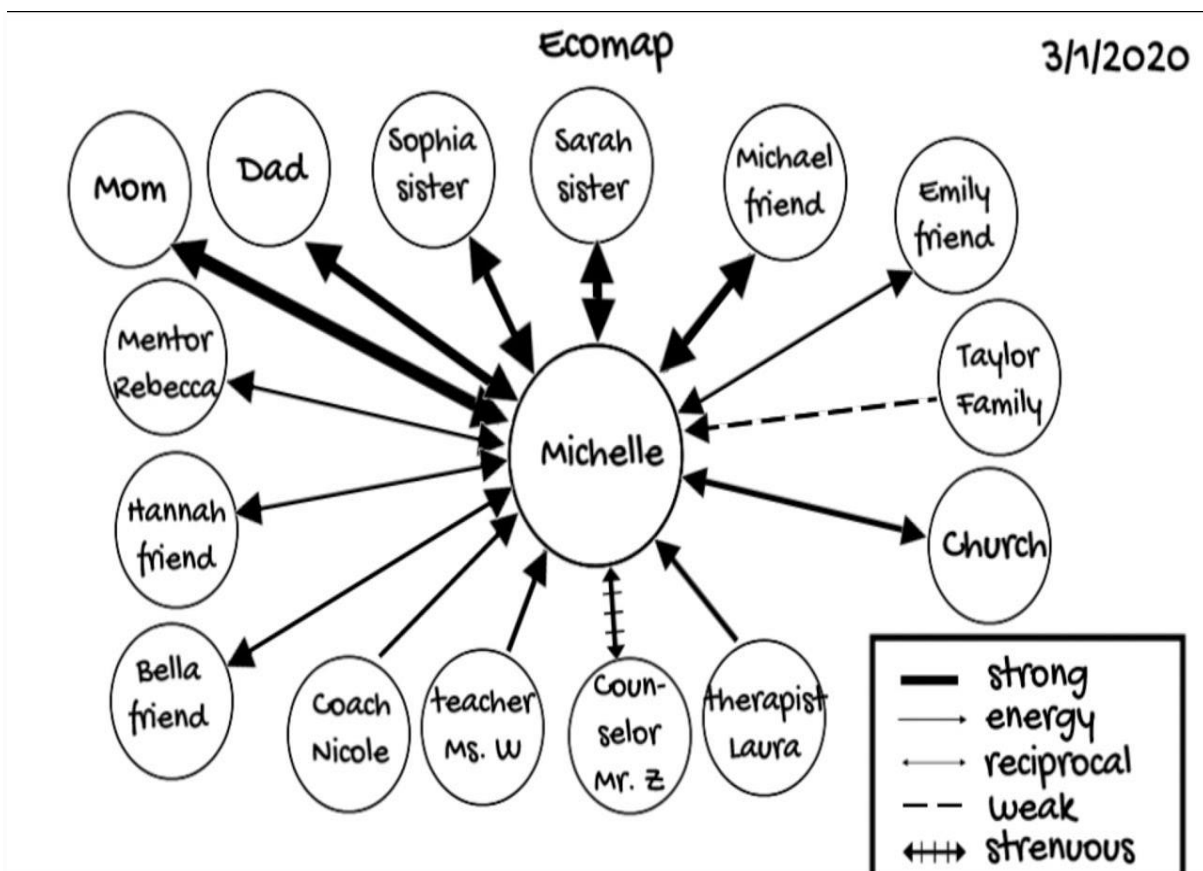
Mutually strong relationship

The individual is receiving a service.

As situations are fluid and do not stay the same, ecomaps can be updated to reflect the current situation, especially if there has been some time since the last one was completed.

An example of an ecomap:

Appendix 1: Ecomap Template