



# Selected Papers of William L. White

[www.williamwhitepapers.com](http://www.williamwhitepapers.com)

Collected papers, interviews, video presentations, photos, and archival documents on the history of addiction treatment and recovery in America.

**Citation:** White, W. (2009). The social network diagram. Posted at [www.williamwhitepapers.com](http://www.williamwhitepapers.com)

## The Social Network Diagram

**William L. White**

Emeritus Senior Research Consultant

Chestnut Health Systems

[bwhite@chestnut.org](mailto:bwhite@chestnut.org)

Another helpful assessment technique is to have clients diagram their social network and then assess the extent to which this network supports continued addiction or recovery. Using the instrument on the following page, ask clients to place in each of the twenty-five circles the name of a person outside the family with whom they have frequent contact. Then ask them to identify those persons in the diagram who will support their continued addiction by using with them, providing them alcohol/drugs, bailing them out of trouble, etc. These persons are indicated by placing a minus sign beside the circle with their name in it. Then ask the client to place a plus sign beside the circles containing the names of those persons who will be most supportive of their recovery. With culturally enmeshed clients, nearly all the network is marked with minus signs. The comparison of minus and plus scores provides both good assessment data, a powerful visual message to the client on the forces (people) promoting either continued addiction or recovery, and an excellent entry point for the probation officer or counselor to begin discussing reconstruction of the client's social world.

An extension of the above process can be utilized with adolescents by presenting the diagram as a game of conflicting forces. The additional steps are added to the above.

1. Pick out up to five persons whom you see very frequently and who have been very important to you. Place the number 5 beside each of their circles.
2. Place the number 2 beside all other circles.
3. Add up the numbers on all the minus circles to get a total score.
4. Add up the numbers on all the plus circles to get a total score.

The side with the highest numerical score wins. It is explained that this game is played for exceptionally high stakes. The clients are given the assignment of identifying and comparing the prizes offered by each side. One-to-one sessions explore what the adolescent can do to change the score and by so doing tip the scales toward continued addiction or recovery. The message is that the outcome of the real life version of this game is a result of choices and decisions over which the individual has control.

**Adapted From: White, W. (1996). *Pathways from the Culture of Addiction to the Culture of Recovery: A Travel Guide for Addiction Professionals* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Center City, MN: Hazelden.**

Social Network Diagram

