

NEW
REVISED
EDITION

Here We Go Round

Quality Circle Time for 3 - 5 year olds



*"All early years
practioners will
benefit greatly from
this book."*
Nursery World

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Positive Press

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Introduction

This new edition supports practitioners in promoting the rich and stimulating environment and practice that young children need. The commitment of early years practitioners has emphasised the critical impact of a child's early experiences on later learning and growth. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which became statutory in 2008, is just one legacy of this work and commitment supported by the publication of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Development (SEAD, 2008).

In 2012¹ the EYFS was revised on the recommendations of the Tickell Review. It changed the six areas of learning to three prime areas essential for future learning and development: Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED), Physical Development (PD) and Communication and Language (CL). In addition to these are the four specific areas of learning: Literacy (L), Mathematics (M), Understanding the World (UW) and Expressive Arts and Design (EAD); through which the prime areas are reinforced and applied. Underpinning all of these are the Characteristics of Effective Learning.

Good practice as we know never changes. Opportunities for well-planned experiences are still seen as fundamental to ensuring children make progress, experience challenge and, above all, enjoy their learning.

Quality Circle Time is an established and evaluated approach that promotes the skills, knowledge and understanding that help children achieve the Early Learning Goals and be ready for learning in school. It is engaging, motivational and promotes the Characteristics of Effective Learning. The ideas are based on common sense and good practice.

Since the beginning of time, children and adults have gathered together in circles to learn about themselves and others through a rich weave of rhymes, songs and games. This book builds on this tradition by structuring the activities in such a way that the adults and children know what they are achieving by being involved and by having fun. Here We Go Round takes our implicit understanding and makes it explicit in our actions.

¹ Subsequently an updated version of the EYFS was published in February 2014 and came into effect in September 2014. The changes apply to areas within Section 3 on "Safeguarding and Welfare" but no changes have been made to the areas of learning and development, including the early learning goals.

The Five Skills of Circle Time

The children need to be taught the “Five Skills of Circle Time” which are:

- **Looking**
- **Listening**
- **Speaking**
- **Thinking**
- **Concentrating**

The following short routine can be practised in a circle as a game. Once you have explained the skills to the children, you can say the words while they perform the actions and vice versa. Remind them at the beginning of each Circle Time of these skills as part of the introduction.

“In Circle Time we use our looking skills.”

Point to eyes.

“We use our listening skills.”

Point to ears.

“We use our speaking skills.”

Point to mouths.

“We use our thinking skills.”

Place hands on sides of head.

“We use our concentrating skills.”

Clasp hands, place in laps and look at facilitator.

How do I plan for Circle Time?

The EYFS quite rightly emphasises the importance of planning experiences for all children in your care. This does not mean that children’s experiences are all prescribed for them. Child-initiated play is central to your day. Your role is judging when to extend children’s play through a guided opportunity. The Circle Time meeting is one of these opportunities. You will still find that you will be following the preferences of children, which always happens in the best, responsive teaching. However you will be planning activities which act as a springboard for the children. This is similar to when children listen to a story, which then stimulates their play and exploration in a variety of ways throughout the rest of the day, or even the week! Sometimes it is appropriate to start to engage in a Circle Time with a few “ready” children. Then others can come and join you when they feel ready to.

Introducing children to Quality Circle Time

One of the most valuable things about circle times, can be their routine, which children enjoy and look forward to. Having a pattern for your planning is helpful for you too, as when you are just starting off you have a structure which can then allow you to relax a little.

For the young children that you are working with, any time sitting and paying attention is difficult and the skills and attention span need to be built up over time. One of the benefits of Quality Circle Time is that when children are engaged and having fun in their learning, they are able to pay attention to the activities for much longer. To start with you may only want to spend a few minutes sitting in a circle using a singing or story activity.

Children will be at different developmental levels which makes the planning even more complex. It would not be surprising for the developmentally very young to find sitting and concentrating for the same length of time as more mature or older children a challenge, and they may well move away from the circle at first, returning when the activity is more attractive to them.

It is recommended, when you are entering into planning circle times, that you think of it in three phases or "steps":

Introduction	To set the scene for the children so that they know that this is circle time. This may be a warm up activity or even to introduce what is coming next.
Middle phase	You might be giving opportunities for developing a skill through an activity or learning through sharing conversation.
Closing phase	Rounds the session off; allows for reflection and a calming down.

The introductory sessions on pages 28-33 can be repeated and adapted as you see fit and to match the developmental needs of your children. Children will not mind repetition. Indeed they often prefer to repeat the familiar to show how well they have remembered and how improved they are!

Circle sessions are incremental, in that the children will be building skill upon skill, so by rehearsing the Five Skills of Circle Time (Looking, Speaking, Thinking, Listening and Concentrating) you will always be emphasising and sharpening these skills.

To enable effective planning, the charts on pages 20-26 detail the areas of learning relevant to the activities in this book. For each area, the Early Learning Goal (ELG), Aspect of Learning and Development Statement are listed and alongside each statement, the numbers of the activities that support the development. This enables you to choose the ELG and "Aspect" at a glance and

then select the activity you require from those listed. In addition, an index of specific foci, such as sharing, kindness and taking turns, is included at the back of the book.

Each activity shows the areas of learning in the headline and includes a box with further details of the aspects and development statements for each area to ensure you are aware of the learning intentions.

A template for observation notes of selected children and evaluation of the activity is included on page 36, and it is recommended that you photocopy this, and the chosen activity, to include in your planning folder. For the sake of providing an easy-to-read example of a circle session, Introducing Circle Time (1) has the observation and evaluation notes included in the activity.

It is not easy to be facilitating an activity and observing as well. We would always recommend that there are two adults involved; making sure that one of you is able to concentrate upon the organising of the session and the other on noting the children's response. Of course, both adults and children are part of the circle, all taking part and all learning from each other.

To a greater or lesser degree PSED will feature in every Circle Time session that you plan, as the very act of sitting together in a circle, participating, taking turns, listening and speaking develops the skills from this area of learning. However, it has only been listed in the activity if there is a particular focus on an aspect of PSED. Remember that, as with other aspects of children's learning and development, these are the foundations for later learning. Developing their confidence and sense of value early on in their lives is a priceless element that children can take to their later learning.

Introducing Circle Time (1)

Indoors/Outdoors	am/pm	Date:	Adult:
Links to areas of learning: PSED CL PD			
Learning intentions: To introduce Circle Time activities, to learn and practise the Five Skills of Circle Time, to take turns and to work as a group.			
Area of learning	What children will be learning	Aspect	
PSED	Initiates conversation, attends to and takes account of what others are saying. Confident to speak to others. Aware of the boundaries set and of the behavioural expectations in the setting.	Making relationships Self-confidence and self-awareness Managing feelings and behaviour	
CL	Maintains attention, concentrates and sits quietly during appropriate activity.	Listening and attention	
PD	Shows increasing control over an object.	Moving and handling	
Resources A "talking object", e.g. Talking Ted and a ball.			
Children for focus <i>Kieran, Lucy, James and Asma: needing to practise taking turns.</i>			
Introduction Go through the Five Skills of Circle Time with the children. Remember to give the children clear feedback, praise and encouragement: "Well done _____ for using good looking skills" Introduce the "talking object", e.g. Talking Ted: "Hello children, I'd like you to meet _____. She would like to know what your names are." Ask each child in turn around the circle to say: "Hello _____ my name is _____" as they pass around the "talking object".			

Middle: "Rolling ball"

Ask the children to sit with legs apart. The children roll the ball to one another after saying:

"Hello _____" (name of receiver)

The child who receives the ball responds by saying:

"Thank you _____"

Closing: "Pass the smile"

Pass the smile around the circle. Begin by smiling at the child to your right. This child then smiles to the child to his right and so on. Encourage the children to make eye contact when they pass the smile on.

Observations

Asma waited for the teddy and said her name, next time I shall try to encourage her to say the whole sentence.

Kieran stayed for the introduction, with the 5 skills and left to play in the water afterwards. I have invited him to play all of the games tomorrow.

James and Lucy both stayed for all activities (15 minutes in all) and were passing the smile to their neighbour sensibly.

Evaluation

I was encouraged by the children's response to these games. Tomorrow I shall invite the same children to see if they remember any of the skills. It might be best if we all sit on little chairs.

I found it difficult to always see if children were eye contacting but I shall keep trying with this.

My Favourite Book (21)

Learning Intentions: To discuss stories, respond with relevant comments and listen attentively.	PSED L
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Area of learning	What children will be learning	Aspect
PSED	Attends to and takes account of what others say. Confident to speak to others about own interests.	Making relationships Self-confidence and self-awareness
L	Enjoys an increasing range of books.	Reading

Resources

Ask the children (with prior prompts to parents) to bring in a favourite book from home. If a child fails to do this, ensure that an adult who is familiar with the child helps the child to choose a book he or she has enjoyed from the library in your setting. Also bring in a suitable favourite book to read to the children. It may be a good idea, especially with younger children, to divide the class into smaller groups for the introductory phase.

Introduction

Ask each child in turn to show the book he or she has brought in. Ask the child why he or she likes the book. Ask if any of the other children have read the book and what comments they have. Try to make a positive comment about each book such as:

“That book was very exciting/funny.”

“The pictures in that book are very good.”

“I liked the bit where _____.”

Middle

Show the children your favourite book and then read it to them.

Closing

Ask the children to put up their hands and say why they thought you really liked that book. You can add further reasons to the ones they suggest.

Further Ideas

The children can paint or draw a picture from their chosen books.

They could have a dressing-up day and come to nursery/school in the costume of a book character. The other children could try to guess who they were. Get in touch with your local library to arrange a visit with your class. Alternatively, some libraries have a scheme where the librarian will visit your premises to talk to the children.

