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How to Use This Book

This book has been written for both experienced and inexperienced Circle Time practitioners. To make it easily accessible to the teacher for each lesson you will need the following resources.

Firstly, a *CD* is enclosed which has colour images of the poems and bears for each letter of the alphabet. These need to be printed and copied on to A3 or A4 paper and laminated.

The poems and letters are written in alphabetical order and introduced on a weekly basis to the children. To aid visual stimulation for the children, *A3* and *A4 posters* can be reproduced to display the letters in alphabetical order around the classroom. These can therefore be referred to on a regular basis, in Literacy and Circle Time lessons.

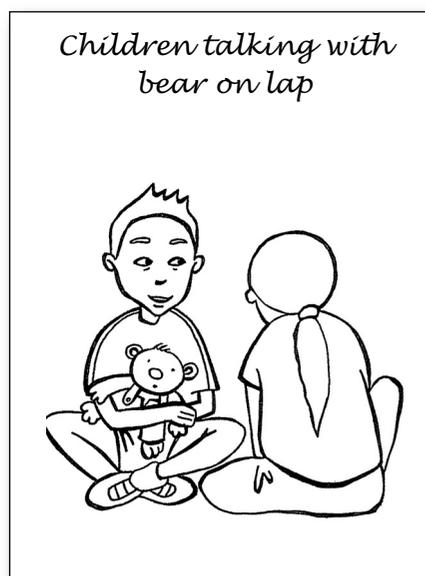
The teacher needs to *purchase a bear*, to be used throughout the Circle Time lessons. The bear's name could be chosen by the class, but it is important that it is a two syllable name, to fit in with the rhythm of the poems. In the poems, all the bears' names begin with 'B', to enhance the idea of an alliteration with the word bear. For example, Brindle bear and Bradley bear. In this book, all the bears are male, as the reference in the poems are to a male bear, as he is described as 'king bear'.

Also included is a *knitting pattern*, so that 'Stripy' bear can be reproduced. The purchase or making of a bear is a very important part of the Circle Time session, as he becomes a 'real character' to discuss issues linked to the social skills curriculum. Furthermore, children often talk 'through' the bear, as he is passed around the circle, for 'rounds' and other games.

A *CD of music* is also enclosed to recite each alphabetical poem to. On the CD there is an example of how to recite the poem to a rhythm followed by just the rhythm to recite it as a class. It is advisable that each teacher keeps a *box of instruments* in the classroom to enable rhythms to be played simultaneously to the poem being recited. It is usually more helpful when a third of the class use the instruments to enable the poem to be recited, as well as the rhythm played to accompany the performance.

This book aims to encourage teachers to use the 26 alphabetical lesson notes with a flexible approach across the curriculum, either for a specific social skills curriculum or linked to a Literacy lesson. It is accompanied with poems and rhythms (on a CD) which can be used effectively in Literacy lessons to encourage and develop speaking, listening and performance skills. The Circle Time ideas can also be included in Personal, Social, Citizenship and Health Education lessons (PSCHE). Furthermore, this approach enhances the music curriculum with its focus on rhythm, use of instrumentation and performance skills.

Before each Circle Time session the children should be encouraged to listen to an alphabetical poem on the music CD and to follow the words of the poem or song. In the first lesson the bear puppet should be introduced to the children and should be named and be part of all the Circle Time activities. The poems and songs should usually be performed in the classroom before the circle is formed. The children are encouraged to read the poem and use instruments to accompany



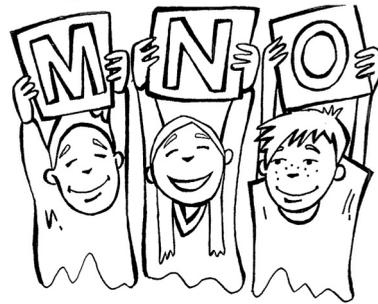
the rhythm of the poem. The CD has rhythms to accompany each poem and music to accompany the songs. Following this, the children recite the poem and also use instruments to enhance the poem. The majority of poems can be learned off by heart very quickly and children enjoy the challenge of this, which results in a presentation and performance with instrumentation. This part of the lesson could be introduced at a different time to the Circle Time session, for example, as part of a Literacy lesson, or at the beginning of a morning session to support reading activities or oracy skills. The same poem and alphabetical letter is used throughout the week.

The Circle Time lesson activities proceed following the weekly introduction of the poem. This is often on a Monday morning. The poems are purposefully written in alphabetical order to encourage the children to continue to use and become confident with the alphabet in a fun but challenging way. Many words end in 'ing', for example, **dancing and hiding**; this supports the teaching of 'ing' in the Literacy curriculum. There are also some simple words like **wow, tall, very happy** and some challenging words, such as **noughts and crosses, adorable, ice-cream and laughing**. The 'm' in the centre of the book encourages the children to associate **M is for mending bear**. The children should be told that **M also** mends the two parts of the alphabet together, so it is remembered as the middle letter of the alphabet.

Games can be played with words that come before and after the chosen alphabetical letters and the different words in the bear's alphabet. It is always a good idea to spend a few sessions going through the order of the words on the posters so that the children can become familiar with the order of the alphabetical words. The children enjoy the words to be used in an alphabetical challenge to see how many they can remember. If the words are cut into strips the Alphabetical game can be played from the circle. This game is shown at the beginning of the 26 themed lessons in Chapter 8 where the alphabetical word strips are also included. The alphabetical word strips are included on the CD.

*3 children in a row
hold card in
alphabetical order.*

*M is for Mending
N is for Noughts and
crosses
O is for Orange
drinking*



How to begin Circle Time

For Circle Time to be most effective, a whole school approach needs to be established where it is clearly understood that deep foundations of mutual respect, care for all individuals and trust lead to feelings of security. Schools need to take the time to establish these foundations at all levels, as a strong pastoral support programme within schools strengthens relationships and enables them to become honest and secure.

Circle Time should be planned across the school to ensure the continuity and progression of skills across the Key Stages supports the progress of the Personal, Social, Citizenship and Health Education programme. My own belief is that time should be given on the timetable to ensure that Circle Time is a structured part of your working week. Ideally, it should begin as a short meeting on a Monday morning where the week's timetable, targets or procedures need to be revisited and then later in the week a more structured timetable of Circle Time themes needs to be established. A Circle Time lesson should normally last between 15–30 minutes for Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1.

In the ideal classroom, Monday morning needs to be a place of regaining tranquillity, where the children come in to peaceful music, sit in their place or on the carpet with a book or activity, and relax into the situation before beginning any more structured work. Relaxation and breathing techniques are often a good opener to the week, or a relaxing poem, or piece of music. Beginnings of days or a week are an ideal time to use the positive thoughts in this book, as a stimulating activity to begin your week. These positive thoughts should be read and reflected upon through discussion.

4 CREATIVE CIRCLE TIME LESSONS FOR THE EARLY YEARS

Circle Time Organisation

Sitting in a circle enables children to feel a sense of equality and helps them to be responsible and able to make important decisions. The circle is a symbol of co-operation and support for each other.

Some Circle Time writers feel it should be a circle of chairs ... personally, I do not feel it matters. It is important however, that every child has a place to sit that is not too squashed, so that if they change places, there is an obvious space to go to. Some teachers like to use carpet tiles for this purpose.

The teacher's role is one of co-ordinator or facilitator where they create a supportive atmosphere and takes part in all activities.

The benefits to children are...

- children have a sense of belonging to a group they can trust
- it encourages good communication and co-operation skills
- it promotes positive self-esteem and behaviour
- children begin to understand and value themselves and others
- it aids the development of positive relationships with each other
- it encourages self-discipline
- it develops confidence in speaking and ensures children are good listeners.

It helps children to...

- discuss sensitive issues
- resolve conflicts
- solve problems
- be able to participate in reflection and meditation/dream journeys.

Rules

It is important to establish some very clear but specific rules for all the children follow in Circle Time. These are applicable for Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 children.

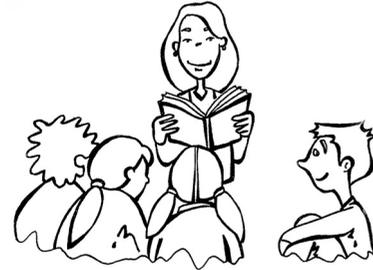
An object such as a bear or puppet, instrument, soft toy, or shell should be passed round to initiate talk and to give the child the right to talk. Children must signal with their hands if they wish to speak.

There should be no put downs and the exploration of put downs should be dealt with early on in Circle Time.

Children are told that good behaviour is expected throughout the Circle Time sessions, and a discussion of expectations on good behaviour would be beneficial.

A child has the right to pass if he/she is not able to speak. This child may then speak at the end if he/she wishes to. If a child continually does this deliberately they may be asked to sit outside the circle until they are ready to rejoin the group (unless the child has particular difficulties). A discussion with the child after the session about positive expectations on how to participate would be helpful.

Teacher reading a story. Children sitting relaxed on floor listening. (Black and White). 2 Asian - 2 white children



(10) Circle of children - holding bear or puppet - one child - children all focused looking at that one child (6 children)



A teacher has the right to sit a child outside the circle if they break any of the rules explained to them. The teacher must find a quick opportunity to enable the child to return to the circle, e.g. 'You are sitting beautifully now John, join our circle.'

No one in the circle must be named in a negative way. The child must say 'Someone has hit me.' Family names are also respected and 'Someone' must be used, not Mum, Dad, brother, etc.

Very private concerns should be encouraged for problem boxes.

Circle Time Rules Should be Simple for Children

- we listen to each other
- we may pass
- there are no put downs
- we do not tell anyone else what they should be doing
- when we try to help we say, 'Do you think it would be helpful if...'
- we behave well and tell the truth
- we speak by raising our hand or by using the bear or puppet.

TWO CDS accompany this book:

Audio CD

On the audio CD, each poem or song is read or sung by primary aged children, to demonstrate how it should be performed. Following the performance, a rhythm or song will be played, so each teacher with their group of children can 'have a go' without the help of the children on the CD.

The majority of the alphabetical words are poems, with the exception of Goalkeeper bear, Laughing bear and Stripy bear, which are all songs. King bear, which is the most serious of all the poems, is read without a rhythm. Children can be encouraged to read this 'out loud' to try and replicate a 'majestic' and important feel to it. Microphones can be useful to assist with this process.

Children on hands and knees copying a rhythm, using floor as instrument



CD Rom

The CD Rom contains the following:

- All the poems, including the appropriate bear, for each letter of the alphabet.
- Outline images of all bears labelled with correct alphabetical name.
e.g. Baloo bear, Bathtime bear.
- The alphabet strips, for the alphabet game (see Chapter 8) including the picture of bears on each strip.
- The knitting pattern for the bear.
- The story script of Dabbit Day, including images of the story (see Very happy bear).
- Positive Thought scripts with appropriate alphabetical bear.
Circle Time notice board poster with appropriate bear.
A4 list of Bazal's stripes in order.