

Using Circle Time to Promote Social-Emotional Skills

When Miss Sarah called all the children together for circle time, she expected them to sit quietly while she read a story to them or taught them about colors and shapes. Two-year-old Emily could sit for about a minute, and then she'd wander off to do something else; three-year-old Justin interrupted Miss Sarah repeatedly; when she wasn't refusing to join the circle, four-year-old Grace punched or kicked the child next to her. Circle time was not helping children learn social and emotional skills.

The Purpose of Circle Time

Using circle time to promote more learning is not necessarily the primary purpose; rather, circle time should promote a sense of community, and help children learn to know and enjoy each other, and to practice the social and emotional skills they need to succeed.



How to Foster Social-Emotional Learning During Circle Time

- Create a sense of belonging for everyone.
- Listen attentively.
- Make all children feel safe, included, and respected.

continued on back page

- Pay more attention to the interests and need of the children than to your own need for circle time to happen a certain way.
 - Celebrate success.
 - Encourage everyone to participate but also allow children to pass.
 - Be enthusiastic and keep it lively.
 - Have strategies for how you will respond to negative behavior.
 - Organize activities in a sequence so children know what to expect and what comes next.
 - Give choices about where to sit; set boundaries for each child such as carpet squares.
 - Use a circle mini schedule to help children know when their favorite activities will happen.
 - Give opportunities for children to be successful, and praise them when they participate appropriately.
 - Provide fidget toys .
 - Allow children to opt out and do something else if they lose interest before circle time ends.
 - Be prepared to do something else if an activity isn't working or children are losing interest.
- Preventing Problem Behavior**
- Whenever possible, set up circle time away from other distractions (an open door, prep for another activity, etc.).
 - Have two circle times to accommodate different developmental levels; adjust length of circle times to age of child (no more than 5-10 minutes for two-year-olds, or 10-15 minutes for three and older).
 - Include hands-on and physical activities.

R E S O U R C E S

Successful Circle Time: Tips for a more effective and enjoyable group time, by Sharron Krull; sharronkrull.com/articles/act_successful.pdf

Ten tips for circletime in the preschool classroom, by Deborah Stewart; teachpreschool.org/2013/03/25/ten-tips-for-circletime/

Programs and families can contact the program leadership directly at PAIECMH@pakeys.org with questions or concerns.

