



# **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION**

**WELCOME TO PILOT TESTING SIBLING CIRCLES:** a privacy-preserving, local peer-discovery app for the daughters and sons of absent mums and dads  
Please take a few minutes to read the following information carefully and contact us if you have any questions.

## **Invitation**

If your mother or father passed early, or if they were absent for other reasons (before you were 21), we need your help to test an early-stage app, (a minimum viable product) to encourage a local peer support provision. Its purpose is to create safe, local connections and strengthen community around experiences of early parent loss or absence. The app is privacy-preserving and is designed to allow you to anonymously make connections with the people around you who share the same experience. We only have a limited time period to test this prototype so we need all eligible participants to jump on the app at the same time in March, connect with each other and tell us what they think!

## **Background**

Sibling Circles is a social start up on a mission to create local networks around early parent loss or absence. The founder's mother died when she was 13 and her father when she was 23. Studies have shown that around one in 20 young people lose a parent before they're 16 and up to one in four experience parental absence for other reasons. We know it isn't something to hide – it's something to share with the people around who get it.

## **What can I expect on the app?**

The core function is local peer discovery; via a privacy-preserving, avatar-based map, you'll be able to find the people around you who share exactly the same experience. You can then connect and chat with them and access other features.

## **What's the purpose of this study?**

Our aim is to obtain proof of concept for the app, as well as to test its features so we can refine it. Our greater aim is to combat the isolation and the impacts around these experiences, so in the future we'll also signpost to resources, social events, and mentoring services currently being developed with our project partners.

## **Who can take part and can I pull out?**

If you're over 18 and your mum or dad passed before you were 21, or if they were absent, when you were growing up, you're invited to take part. This is a closed pilot and we may

ask you to provide additional information to maintain safeguarding protocols. Choosing to take part or not take part will have no effect on any student assessments or marks. Your participation is voluntary, confidential and anonymous and you can withdraw from testing it at any time without giving a reason, even after providing your consent.

### **What does taking part involve and when?**

Try out the app and complete a 2 minute form in the time frames below.

#### **PHASE 1. TEST THE APP:** Mid March to end of March, 2026 (or onwards)

Receive a link and download the app. Chose an icon and create a quick anonymous profile (2 minutes). Look for the people who share your experience or similar, make a few connections with each other and test the app's features. Please jump on the app a few times during this three-week phase to allow time for more people to join in. If there's anything that's broken or needs urgent improvement please put it in the feedback box.

#### **PHASE 2. 5 MINUTE SURVEY ONLINE:** end of March, 2026

Take five minutes to complete an anonymous survey online asking what you liked, didn't like and for any suggested improvements. You can preview the questions [here](#). We'll send you a live link to it later in March.

#### **OPTIONAL FOCUS GROUP** Later date to be confirmed

If you'd like to give us more feedback and meet your peers you can also take part in a 45-minute, informal focus group at City's Clerkenwell Campus and/or online. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained. Please indicate your interest in the consent and sign up form.

### **What will happen to the results?**

This study will form part of the researcher's final year dissertation. If you'd like to receive a summary of her study, please indicate this in the consent and sign up form.

### **Possible benefits to you**

This is an opportunity to find the people around you who could potentially become life-long, loyal friends! You'll also be helping to co-design a product which can help younger users and has the potential to strengthen local networks on the ground. Your feedback will also help us obtain funding so we can develop this product fully.

## **Considerations before taking part**

### Safeguarding, Social and Ethical Considerations

We want everyone to have a great experience and that means keeping things safe for everybody. This is a small, closed pilot and is not available to users who are not vetted.

We only recruit users over 18 via admin approval and we implement privacy-by-design on the app (minimal data collection, encryption, anonymisation and privacy-preserving location). We also operate a reporting system and escalation protocol to mitigate potential misuse. The app also provides community guidelines promoting kindness and inclusion, operates a safe meeting policy encouraging real-life meetups in secure environments and provides a feedback loop. This helps us make sure everyone is supported and looked after.

### Privacy, Anonymity and Confidentiality

This product will not be open to the public and will only be accessible to the research team and eligible participants. To take part you'll be asked to provide your name and contact details. This information will not be shared on the app. You'll also be asked to provide some limited, but sensitive information concerning your age at parent loss or parental absence. These questions can be previewed in the Sign Up form, below.

These records will be stored on an encrypted device and kept for two years until June 2028 before before destroyed. We keep this information so we can contact you with the results or invite you to take part in further research. You can withdraw this data at anytime prior to June 2028. While user testing the app any data collected will be anonymised. Anonymous data may not be withdrawn. Your participation is confidential and anonymous and no personal identifiable information will be disclosed or recorded in the study itself.

### Data privacy statement

Sibling Circles, based in the United Kingdom, is the data controller of this study. This means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. The legal basis under which your data will be processed is our public task.

To safeguard your rights, we will collect the minimum personally identifiable information possible to ensure you are eligible to take part. You can find out more about how we handle your data and your rights under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) by visiting: <https://siblingcircles.com/privacy>

The only people who will have access to your identifiable information will be the members of the research team. There may also be occasions when regulatory authorities may access research data in accordance with their statutory powers.

If you are concerned about how we have processed your personal data, you can contact the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) directly here: <https://ico.org.uk/>.

By email: [casework@ico.org.uk](mailto:casework@ico.org.uk)

By phone: 0303 123 1113

## **Who has reviewed the study?**

This study has been approved by City St George's, University of London (Clerkenwell and Moorgate Campuses) Computer Science Research Ethics Committee.

## **Further information and contact details**

If you have any problems, concerns, or questions about this study, speak to a member of the research team, using the details below.

Principle Researcher: Mariyah Memon [Mariyahbanu.Memon@citystgeorges.ac.uk](mailto:Mariyahbanu.Memon@citystgeorges.ac.uk)

Supervisor: Artur Garcez [A.GARCEZ@citystgeorges.ac.uk](mailto:A.GARCEZ@citystgeorges.ac.uk)

If you wish to complain formally, use the details below informing them that the name of the project is Sibling Circles.

Research Governance, Ethics, and Integrity Manager  
Research & Innovation Directorate  
City St George's, University of London Northampton Square London,  
EC1V 0HB Email: [senaterec@city.ac.uk](mailto:senaterec@city.ac.uk)

## **Insurance**

City St George's, University London holds insurance policies which apply to this study, subject to the terms and conditions of the policy. If you feel you have been harmed or injured by taking part in this study you may be eligible to claim compensation. This does not affect your legal rights to seek compensation.

## **Support organisations which maybe helpful**

- EACES: for estranged and care experienced students [www.instagram.com/eaces](http://www.instagram.com/eaces)
- Stand Alone; supporting estranged adults, [www.standalone.org.uk](http://www.standalone.org.uk)
- Breakaway; supporting estranged adult children, <https://breakaway.org.uk>
- Lads Need Dads; supporting the sons of absent fathers with male role models, <https://ladsneeddads.org>
- Sister System; a north London charity for care affected women and girls (13-24), [sistersystem.org](http://sistersystem.org)
- National Youth Advocacy Service; supporting care leavers, [www.nyas.net](http://www.nyas.net)
- The Sisterhood for Early Motherloss; supporting families in north London affected by early motherloss, [sisterhoodearlymotherloss.co.uk](http://sisterhoodearlymotherloss.co.uk)
- Winston's Wish; online grief support for young people, [www.winstonswish.org](http://www.winstonswish.org)
- Grief Encounter Helpline; 0808 801 0111
- Young Minds; a mental health charity for young people, [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)