

University College

SJÆLLAND



**BIBLIOTEKET**

Læruddannelsen · Vordingborg

Kuskevej 1A

4760 Vordingborg

Tlf. 72 48 23 18

# Step-by-Step Guide to Circle Time

**By Jenny Mosley**

A first-stop introduction to leading successful Quality Circle  
Time meetings for beginners and a refresher for those who  
want to improve their practice.

**Positive Press**

# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>In my opinion</b>	<b>52</b>
		<b>All change</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Using SEAL guidance in Quality Circle Time meetings</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>How to use this book</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>How to use the SEAL toolkit for</b>	
		<b>Circle Time meetings</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Part One: Understanding the Quality Circle Time Model</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Part Three: Designing Your Own Quality Circle Times</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>The benefits of Quality Circle Time</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>The skills of Circle Time</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Quality Circle Time is safe</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Writing your own plans</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Quality Circle Time is flexible</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>Step One</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>The structure of Quality Circle Time</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>Meeting up</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Getting ready for Quality Circle Time</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>Step Two</b>	<b>75</b>
		<b>Warming up</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Part Two: Getting to Know the Model</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>Step Three</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Before you begin</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>Opening up</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Practical Circle Time Plans</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>Step Four</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>Into the unknown</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>Cheering up</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>Getting to know you</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>Step Five</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>In and out</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>Calming down</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>Can I join the game?</b>	<b>33</b>		
<b>A time for telling</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>Putting It All Into Practice</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>Keeper of the keys</b>	<b>39</b>		
<b>Things that work for us</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>What Teachers Ask</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Stick with it</b>	<b>44</b>		
<b>Monarch of the realm</b>	<b>46</b>		
<b>Stop and think</b>	<b>49</b>		

## Positive Press

Published in 2006 by:  
Positive Press Ltd  
28A Gloucester Road  
Trowbridge  
Wiltshire BA14 0AA  
Telephone: 01225 719204  
Fax: 01225 712187  
E-mail: [positivepress@jennymosley.co.uk](mailto:positivepress@jennymosley.co.uk)  
Website: [www.circle-time.co.uk](http://www.circle-time.co.uk)

Text © Jenny Mosley

ISBN 1 904866 20 4

Photography by Viewpoint, Somerset

The right of Jenny Mosley to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition, including this condition, being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

## 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.*



## Introduction

The social and emotional aspects of health are increasingly recognised as absolutely essential to our success as individuals and communities. So much so that, in 2005, the Department for Education and Skills introduced Guidance for Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning – SEAL.

The Guidance confirms a crucial shift in our understanding of why some people seem to glide effortlessly through life while others flounder and ‘mess things up’. SEAL recognises just how much of our inner and interpersonal well-being is dependent upon how well, or not, we have learned a range of key skills. The word ‘skill’ implies something significant and positive for us as educators because we know that skilfulness is never something anyone is born with. Some people may be born with an innate aptitude for something but none of us can be become skilful unless we are given two vital things. These are **experience** and **training**.

Just like any other skill, social and emotional abilities can only flourish if they are nurtured and practised over and over again. Resources like SEAL are based on the realisation that every child should be taught social, behavioural and emotional skills in the same way that they are taught reading or mathematical skills. This teaching is too essential to be anywhere but at the absolute heart of your school's curriculum.

Before each lesson, you make a series of professional decisions about the best ways to develop your children's competency and understanding. Your learning objectives will be clear in your mind and you will have planned your lesson around the best possible means of achieving them. This book is designed to show you how to use exciting strategies to teach social, emotional and behavioural skills effectively.

## 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 a 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.

## Part One: Understanding the Quality Circle Time Model

### The benefits of Quality Circle Time

Social and emotional aspects of learning are a vital part of every moment of your school's practice. They underpin the attitudes with which your children approach the challenges of learning and how they 'feel' about every lesson in the curriculum. Your academic objectives may change from lesson to lesson but the attitudes that you instil will be constant throughout the school day. They inform the way in which you work together as a community and are an important feature of your success or failure as an educational establishment.

As educators, you want attentive, motivated children in every lesson. You want your children to interact peacefully and constructively with one another. Individual and communal esteem has to be high so that everyone works towards success with confidence and good humour. All of these social and emotional aspects of learning are much too important to be left to chance. They need and deserve curriculum space that is specifically set aside.

When you think about how these essential lessons should be delivered, Quality Circle Time offers you a considerable number of advantages, which are detailed here.

### Quality Circle Time is safe

Many of the issues that you will want to investigate can seem difficult, embarrassing or threatening to some children. If you want them to 'open up' and discuss social and emotional aspects of learning in a productive way, you need to be certain that everyone feels emotionally safe. Quality Circle Time is

carefully designed to ensure that group cohesion is strong and supportive and that all participants feel relaxed and secure throughout the meeting. Quality Circle Time has a number of characteristics that ensure that the sense of safety is steadfastly maintained:

- **Structure**

Every Quality Circle Time meeting is built on a Five-Step Plan. Each stage has a specific structure and leads into the next one. The first two steps prepare the ground and are used to create just the right atmosphere of enthusiasm and trust for the middle step to be constructive and beneficial. The last two steps are used to wind things down and guarantee that the meeting closes with everyone feeling positive and calm.

- **Solution focused**

The atmosphere of safety is further reinforced by the requirement that everyone must be constructive during meetings. Put-downs and negative attitudes are not tolerated. The objective of every meeting is to teach positive behaviours and attitudes and to raise self-esteem. All participants are aware of this rule. They can feel safe in the knowledge that they are in a circle that is interested in finding ways of moving forward and which will never resort to unkind words or recriminations.

- **Pace**

Quality Circle Time meetings are lively and upbeat. It is the leader's responsibility to make sure that meetings never become dreary by moving briskly from step to step and keeping everyone's enthusiasm high.

- **Variety**

An amazing range of teaching strategies is available to Circle Time practitioners. Some issues require directed discussion and will involve the teaching of thinking and problem-solving skills. Others can be taught using more active methods that will be described later in this book. Your children

will soon realise that every Circle Time meeting is different from the ones that went before and will look forward with a sense of expectant enthusiasm for whatever you have planned.

## Quality Circle Time is flexible

The Five Step model is designed to teach social and emotional aspects of learning but can also be used for school councils. Many schools also use Circle Time to teach language skills and other academic subjects. It is particularly useful for groups of less confident children who have low self-esteem and need careful nurturing. Some enlightened schools now use the model for staff meetings so that everyone in the school can benefit from its democratic and positive ethos!

- **Quality Circle Time builds group cohesion and strengthens the individual**

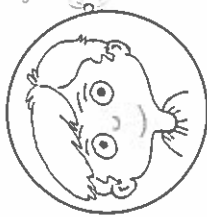
Circle Time celebrates signs of progress, however small, and seeks to build on success. Every child has the chance to speak and feels safe because they know they will be heard and will not be ridiculed or criticised when they express their opinions. Each individual feels strengthened and part of a democratic culture that works together to improve life for the community. This ethos of cooperation and mutual support spills over into the playground and lesson times because the skills that are learned in Circle Time can be applied to all social situations.

## Quality Circle Time enhances learning

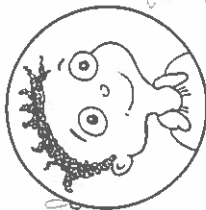
- **Teaching learning skills**

Academic success requires more than intelligence and a well-planned curriculum. It involves high levels of skill. Quality Circle Time identifies and teaches five essential learning skills, which are:

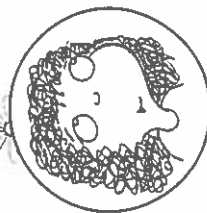
## Concentrating



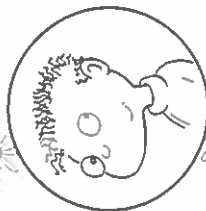
## Looking



## Thinking



## Listening

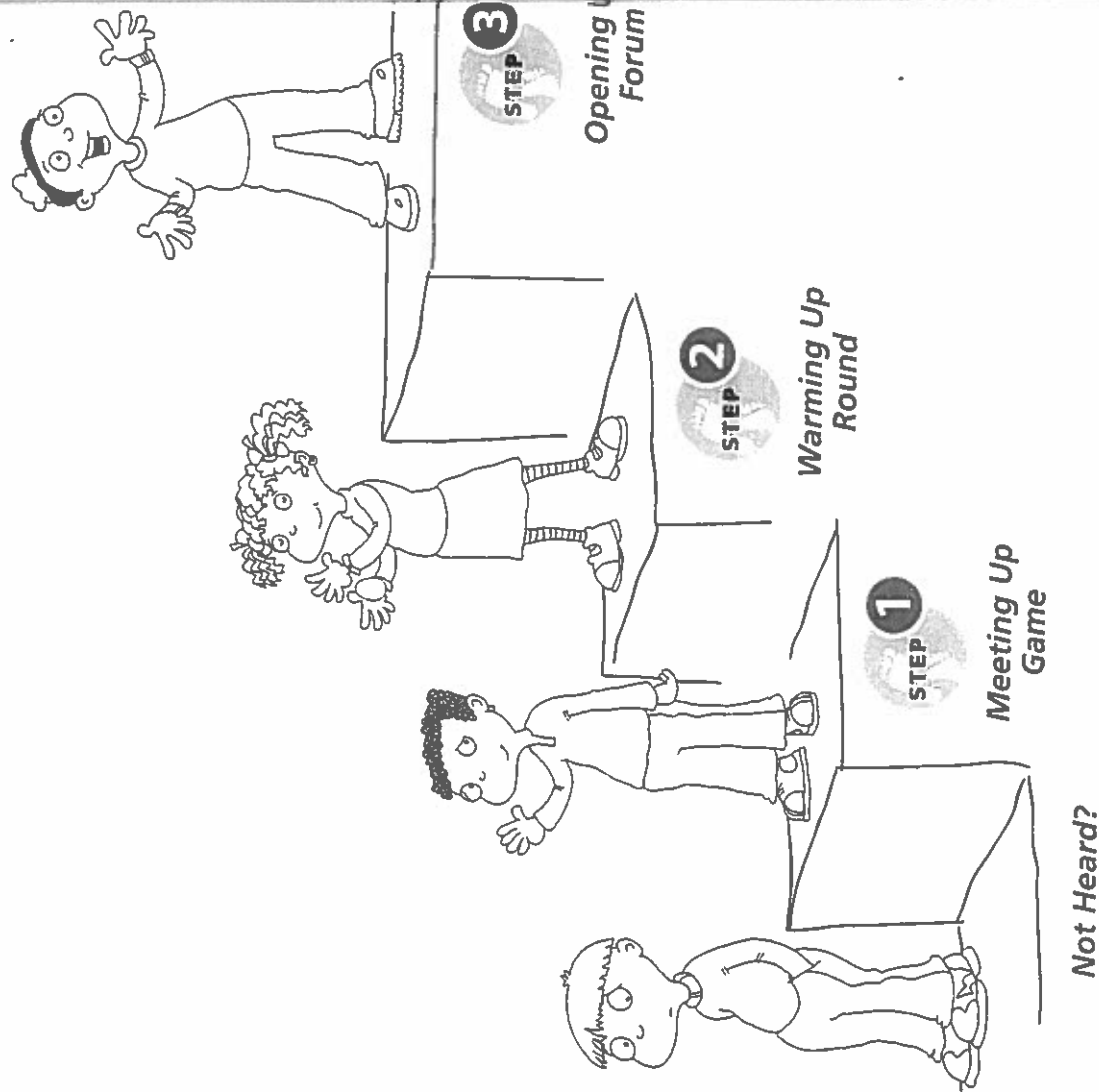


## Speaking

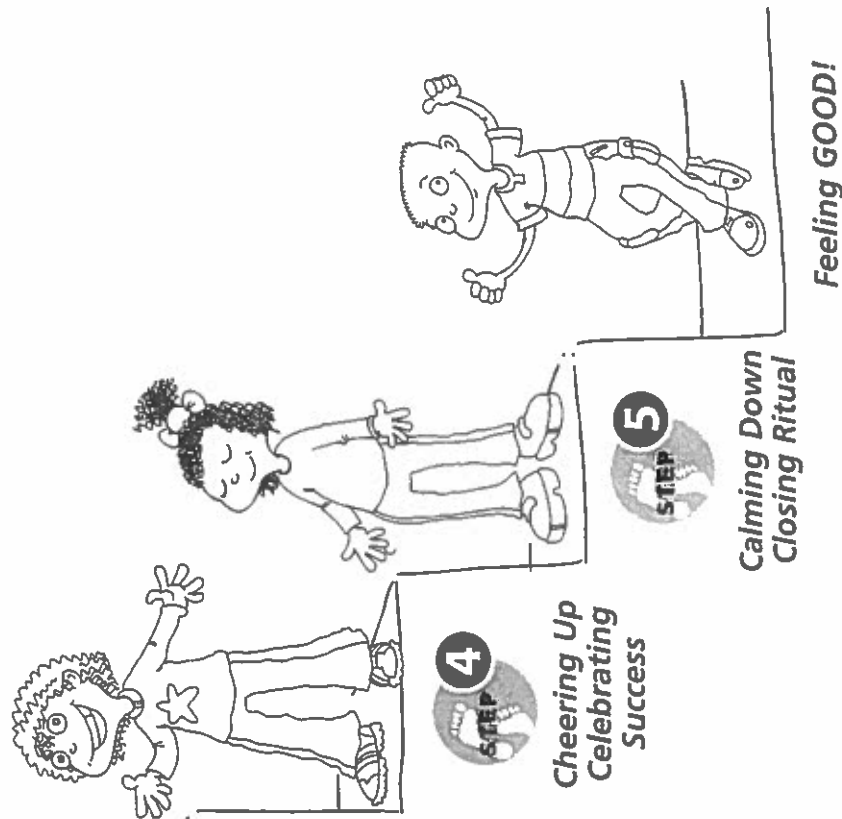


Every Circle Time meeting includes activities that encourage the development of these skills. This means that Circle Time meetings offer you academic benefits alongside their dynamic effect on social and emotional development.

## The structure of Quality Circle Time



Quality Circle Time meetings progress through five distinct steps. Each has a particular purpose. The theme of the meeting will be apparent in each step but will be handled differently at each stage.





The two introductory steps relax the children and prepare them for the third step when key issues are investigated. The meeting draws to a close with two final steps which lighten the mood and ensure an atmosphere of closure and calm. So, the five steps of Circle Time are:

### 1 STEP

## Meeting Up

Each meeting begins with an enjoyable game to help children relax, release tension and feel the joy of being together as a group. The games are designed to create a supportive atmosphere and are often used to encourage the children to sit next to those who are not their usual companions. Sometimes, you may feel that is not appropriate to begin with a lively game and may decide that a relaxing activity might be more suitable.



### 2 STEP

## Warming Up

Many children need to 'warm up' to speaking. This is achieved through a 'round'. The teacher begins a sentence that must be repeated and completed by each child. For example, you might say, 'The animal I would like to be ...' Each child repeats the sentence 'stem' and chooses their own way to complete it. A 'speaking object' is used to show whose turn it is to speak and whoever is holding the speaking object has the right to speak uninterrupted. (A speaking object might be a decorated wooden egg, a soft toy, 'talking teddy' or any suitable mascot.) The speaking object is then passed to the next person. Holding the speaking object does not oblige anyone to speak and any child who does not wish to do so may say, 'pass' and hand it on.



### 3 STEP

## Opening Up

This is sometimes called 'Open Forum' and is an opportunity for children to work together to explore problems, concerns, hopes and fears. They also investigate what it means to be part of a community and think about the social and moral responsibilities that this entails. They learn how to offer peer support in respectful and compassionate ways. They practice problem-solving skills and rehearse behaviours that strengthen their confidence and self-esteem. They learn how express opinions and join in discussions that develop their ability to reason and think logically.



### 4 STEP

## Cheering Up

It can be difficult to 'switch off' from issues of concern so it is important that you provide two closing activities that ensure everyone leaves the meeting feeling calm and refreshed. The 'cheering up' step begins this process by celebrating the group's successes and strengths and giving children the opportunity to praise one another or cheer everyone up by giving them the chance to teach everyone new skills and games.



### 5 STEP

## Calming Down

Every meeting needs to end with a closing ritual. This winding down step is calming and ensures that a feeling of emotional safety and closure is achieved.



Everyone needs to agree that they will work together in a positive way:

We are kind to each other and never say hurtful things.

We know that everyone has the right to have opinions that are different from our own.

We take turns and let other people have a go.

We praise each other and thank people who have helped us.

We work together as a team

We share our opinions and learn from one another.

We think about problems and try to find solutions.

## Getting Ready for Circle Time

- Find the right space

A quiet uncluttered area is an ideal base for your Circle Time meetings. It should be large enough for the children to sit in a circle, facing inwards, and engage in the activities that happen inside it. Carpet squares, cushions or chairs that show the children where to sit are helpful. It is also helpful to clear the space of anything that might distract their attention.

- Choose a good time

Circle time is important so it needs to be timetabled to reflect the value that you and your school place upon it. Choose a time when you know that everyone will be feeling energetic and alert. Stick to the timetable and never allow Circle Time to be squeezed out by the rest of the curriculum.

- Build a collection of props

Puppets are an indispensable addition to Circle Time meetings. There are books of stories and scripts available that are specially designed to use with puppets during Circle Time meetings. These will help you to become proficient enough to devise scripts of your own that meet the specific needs of your children. Many teachers also use props like crowns, cloaks and other items from the dressing-up box.

Planning is easier if you have a collection of poems and stories that can be used to stimulate drama and discussion and there are ready-made collections available. Circle Time meetings are not just about talking about difficult issues: most begin and end with a game that is designed to put the children at their ease. Party games are easy to adapt and many games from the PE curriculum can be tailored for Circle Time.

- Now assemble a 'bag of power'

Just like other lessons, not every Circle Time meeting will go as you wish. Sometimes the meetings will be flat and the children unresponsive. You will

need to have something up your sleeve for these difficult moments. We call this 'the Bag of Power', a cloth bag full of Circle Time rescue remedies! Include your puppets, games and objects to intrigue and invite discussion, a book of poems, a cloak or other dressing-up clothes and a 'treasure box'. When things start to flag, just slowly put your hand in the Bag of Power and pull out something to surprise and distract. You need to be more exciting than the most disruptive child in your group so that the rest of the class ignore the distraction and focus all their attention on you!

### • Prepare your adult helpers

You will need adult helpers trained to understand how Circle Time works and it is helpful to spend time before each meeting explaining what you are intending to do and what you will expect from your aides. Parents can be useful and you may decide to send out invitations so that they feel welcome to attend. This is another reason for holding your meetings at a regular time every week.

### • Agree your ground rules

Ground rules tell us how to behave in particular situations. Their purpose is to minimise confusion and conflict and to create an atmosphere in which meaningful discussion can take place. To be effective, the rules must be agreed by everyone and you will need to review them before each meeting. The list below covers the ground rules that experienced practitioners find indispensable.

#### *Everyone has the right to be heard*

It is important the children have the right to be heard without interruption. This right is made very clear when a 'speaking object' is used. Only the individual who is holding the speaking object is allowed to speak. It can be passed around the group or placed in the centre of the circle and picked up by children who wish to contribute to discussions. Alternatively, children can raise their hand or do a 'thumbs-up' to indicate their wish to speak. In excellent Circle Time meetings, the teacher acts as a facilitator and skilfully ensures that children talk and debate with each other. The teacher's voice is heard less and less as children

become more respectful and confident with each other. Attentive listening is a vital social skill and meetings cannot be successful if this rule is not observed. Sometimes, however, you will need to employ some polite interruption: We advise that you do so like this: *'I'm very sorry to have to interrupt you, Sally, but I need to remind Joe about one of our ground rules.'*

#### *Everyone has the right to 'pass'*

In the circle, every child has an equal right to speak. Every child also has the right to remain quiet if they so wish – they can say 'pass' if it is a round, for example. Give them another opportunity to speak at the end of each step when you can say, *'Does anyone want to change their mind and say something before we move on?'*

#### *We are always kind and positive*

Children will clam up and refuse to contribute if they feel that their views will be dismissed or ridiculed. Circle Time meetings are all about reinforcing good behaviour and it is important that only positive things are said. Participants need to be taught to make 'I' statements that describe their personal feelings so that their statements are not received as an attack. Teach your children to relate things back to their own viewpoint by using this sentence stem: *'When you ....., I felt .....*

### • Facilitate different learning styles

Circle meetings are fast-paced and involve a wide range of activities. They should be designed to tap into different learning styles so that every child can excel at some point of the meeting. Shy children, for example, can be transformed by holding a puppet. Academic lessons are planned to accommodate a variety of learning styles, so plan your Circle Time activities in the same way. Both shy and outgoing children should have a chance to shine and every child must get an opportunity to learn in the way that suits them best.

### • Use your adult helpers

Your adult helpers can be encouraged to give extra support where it is needed.

This may mean one-to-one support for particular children. For children whose development is delayed they can be asked to simplify tasks or they may be used to help particular children concentrate and stay on task. It is a good idea to keep an empty chair in the circle for children who find it difficult to join in. Welcome them into the circle if they choose to come in from the outside.

- **Encourage, don't 'force'**

Some children are reticent and are allowed to say 'pass' if they feel that they do not want to speak. They need encouragement and can be given a second chance to speak with assistance from an adult helper. Alternatively, you may find that they will feel more confident if they are allowed to hold a puppet or a cuddly toy. Be prepared to wait patiently until such children are more familiar with the routines of circle time. They will come to realise that they are in a safe environment and can trust in the people around them.

- **Use the sessions to meet children's needs**

If you have children in your class who display particular problems, then Circle Time is your opportunity to offer them help. For example, if you have a child who has a problem with anger then you can model and teach anger management and calming techniques. This means that the whole class learns to help one another by practising pro-active strategies and problem-solving as a team.

- **Try smaller Circles of Support for 'children beyond'**

Some children are exceptionally needy and cannot cope with whole-class circle meetings. These children need to attend small therapeutic meetings where their specific needs can be met. They need extra-large portions of praise and affirmation that only a small group can supply. In an ideal world, these small group meetings are timetabled to take place at the same time as the larger meetings. Children with emotional, social and behavioural problems urgently need these boosts to their self-esteem and it is well worth rearranging the timetable to accommodate them. *Running Small Circles of Support For Children 'Beyond'* What Normally Works by Jenny Mosley will be published by LDA in 2007.

Children say...

My teacher is good because she chooses good games. She thinks hard to make it fun and she works hard to be very smiley.

Fallon, Year 3

Children say...

I like holding the speaking object and talking about the things I sometimes think about.

Joseph, Year 6

Children say...

I like circle time because it relaxes me so I'm not so steamed up all the time.

Holly, Year 4

Children say...

It relaxes me so I don't yell at anyone.

James, Year 5



### 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 bringing 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.

### INTRO TIME WINKLEWOOD

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



## GETTING TO KNOW YOU

**SEAL theme:** New beginnings  
**Focus:** Boosting the individual and strengthening the group

**What you need:** Speaking object; fruit basket

### Meeting up

The children sit in a circle. Go around the group and label each child either an orange or lemon. Call out 'oranges', or 'lemons' or 'fruit basket'. The children in the named category must change places. When 'fruit basket' is called, everybody changes places.

TOP TIP

The purpose of this game is to make sure that everyone 'mixes up' and sits next to someone with whom they would not usually interact. Explore other games that help children to sit next to 'new' people.

### Warming up

Each member introduces him/herself and physically makes one action to indicate how they are feeling now. For example, Joe is tired and so he stretches, Shakira is excited so she jumps up and down. The whole group imitates that person's contribution.

TOP TIP

Work on these ideas before Circle Time and put them up on the wall.

### Opening up

Everybody should mingle inside the circle – they have two minutes to shake each other's hands, give their names and tell a fact that they think everybody knows about them, e.g., 'I like jelly sandwiches.' The children then return to their circle seats.





**Don't forget that adults must try to join in Circle Time activities.**

Now ask if they can remember any of the facts. Ask for volunteers to stand up and introduce a classmate like this: *'This is Kayleigh and she likes to dance to loud music in the kitchen.'* Kayleigh then introduces another person until the whole group is standing up. Ask another child to walk around the group labelling each child A-B-A-B-A-B-A around the circle. All the 'A' children should now move their chairs to face the 'B' children so that an inner and outer circle is formed. These pairs of children now have to discover three things that they both like and three things that they both dislike. When you re-form the larger circle, ask the 'A' children to introduce their partner and recount the things that they both like. The 'B' children then introduce their partner and recount the things that they both dislike.

**The aim here is to introduce the concept of shared experience and individual differences at a basic level.**

### Cheering up

Congratulate all the children on their speaking skills and highlight individuals who have displayed particular skill – for example, *'Well done, Joe, I liked the way you used eye contact.'* Or, *'Susie, the way you stood still made it much easier to concentrate on what you were saying.'* and so on.

### Calming down

Ask the children to hold hands in the group and close their eyes. Gently squeeze the hand of the child next to you and ask him/her to pass the squeeze on to the next person and so on



around the circle. Repeat this with a smile and then with a 'hello'. Unclasp hands and thank the children for listening to each other so well.

TOP TIP

Like Chinese Whispers, pass around a shape drawn on a palm. It doesn't really matter what is drawn – it's a lovely feeling.

TOP TIP

Take time to reflect on the success of your Circle Time. If your teaching assistant is able to join you all ask her for her thoughts on how you could plan the next meeting to embrace more children's needs. For example; if too many children say 'pass' – then a few days before Circle Time give them notice of what the sentence stem will be. They can then prepare by bringing a little card with them to remind them what they want to say. If a child is terribly shy they can give their card to someone else to read – or whisper to your puppet who can then speak for them

## HOW TO INVESTIGATE...

*When you work together as a group to investigate social, emotional and behavioural issues you all need to know when facts are a necessity and when opinions can be expressed.*

**SEAL theme:** Relationships  
**Focus:** To facilitate smooth social interaction  
**What you need:** Speaking object, pictures of animals or a collection of animal toys

### Meeting up

The children should crouch down to balance on arms and legs in a large circle, facing towards the centre. Number the children 1, 2, 3 and again 1, 2, 3 and so on around the circle. When a number is called, all of the children with that number can move one limb. The numbers need to be called quite quickly. The object of the activity is to cross the circle without touching anyone else so there needs to be considerable co-operation and manoeuvring. For example, a child may have to move backwards or sideways to allow another child to pass.

### Warming up

Using the speaking object, ask each child in turn to complete the following sentence: 'My favourite animal is ...' Children who do not wish to speak may say 'pass' and give the speaking object to the next child.

### Opening up

Point out that a lot of people chose different animals but there were no wrong answers. It was all a question of taste and everyone had their own reasons for making their particular

choice. Hold up a toy giraffe and tell the children that you are going to say three things about it:

*'This giraffe has four legs.'* (a fact)

*'It has long legs.'* (another fact)

*'Giraffes are pretty.'* (an opinion)

You can then ask for a show of hands. *'Who agrees that this is a giraffe?'* (It is a fact so everybody should agree.) *'Who agrees that it has four legs?'* (This is also a fact so everyone should put up his or her hand.) *'Who agrees that it is pretty?'* (There should be a variety of opinions here.) Repeat this activity with another animal. Now ask the children to think of another animal and state two facts about it and then add an opinion. Point out that we can hold opinions that are very different. For example, one child may think that lions are cuddly while another may think that they are quite frightening. Ask the children to research the range of opinions about animals.

You can extend this idea later by showing the children how to research strength of opinion. Give them a prepared survey sheet that gives a range of opinion – hate/dislike/like/like very much – and an issue to research, such as 'Opinions about dogs'.

Now you can show the children how we justify opinions by telling them how we use the word 'because'. It's a word that means 'for the reason that follows'. Put the children into groups of three and give them an animal and a large card with the word 'because' printed on it. Ask each group to think of facts about the animal and to discuss their opinions about it. They can then hold up their picture and describe it using facts, and then share their opinions. For example:



- 1st child: 'We like this animal...' (expresses opinion)  
2nd child: 'because' (holds up card)  
3rd child: 'it has interesting habits and runs very fast.' (our reasons)

You can then develop this by asking them to follow the same format when discussing more abstract issues, such as: 'We don't like noisy people because it is hard to concentrate when they are around.'

### Cheering up

Tell the children that you know some facts about them: they are all in your class, they are a group of boys and girls, and so on. Then tell them that you are of the opinion that they are also quite wonderful because..... (Prepare a list of positive comments about your class from your teaching assistants, other support staff, school secretary etc.)

### Calming down

Ask the children to take three or four slow deep breaths and imagine that they are breathing in happiness and breathing out unhappiness until their whole body feels peaceful and content. Pause for moment and then think of positive words to tell themselves. These can be thought as 'I' statements - 'I am lovely. I am good at many things, I am happy' etc.

