

Circle Time



“Circle time is a space within the school curriculum into which a person comes with unconditional acceptance.

It is not the place for judgment or coercion.

It provides an opportunity to learn and explore through the discussion of experiences and individuality.”

(Barbara Maines)

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CIRCLE TIME INSET

Introduction

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Context / purpose

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Start Up Activities

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Format / Ground rules

~

Non-threatening games

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Rounds - non-threatening / more 'personal'

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Open floor (Questions)

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Conclude / Sum up / Celebrate

~

Ending activity

The aim of the session is:

To equip class teachers with a range of practical ideas to enhance successful circle time sessions in their own classes, based on theory and experience.

GROUND RULES

The session should:

- ~ be well planned
- ~ last approximately 30 mins (less/more depending on age of children)
- ~ have a brisk pace
- ~ end positively

All participants should:

- ~ ensure that only one person speaks at a time
- ~ hold an object to speak
- ~ listen to the speaker
- ~ not interrupt
- ~ show respect
- ~ not put anyone down (verbally/non-verbally – be careful of laughing)
- ~ not mention any names if saying something negative
- ~ ensure confidentiality
- ~ be able to say “pass” if they do not want to speak

The facilitator should also:

- ~ set a positive example
- ~ be calm
- ~ not speak too much!
- ~ show enthusiasm and use humour sensitively
- ~ reinforce/encourage/draw attention to positive behaviour/talk
- ~ respectfully challenge inappropriate behaviour/talk

Starting activities

In pairs:

Talk and tell – Talk in pairs and tell that person something they didn't know about you, your partner to share that fact to the whole group.

Introduce your partner – Have some facts they need to find out and remember about their partner in order to report back to the group.

As a whole group:

Grandma's shopping trolley – Put in your name e.g In Mrs _____ class, and then proceed to add to the list, remembering what others have said before you. E.g in Mrs _____ class there is Jack who likes to eat ice-cream and I like.....

Favourite sweets: Remove one chair and the child without a chair stands in the middle of the group, and announces his/her favourite sweet/food, if other children like that food too, they swap seats. Middle person to find a seat to have a new person in the middle.

Silent games

Warm feelings - Rub your hands together until they feel warm. Pass this warm feeling on to the child sitting on your right by stroking their hands with yours. They should rub their hands together in the same way and pass this all around the circle.

Pass the present - Stick a small mirror to the bottom of a small and colourful box.

Explain that there is something very important and special in the box and that you want each person to look carefully inside to see what it is. Pass it round so that each child can look into the box.

Keeping very quiet - Pass a tambourine or a bunch of keys silently around the circle. Discuss improvements (for example in the quality of silence or in the time taken to achieve this goal) and try again.

Pass the squeeze/hug – everyone in the circle to hold hands and passes a gentle squeeze around the circle.

Pass the smile – pass the smile around the circle and tell your neighbour something that makes you smile.

Chinese Whispers – Pass a secret message around the group.

Creep towards the key - Blindfolded person in the middle of the circle, keys behind him/her, members of the group to creep towards the key, if heard and pointed at they return to their place.

Time a minute – Members of the group sit in silence and put up their hand when a minute has passed, first one to do so accurately to choose to the next game.

Team building games

The balloon game - All children hold hands in a circle and one child is chosen to stand in the middle and blow the balloon up. The circle of children represents the expansion of the balloon so that they begin close to the central child, as the balloon has no air. As the child blows, the circle gets bigger until the balloon blower claps their hands and all the children fall on the floor. The balloon has popped!

Jumble – Children stand in a circle, close their eyes and stretch their hands out. The idea is that all children should hold hands with others across the circle while they have their eyes closed. All the children then open their eyes but remain holding hands, while they try to see if it is possible to get into a circle without letting go of the hand they have hold of.

Send a ripple - The adult makes an action that is sent around the circle, like a ripple.

'We are special' game – The whole class stands in a circle and holds hands. All the children swing hands gently backwards and forwards while singing or saying, 'we are special, we are clever, we are _____ class at _____ school'

Clap your hands – sing together to start a circle time as a cohesive group. Song 'clap your hands and wiggle your fingers', x 3, 'now we've made a pattern'.

Thunderstorms – The idea is to create a thunderstorm sound by all working together. The leader walks around the circle conducting the storm. First the leader rubs their hands together; as he/she passes each child they should start to rub their hands too. When the leader gets back to the start they start to click their fingers. Next the leader claps their hands then stamps their feet. This whole sequence is then repeated in reverse order, as the storm dies away. Conclude with the idea that if we all work together, we are more powerful than if we work alone.

The belonging game - Space is needed for this activity as all the children walk around together. Make enough small cards for each child to have one. Write the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 on approximately equal numbers of cards but leaving the last two or three cards blank. If there are 28 children in your class, you would make 5 matching sets of 5 (i.e. 5 _ 1s; 5 _ 2s up to 5 _ 5s) leaving 3 cards blank. On each blank card, write a number that has not yet

Team building games (cont.)

been used (a different one on each card), say 6, 7 and 8. Explain the game as follows: You will be given a card with a number on it. Your task is to walk around looking for people with the same number as you have. You are not allowed to talk, just to show your number to people. If you find another person with the same number, show by your body language that you are really pleased to see them and walk around close to them, as an obvious group. Continue until you think you have found all the members of your team, then sit down in silence. If people approach you or your group showing a different number, show by your body language that they are not welcome in your group. Play the game. At the end you will have a number of groups sitting and two or three people wandering around on their own.

Discuss with the group:

- what they think the game was supposed to show them;
- how it felt to be left out;
- how it felt to be rejected (and rejecting);
- how it felt to be accepted (and accepting).

Draw out the central concept of the game – our need to belong.

Note: Ensure that those who have the unique numbers are robust characters who are unlikely to experience such rejection in real life.

Rocket launch - Count how many people are in the room. This number starts your countdown. Sitting in a circle, children start to count down from the starting number, standing up as they call out. Anyone can stand up and call out the next number but, if more than one child stands at the same time, the countdown has to start again.

Can we do it? - This is a very simple but effective game. There should be no talking during the game. Everyone starts sitting and should end standing. One person starts by standing up. Other children follow suit, but if two people move at the same time everyone must sit down and start again. When you reach 1, everyone stands, raises their arms and shouts 'We have lift-off'.

Lining up game – Children should line up as quickly as they can and without help: In the order they are in the register, according to their house number, by month of birthday, by height order, age order etc..

Pass the ball/coin on a string – ball/coin 'hidden' behind the backs of the groups, detective to find it.

One word stories, one sentence stories - Each group member to contribute to the story being made as a team.

Detective games

Wake up Baby Bear - One child is selected to sit in the centre of the circle and pretend to be asleep. This child should be blindfolded. Place a 'honey jar' in front of them.

The whole group sings:

'Baby Bear, Baby Bear

Sleeping in the wood.

What lovely honey's in your jar!

Mmmm, mmm, (the children should rub their tummies)

How I'd like it in my tummy!

Gently tap one child on the back who should quietly go and take the honey and hide it behind their back.

Everyone sings:

'Wake up Baby Bear,

Wake up Baby Bear,

Your honey's gone!'

Baby Bear takes off the blindfold, looks around the circle and tries to guess who is hiding the honey. They should have three guesses. The person who took the honey then has a turn at being Baby Bear.

You might like to talk about how Baby Bear might know who is hiding the honey. How?

Observation skills - All the children should sit in a circle. One child should then volunteer to go outside. The remaining children should then choose a leader. This person's job is to start off a particular movement or change of position which all the others have to copy, but without letting the volunteer know who the leader is. After a practice to make sure all the children understand the game (you may need to practice a range of movements and positions with the class before sending out the volunteer), the volunteer should rejoin the circle. Their task is to watch carefully to see if they can spot who the leader is. They have three or four chances. If they guess incorrectly, the person they choose is 'out' and does not join in any more, thereby narrowing the field. If the volunteer doesn't identify the leader they should be congratulated on continuing to try and for staying calm.

In the manner of - Children should work in pairs round the circle. They should decide on a feeling – you might like to get the children to generate ideas for a list to go on a flipchart or whiteboard to help. Give the children an activity.

Detective games (cont.)

For example:

- make the bed;
- change a wheel on the car;
- explain how to make a cup of tea;
- change a light bulb.

One of the children should try to show the feeling, by doing the activity in the manner of a feeling that they have chosen. The child's partner should try to guess the feeling. When the partner has guessed the feeling, the pair should sit down and wait for the next activity, when they will swap roles.

Cool or uncool? - Play a game where the adult goes round each child in the circle, saying whether they are 'cool' or 'not cool'. Use a simple but not too obvious criterion (such as whether the child has their ankles crossed or arms folded) to decide which category each child belongs in. Do not share this with the children. Everyone has to guess the criterion and make sure they are 'cool'. After a while some children will have guessed and crossed their ankles or folded their arms. Stop the game and ask those who have not guessed (they should still be the majority) how they are feeling. Ask how they might feel if the game went on and they were the only one left in the class who had not guessed.

Changes - A volunteer should be chosen to go outside the room. When they are gone two people in the circle should swap places. The volunteer should try to guess what has changed.

Wink sleeping (same as wink murder) – detective leaves the room, 'murderer' to be chosen, detective to find out who it is, without everyone in the group being put to sleep!

What's the rule? – A detective leaves the room, as a team decide what the rule will be for when the detective asks a question (e.g blinking twice before answering the question). The detective asks loads of questions to lots of different people and has to guess what the rule is.

Hedgehogs – Children mingle in the circle. The leader says 'hedgehogs' and all curl up on the floor and close their eyes. The leader then covers one child up with a large cloth and the children have to guess who is under the cover. When they have guessed, they return to their places and follow up with a round describing the covered child's attribute, with the stem 'I like the way he/she.....'

Inclusive games

Look what I can do - Explore some actions the children can do (hopping, skipping, jumping, clapping). Each child then chooses an action and says to the group 'My name is ... and I can ...'. The child demonstrates, and the others copy. The child demonstrating then nominates the next child to lead.

Roll a ball - Roll a ball to a child across the circle, saying their name. The recipient says 'thank you' and rolls to another child, saying the name of that child as they do so.

Stamping name game – All the children stand in a circle and give each child a turn to say their name and stamp their foot three times before you go on to the next child.

Working together – sentences are said to the group and those people called get together and hold hands in a circle, e.g wear glasses, have lived in this country all your life, have family in another country. Finish game by saying things that include all children in the group.. in _____ school, in _____ class.

Feeling games – The children should each take a small bit of paper or sticky note and write a word that describes how they are feeling. These should be placed in a tub or hat. The children should take a feeling from the hat. This is their new feeling for the game. The children then move into a double circle, inner circle facing outer in pairs. The children in the outer circle should suggest an activity e.g getting up, eating dinner, skateboarding, doing homework. The children in the inner circle should mime the action in the manner of their feeling given. The leader should shout 'freeze' and the children in the inner circle should freeze. The children in the outer circle should guess the feeling. This should be repeated with swapped roles. It might help to have some basic feelings written out and displayed.

Good try - Children sit in a circle with one person standing in the centre. The person in the centre has an everyday object (such as a mug) which they use to mime a common activity (such as brushing the hair, ironing, speaking on the phone, etc.) The children have to guess the activity. When one of them guesses correctly, the person in the middle says 'Well done', swaps places with the child who got the correct answer and gives them the object. The new person in the centre thinks of a different mime. If someone gives a wrong answer, the person in the middle says 'Good try' and carries on until someone guesses correctly.

Inclusive games (cont.)

Handshake game - Use a tambourine or another musical instrument. Shake the tambourine and have the children walk around, changing directions and mixing amongst themselves. When the tambourine stops the children should turn to someone standing close to them and tell them one thing that really annoys them (not about that particular person) and one thing that makes them happy. Repeat this about three times. The children should stop and sit in a circle. They should then do a round saying:

'I spoke to someone who said that it really annoys them when ...'

'I spoke to someone who said that it makes them happy when ...'

Jumbled names – Introduce your name with an adjective with initial sound the same as your name.

Swap places games

Circle game - The children sit in a circle. Explain that they are to get up and find a new place if what you says applies to them. For example, 'Get up and find a new place if:

- ... you are going to play in the sand today';
- ... you are going to do some painting today';
- ... you are going to play with a friend today';
- ... you are going to read a book today'.

There's a chair on my right - Place a chair on your right and say: 'There's a chair on my right and I would like (name a child in the group) to come and sit in it.' The child who is named moves to the spare chair, leaving an empty chair in the circle. The child on the left of this then says, 'There's a chair on my right and I would like (name a child in the group) to come and sit in it' and so on. At the end of the game you might like to ask those who sat in the chair what they felt like when they were chosen.

Keeper - The leader is the Keeper and children chant 'Keeper, Keeper may we cross your Golden River?' The Keeper replies, 'only if you are... (use positive attributes: such as kind, friendly, helpful, gentle, talented)' The children who think they have the attribute cross the circle and change seats with children who think the same.

Swap places – The children to swap places or maybe put thumbs up when they agree with the statements called out. E.g. swap places if you like eating beans, swap places if you like playing in the sand'.

There's a chair on my right - Place a chair on the right of the facilitator, who should say: 'There's a chair on my right and I would like (name a child in the group) to come and sit in it.' The child who is named moves to the spare chair, leaving an empty chair in the circle. The child on the left of this should then say, 'There's a chair on my right and I would like (name a child in the group) to come and sit in it.' And so on. At the end of the game ask the children what it was like as they waited to be chosen.

All swap - Swap places or put your thumbs up if:

- you have lost something that is important to you;
- one of your friends has moved away;
- something interesting or exciting has happened to you recently;
- you like frightening films;
- you have found something you thought you had lost.

Swap places games (cont.)

Swapping places -This game works best if one chair is moved from the circle and a volunteer stands in the middle. The volunteer should try to sit down as the others change places at the following commands.

‘Swap places if you:

- have changed your hairstyle this year;
- had something different for breakfast this morning;
- walked a different route to school.’

Ask the children to think of their ideas for things that might have changed.

Energetic games

All change - Children hop, jump, walk or tip toe round the circle. When the leader says 'Change' they reverse direction.

Through the hoop - Group the children and ask them to stand in several small circles. Give each group a hoop and a stopwatch. The idea is that each person in the group goes through the hoop in the shortest possible time. The children should set themselves a target time to achieve. The winning group is the one that achieved the greatest improvement in their time. At the end of the game, ask each group to reflect on how they set about the task, what things worked well and what didn't work.

They should decide what were the key factors in success.

Cockles, muscles, shrimps - Each group member is given a name, either cockle, muscle or shrimp. Leader calls out one of them and they have to run around the circle until you say 'tides in' and everyone has to run to get 'home'. There are lots of versions of this game.

Running Stories – Each member of the group to have a name of a character or object....leader to 'tell a story' using the character or object name, when one is said that person has to run around the circle.

Miscellaneous games

Miming game -To play this game you will need to ensure that the children have done quite a bit of work on feelings and how they affect our body and face. Work with the children to think of a list of feelings and write them on the whiteboard. There should be a mixture of comfortable and uncomfortable feelings.

Ask for a volunteer to choose a feeling, without telling anyone which one, and to think of a reason why they might feel that way. The volunteer should use their body and their face to show the feeling. Talk with the children about what the face was like, and then they should all have a go at showing the feeling with their faces and their bodies.

Ask the questions:

- What feeling is he or she trying to show?
- What would make you feel like that?

The children should try to guess what the volunteer is feeling and the reason why. The person who guesses the reason should think of the next feeling.

Spin the bottle - Using an empty plastic bottle (weighted with a little water or sand), ask a child to spin the bottle and see who the neck end points to. That child says one thing they really enjoy doing and which they are good at.

Listening game – Ask the children to walk around the room quietly saying a word that means something to them – e.g fav colour or number. When anyone hears another word other than their own, they change what they are saying to that word. Continue until everyone is saying the same thing.

The exclusion circle - Create a tightly bunched, inward-looking, hostile circle of children. Invite a volunteer to walk around the outside, tap three people on the shoulder and ask to be allowed in. The first two responses are hostile, 'No, go away'. The third person warmly invites the child in to join the group. The volunteer should know what is going to happen. Discuss being excluded from the group: how it feels, feeling left out, not belonging. How might it make someone think and behave? Remind children of the links between thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Remind children that this is a type of bullying and about the work they have done on the importance of belonging to enable us to feel good about ourselves.

Miscellaneous games (cont.)

Find the pair - Give each child a card with a word or, preferably, a picture and word on it. The card will show an object that might go in a pair. For example: cat and mouse needle and thread shoe and sock sun and moon brush and comb dustpan and brush knife and fork plug and socket cup and saucer toothpaste and toothbrush dog and bone fish and fishing rod fish and chips screen and keyboard letter and postbox. The children should use the cards to try finding their partner without talking.

When they are successful they should sit down next to each other.

Have you seen my friend? - Ask for a volunteer to be the 'friend'. The volunteer should describe two or three things about someone else in the group, for example:

'Have you seen this person? They have blue eyes and they are excellent at art.' Or 'Have you seen this person? They have just come back from holiday and they are wearing blue shoes.' Members of the rest of the group should guess who the person might be. The person who guesses correctly should then become the 'friend'.

As an extension, ask the child who was described whether they agree with the friend's description. Repeat this several times, telling the children at the start how many times it will be.



Rounds

Ideas:

My favourite food is....

I am good at.....

I wish.....

I like it when.....

I hate it when.....

I learn best when.....

People like me because.....

I get fed up when....

I am afraid when....

I feel really happy when....

Something I have discovered....

The last time I felt embarrassed I.....