

Step-by-Step Guide to Circle Time

for SEAL



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Foreword

We all have our own 'light bulb' moments in our career as educators. For me such a moment was when I began to understand that there are three very different reasons for children not behaving as we want them to. One reason may be that they have not yet learned the skills that underpin positive and pro-social behaviour. Another may be that they have the skills but are not choosing to use them – because alternative choices offer them bigger pay-offs. A third reason may be that although they have the skills, and although the incentives to use those skills are in place, they are simply too hurt and distressed to make wise choices.

Quality Circle Time was another light-bulb moment for me. It seemed a magic way of addressing all three of the reasons for behaviour difficulties. The framework of Golden Rules and Golden Time provides the motivation. Circle sessions provide the teaching of the skills children need in order to manage their feelings, develop empathy, and make and keep friends. The sessions also provide the kind of nurturing environment that reduces children's distress and hurt by enabling them to share it with others and receive support.

That is why Circle Time is important in the government's approach to the social and emotional aspects of learning materials (SEAL), on which I was privileged to work. More and more teachers are using circle time routinely in their classrooms, and looking for guidance and support in how to use it well.

This book provides that guidance. It explains the benefits of circle time and takes us through the immensely helpful structure of meeting up, warming up, opening up, cheering up and calming down. It provides just enough worked examples, helpfully grouped under the SEAL themes, to give confidence to a practitioner new to Circle Time. It then leads the practitioner into the next, less scripted steps where children explore the issues that are relevant to them as a group and as individuals.

The ideas in this book are practical and realistic. They acknowledge that some circle times can feel flat or go wrong. They help us get over those humps and become ever more confident in our practice.

Enjoy the ideas... look out for the 'Bag of Power' – and have fun with the children you teach.

Jean Gross

Jean was formerly responsible for the Primary National Strategy's work on behaviour and inclusion. She now directs the Every Child a Reader initiative.

How to use this book

'Step by Step' will guide you through all aspects of the delivery of Quality Circle Time meetings. As you work through the chapters, you will gain a secure grasp of the knowledge and skills that are needed to plan Circle Time meetings that are uniquely tailored to the needs of your particular setting.

Part one – benefits of Quality Circle Time and the Five Steps

The Step by Step Guide to Circle Time begins with a description of the many benefits that accrue from regular Circle Time meetings. It includes a description of each of the Five Steps and how they fit together interchangeably to meet your children's needs.

Part two – practical Circle Time plans

This section begins with advice about the best ways to introduce Circle Time. Short, three-step meetings are suggested as a 'way in'. These help everyone to settle into the routines and rituals that make Circle Time such safe, invigorating fun. A selection of five-step meetings follows – these are designed to give you experience of the range and variety of approaches that can be employed during Circle Time.

Part three – tailoring Circle Time to your own needs

The third part of the book is designed to help you become creative. It explains how to plan each stage of a Circle Time meeting and put it all together as a coherent whole. In short, you will be successfully delivering the curriculum for social and emotional aspects of learning and a great deal more as well.

It's worth the effort!

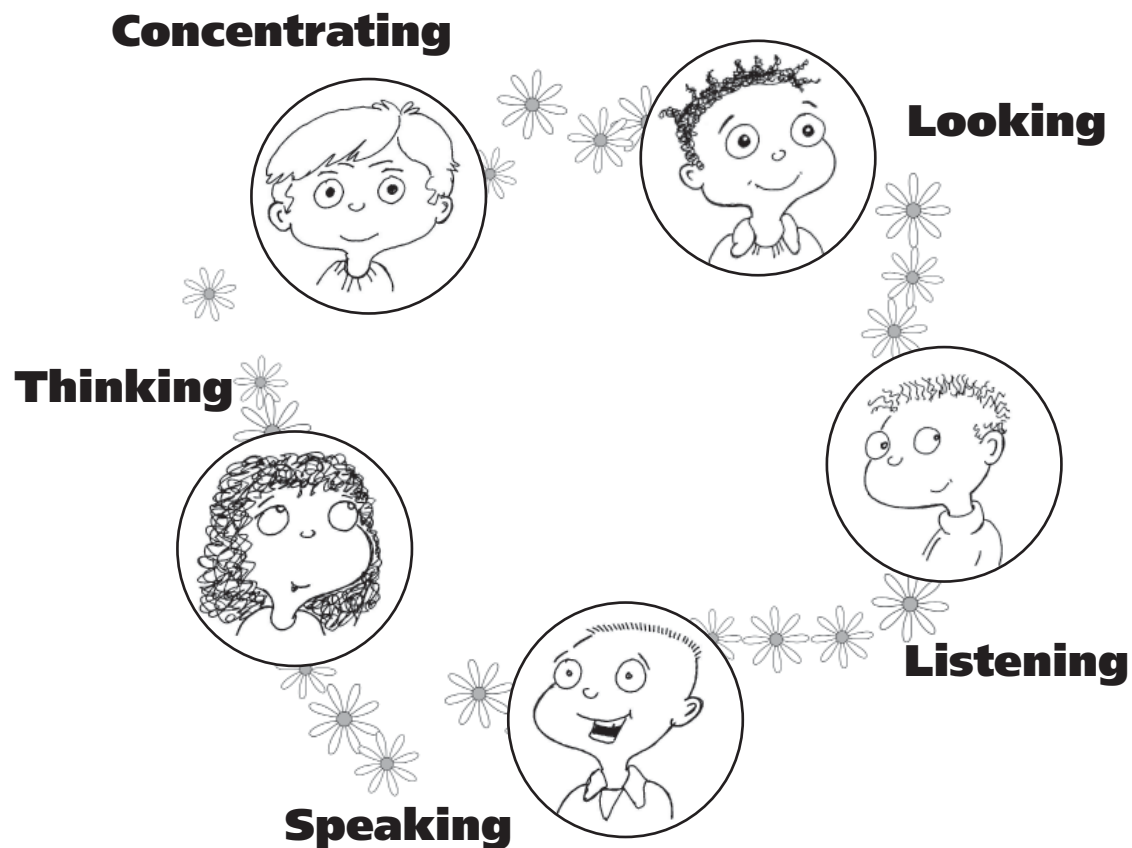
Clear structure and clarity of purpose are just two of the features that make Quality Circle Time so appealing to its many loyal practitioners. We advise you to try to work through the book in the order in which it is written. You may be tempted to skip the theoretical bits and move straight into the lesson plans, but reading the explanations carefully is essential because your understanding of the dynamics that underpin each session will be crucial when you begin to plan independently. Time and effort spent rehearsing the model will ensure that you have the experience to create sessions that will enrich your children's lives and help them to become the self-motivated, self-assured individuals whom you want them to be.

What we don't do in this book

This book is not about the whole Quality Circle Time model. Other books include our strategies for setting up rewards and sanctions systems and ways to deal with challenging and unhappy children. They also highlight the need to take care of yourselves so that you are energetic and ready for the challenges that each day brings. Furthermore, the whole model emphasises the need to ensure that playtimes and lunchtimes are properly managed so that lessons learned in Circle Time meetings are not lost and forgotten when children are outside the classroom.

The *Step by Step Guide to Circle Time* does not revisit these aspects of the Quality Circle Time model. It concerns itself solely with planning and leading Circle Time meetings that give children experience and training in a wide range of cognitive and practical skills that will enable them to achieve satisfying, motivated and successful lives.

There are many excellent books from Positive Press and LDA that cover all the other aspects of the model.



Every Circle Time meeting includes activities that encourage the development of these skills. This means that Circle Time meetings offer you academic benefits alongside their dynamic effect on social and emotional development.

3. Use Circle Time plans

Once you have introduced Quality Circle Time with three step meetings, you will be ready to deliver full five-step meetings. Try out the scripts that follow and you will soon be familiar with the ways things work.

Practical Circle Time Plans

The plans that follow are designed to show you the range of approaches that can be utilised during Circle Time meetings. The themes have been carefully chosen to reflect the Primary National Strategy guidance for the teaching of the social and emotional aspects of learning. Each session should take about half an hour but may take longer if the children respond well to the middle stage and you allow them to investigate the issue in more depth. However, if you decide to give more time to the 'Opening Up' don't forget that the closing steps are vital to bring the meeting to a close in an atmosphere of positivity and calm. The meetings are suitable for a wide age span, but you may need to adapt them to suit your particular group.

INTO THE UNKNOWN

SEAL theme: New beginnings

Focus: Getting to know one another

What you need: Two blankets or large sheet of cloth; a number of different objects from around the classroom – a photo, a storybook, a purse, skipping rope etc

Preparation: Spread the objects across the floor and cover them with the blanket

Meeting up

When the children are sitting in the circle, ask them to curl up with their knees touching their chests. When their name is called, they must uncurl and look steadily at you. Then you welcome them into the circle with the words:

- Leader:** Where is Susie?
Susie: Here I am.
Leader: Great to see you. 1,2,3.
Everyone: Great to see you, Susie.
Leader: It's very nice to see you today!

Warming up

Give the speaking object to the child sitting next to you and ask him/her to complete the following sentence: *'My name is (insert name) and I like to (insert skip, sing, play football etc)'*. Continue this around the group. If some children are shy, you can prepare them for this activity by talking about it before the meeting and/or giving them a picture of their favourite activity that they can hold up. They can say, *'I would like to (ski, parachute)'* if they wish.

Opening up

Choose each child in turn to wriggle under the blanket and bring out an object. Ask them to show the group what they have found and to give it to someone in the group (not their best friend) who might like it. The receiver should say, *'Thank you'*. Both children can demonstrate and talk about the use of the object, e.g. *'I gave it to you because'* or *'I like it because.....'*

Tell the children that it can be a bit scary to go under the dark blanket and then stand up and talk to the rest of the group. Ask if there have been other times when they have felt scared and talk



about ways of making it less scary. You can use sentence stems like, 'I need help because (I get scared when it's quiet at night).' 'I get scared when (I have to talk in front of the whole school).' Ask them to listen to suggestions from other children about coping strategies they have found useful.

It boosts children's self-esteem to realise that they have wisdom that they can share with others. It is important that adults sometimes share their feelings and allow the children to learn that they can help adults too.

TOP TIP



Cheering up

Use this rhyme to the tune of 'Muffin Man':

*If you've been under the blanket today,
Blanket today, blanket today,
If you've been under the blanket today,
Stand up and shout 'Hoo-ray! Hooooooo...ray!'*



Calming down

Tell the children that the blanket has another use: we can wrap ourselves up in it and feel nice and snug and warm. Let the children lie with their feet all pointing into the middle and lay two big blankets over them. Say, 'You are feeling very calm and happy. Breathe in 1, 2, 3. Now, I am going to slowly slide the warm blanket away but everyone can keep the calm happy feeling. You can hold on to it because it's inside you!'

Go round and tap each child gently on the shoulder and lead them quietly to their next activity.

At other times during the day, help children to breathe calmly.

TOP TIP

STICK WITH IT

SEAL theme: Good to be me

Focus: Developing a positive self-image

What you need: Stickers with smiley faces drawn on them; a smiling puppet or picture of someone smiling; cheerful music (eg *The Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy* by Tchaikovsky).



Meeting up

Quickly mix the children with a game like 'fruit basket'. Then, divide them into pairs. They have to take it in turns to try to make their partner laugh. They can pull silly faces but must not make physical contact while the partner has to remain serious for as long as possible.



Warming up

Using the speaking object, ask the children to complete the following sentence: 'I can (run/jump/draw, etc) very well.'



Opening up

Give each child an unpeeled 'well done' sticker. Choose one child and ask her to unpeel the sticker and put it on someone else's jumper. As they do so, they need to say, '*I am giving you this because you are* (good at being kind, good at helping me, etc)'. When each child has received a sticker, go round the group and ask them to repeat the reason why they were given the smiley face. Did they like to receive the sticker and the kind words from their classmates? They can give other people this warm feeling at any time because all they have to do is smile and say something nice. Now see if they can think of someone who might like to receive the gift of some kind words – their mum or dad perhaps. Set them the task of remembering to say something kind to everyone at home and at school every day

and see how much happiness they can make all by themselves.

Cheering up

Smiles are very 'catching' and a very good thing to share. Tell the children the following rhyme – pick up the smiley puppet or show them the picture of a smiley person and say:



Here's smiley Sue.

What shall we do?

Her smile's so bright,

We are smiling too.

Calming down

Play the cheerful music and ask the children to move their arms and legs in a light, floating light way to the rhythm of the music until everyone is in a happy frame of mind.



TOP TIP

To help children self-praise, give each of them a red sticky dot. They can put it on any piece of work they have done that they think is good for any reason they can offer. If they are proud of a kind act they did during the week, they do a drawing of it and put a red dot on it. They can bring these to Circle Time to talk about.