

GIGGLES & WIGGLES!

It's Circle Time

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Circle time, also called group time, refers to any time that a group of children are sitting together for an activity involving everyone. It's a special time to share fingerplays, chants and rhymes, sing songs, play rhythm instruments, read a story, and participate in movement games and relaxation activities. Circle time provides for a listening time, a time to develop attention span, promote oral communication, and a time for learning new concepts and skills. It's a time for auditory memory, sensory experiences, socialization, and a time for FUN! Circle time can be a complex, dynamic interaction among adults, children and resources used. Teachers have the power to make group time more effective and enjoyable for all involved. Here are some tips for conducting a successful circle time...

Planning: Schedule two circle times—one at the beginning of day and the other at the end of the day. The first group time builds a sense of community— acknowledging “whose here” and “what’s happening” or planned for that day. The closing circle time includes high interest activities appropriate to the children’s age, experience and development—music, songs, poetry, fingerplays, movement, games, puppets, flannel board stories, drama, and creative activities.

Location: Set up an area for circle time away from toy shelves and free from distractions so that children face away from an open door or ongoing preparations for the next activity. As a guideline for children to sit on, place tape in the shape of a circle on the floor. If not that, purchase or salvage small carpet squares or cushions to designate each child’s “personal” space. If you have a large colorful educational area rug, have children find an animal, number, shape or letter to sit on. If at all possible, sit on the floor with the children. In this way, you can make eye contact with each and every child. You can even reach out to touch a child or pull one into your lap if need be. I even move myself to sit between children who need separating from each other. It’s a very effective method of handling disruptive children without saying a word.

Don't Sit Like a W: How we sit at circle time is important too. We need to encourage children to sit cross-legged or at least with their feet in front of them. Please do not use the trite “Sit like an Indian”—that’s stereotyping! Discourage the unhealthy and even potentially harmful sitting habit known as W-sitting. W-sitting is described as sitting between your legs, knees turned in, and feet out to the sides.

Time: Keep your circle time short! Toddlers have a maximum attention span of 5 to 10 minutes and most 3 to 5 year olds can attend for up to 15 minutes. As the year progresses, the child’s attention span expands. Depending on the length and complexity of the activities conducted, circle time can last for 20-30 minutes.

Involvement: Do not force children to participate in circle time. Realize that being “actively involved” to some children is observing (watching, listening, sensing). Encourage them to join in when they are comfortable and ready. Always ask permission if they, for instance, would like their name sung in the song. Make circle time a safe place to share and feel trusted.

Guide Behavior: Demonstrate and practice what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior. Use puppets to role-play problem situations. Let the children suggest solutions. Do not allow one child to ruin circle time for the entire group. If a child is disruptive, ask him to sit in a nearby chair and watch, observing circle time as part of the “audience.” Encourage the child to return when she is ready to join in and cooperate. Acknowledge and reinforce appropriate behavior. Tell children often what good listeners they are; how well they can control their bodies when doing movement; what great voices they have, etc.

Be A Good Model: “Let go” and “get into it.” Wake up the “child” in you—be playful. If you worry what other adults might think of you (i.e., you’re acting silly) you are in the wrong profession—get a new job! Remember—the ones watching think you’re great!

Transitions: These are the times when children are moving from one activity to the next and can end up orderly or chaotic. Singing the same song and/or using one signal consistently (i.e., ringing a bell) helps children know when it is time to gather for circle time. This sense of structure and continuity is important to children and allows for smooth transitions.

Repetition: Don’t just sing the song once. Sing it again and again. Kids love repetition and, in fact, repetition reinforces learning.

Musical Extensions: Share all types of music (classical, jazz, folk, etc.). Provide a variety of musical experiences, including songs, rhythm activities, instruments, movement and listening. Make available commercial or inexpensive, easy-to-make rhythm instruments. Make sure there are enough instruments so that every child can use one if they choose to.

Curriculum Extensions: Integrate music with the curriculum by coordinating music with literature, language, math activities and thematic units. Be aware of emergent curriculum that originates from interests or ideas generated by the children.

Attention Getters: Maintain the momentum of involvement at circle time. Avoid interruptions or delays. It is important to alternate active and quiet activities. Use attention-holding techniques: whisper, create a sense of excitement, add some mystery, use humor, try some suspense, or focus children’s attention with pictures or props.

Avoid Gender Bias: Unconsciously and unwittingly we stereotype male and female roles. The words we use reinforce and convey this message to children, whether we intend it or not. Remember to say “firefighter” instead of typically saying “fireman.” Use “police officer” instead of “policeman,” “letter carrier” instead of “mailman.” Include females in songs and finger plays. Change the overuse of “he” by substituting “she.” The monkeys jumping on the bed can be female as easily as male, and the doctor can be a woman doctor as well.

Be Prepared: Practice the song yourself beforehand—sing in the shower, in front of the mirror or in the car. Use a recording of the song to help get you started and build your confidence. If the planned activity does not hold the children’s interest, have alternative activities ready (i.e., a much loved favorite) or move on to the next activity. Let children know that you make mistakes too and use them as a learning experience.

Give Children Ownership: Ask the children, “What’s your idea?” Perhaps they have a favorite song to sing. Sometimes they will even make up a song to sing to the group. Be flexible and embrace their ideas. Children will feel comfortable to share in a risk-free environment—where there is no right or wrong way.

Have Fun! The most important advice I can give you is to smile, be spontaneous, and enjoy circle time yourself—be enthusiastic! It’s contagious!

Organize Activities in a Sequence:

1. Welcome children to circle time with a **hello song** or **name game**.

Hickety-Pickety Bumble Bee (DVD: “Circle Time” by Sharron Krull)
The More We Get Together (DVD: “Circle Time” by Sharron Krull)

2. After the group has gathered, increase children’s alertness with an **active** or **familiar song**.

I Wanna Be a Dog (CD: “10 Carrot Diamond” by Charlotte Diamond)
You Are My Sunshine (Traditional Country Music Song)
Mother Goose Bird (DVD: “Circle Time” by Sharron Krull)

3. Then move on to a **fingerplay** or **body part chant/rhyme**—a dramatic presentation of a verse or poem using fingers and hands and sometimes involving other body parts.

Octopus (CD: “10 Carrot Diamond” by Charlotte Diamond))
Touch Your Nose (DVD: “Circle Time” by Sharron Krull)
The Bridge (DVD: “Circle Time” by Sharron Krull)

4. Next, get everybody up and off their bottoms with an energizing activity, such as a **movement** or **action song**; **cooperative group game**; or **marching with a rhythm instrument**. Engage and actively involve children, enhancing gross motor development and coordination.

Tony Chestnut (CD: “Tony Chestnut & Fun Time Action Songs” by The Learning Station)
Snickers and Hoots (www.sharronkrull.com -- Active Play Idea)
The Mack Chicken Dance (CD: “Big Fun” by Greg & Steve)

5. Follow this with a **calming activity** that helps focus children’s attention—read a **story**, participate in a discussion or **demonstration**, invite children to be in a **“play.”**

What’s Missing (www.sharronkrull.com -- Circle Time Activity)
The Snake -Breathing & Relaxing Exercise (DVD: “Circle Time” by Sharron Krull)
Hush Little Baby (CD: “Circle Time Handout” by Sharron Krull)

6. Signal that group time is over by gradually dispersing the group with a transition activity such as a **closing** or **goodbye song**.

Pass the Microphone or Talking Stick around the circle
Heigh-Ho Goodbye -- (www.sharronkrull.com -- Transition Activity)

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