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The 6 Circle Time Dos and Don'ts



Circle Time is so much more than discussing the weather, the calendar, and shape/letter/number of the week or month.

If that is the main focus of Circle in your classroom, you are missing the boat on the true potential of this large group time and possibly

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Traditional Circle Time

Circle Time in most preschool programs is thought of as a time to “do” the calendar and weather; introduce a letter, shape, color, number or theme; and have Show & Tell.

Many preschool teachers see this time as “real instructional school time” and the rest of the day as “play” time.

However, this could not be further from the truth!

First, What IS a Circle Anyway?

[Dictionary.com](https://www.dictionary.com) defines a circle as “a closed plane curve consisting of all points at a given distance from a point within it called the center”.

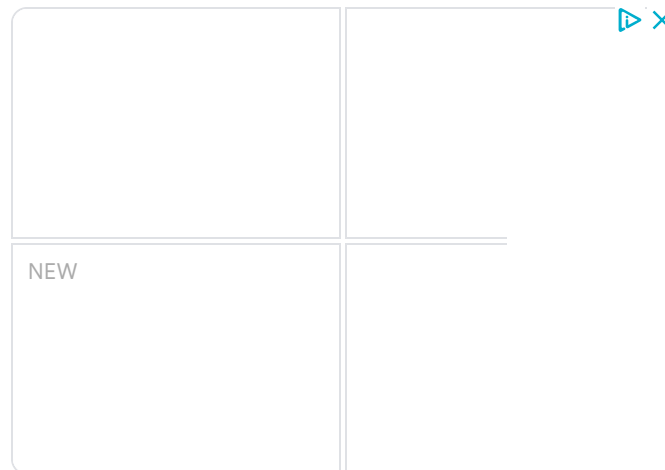
So, it is a closed curve consisting of all points on that curve: meaning there is no beginning and no end.

With respect to people, a circle is a universal simple, yet ancient, symbol of unity and togetherness. Again, it has no beginning and no end. Everyone in the circle is an equal part of that group.

How SHOULD Circle Be Carried Out?

With these definitions of a circle in mind, every person in the circle should be an equal part of the group where each one’s thoughts, ideas and conversations matter and are respected.

This is one of the few times in a preschool day where the entire group gathers as one. It is the perfect opportunity to help them to grow and develop. In addition it is the perfect opportunity to help them to be an active part of that growth and development!



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Properly planned, Circle time will help your preschoolers develop in **ALL** areas of development. ALL? Yes! To see more about how, review the Interest Learning Center Page about the [Circle Area](#).

Do's and Don'ts: The 6 Keys to a Successful and Effective Circle Time

There is so much that can happen to help your children grow and develop at Circle! Conversely, there is also much that can happen to discourage and hold children back at this area.

1. Time Considerations

DON'T allow this or any large group time to go on too long. Consider this: The average class length in most high schools in the United States is 38 minutes. Why? Neurons can only focus on one activity for that long before “burning” out.

Why would we expect preschoolers’ brains to attend for time spans that brains 10 years older cannot handle?

DO: Plan activities based on the time frame we know groups can stay focused. The average preschooler’s GROUP attention span at the beginning of the year is 5 minutes for 3 year-olds and 10 minutes for 4 year olds. Their attention spans will become longer throughout the year.

2. Balance Active and Passive Activities

DON'T expect your children to sit still, remain totally focused with hands on lap, while you “impart” all of your knowledge upon them! They, like adults, need to be involved or all they will hear is the Charlie Brown teacher voice of “Wah. Wah. Wah. Wah. Wah. Wah. Wah.”!

DO alternate your activities between passive and active to keep your children engaged throughout Circle. Passive: Sing a Hello song, check the weather, talk about what day it is (all totaled-5 minutes!). Then MOVE!

Active:





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Okay, another DON'T: By active/passive/active/passive please do not do this:

Active: A get your wiggles out dance

Passive: They sit while you go through calendar, weather, letter....oops...more wiggles

Active: A quick get your wiggles out dance or a Hokey Pokey

Passive: They sit again while you finish the letter, then number, shape, color of the week.

This still qualifies as focused time on ONE topic.....failing the rules of #1 above!

3. Be Predictable Yet Flexible

Plan your schedule with appropriate goals and time frames in mind. Predictability is important for preschoolers. It creates a sense of security and time for them.

Knowing that Circle happens every day is healthy! Knowing that we “always sing our hello song and do the weather” each day is healthy. But, it does not have to become stale!

DON'T be stuck on your own expectations of “getting through” everything—weather, calendar, shape or color introduction, story, songs. This type of self-induced pressure will make this time miserable for you and the children will know it!

When you feel you “have to” hurry or rush through everything for the sake of getting through your own litany list of information

Circle Time Poster

Preschoolers LOVE to talk!

I created this poster as a way to remind them that we all have fun and exciting things to say, however-

We need to be respectful and listen to others as well!

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DO plan on “getting through” what will keep your children engaged and involved in this rare large group time of learning and bonding. Remember, this is a time of community and sharing *as well as* learning. Allow those longer descriptions of a child’s trip to the zoo. Scrap your color introduction. Consider adding another Circle Time throughout your morning or day as your story time or concept time.

DO Plan Circle Time the same way! Sure, you can still do the daily basics (introduction song, weather, days of the week song and introducing a new shape or color)! However, this is a very small part of your circle time! Introduce the concepts and themes differently each week.

Examples:

Rather than introducing a triangle via a flashcard, bring a mystery box with triangle block in it to Circle Time. The children reach in and feel it. “I wonder what shape this is. Does it feel like a circle?” Create a chart for their guesses).

Introduce a theme differently one day:

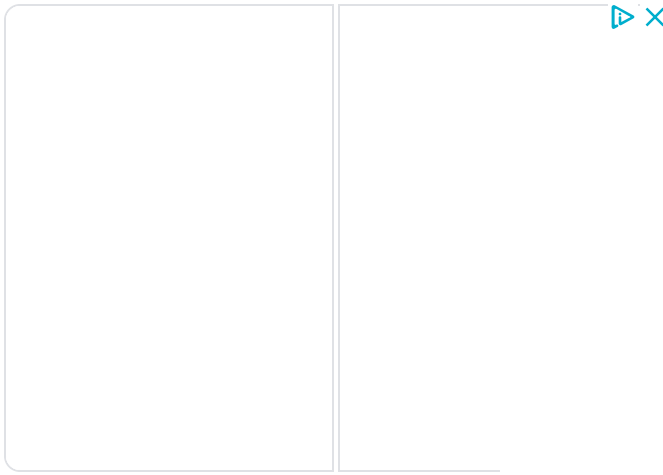
Rather than introducing your new theme, Transportation, by *telling them* “We are learning about ways to get from one place to another. It is called Transportation.”, set out a car, truck, airplane, train, bus, and bicycle.

Let the children discuss what they, who have ever been in one, what they are used for and simply end with “Yes! We use these to get to many places! Getting from one place to another is called ‘Transportation’. Can you say that word? Great!”

by children
and I'll
send this
poster
your way
now!



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4. Be Intentional

DON'T approach Circle Time half-heartedly. You know you are doing this when:

- You grab a book off the shelf *on your way to Circle Time* to read because “We HAVE to read a story, it’s circle time”.
- After you have done your traditional weather, calendar, storytime, etc., you feel empty.
- Your children lose attention quickly and you (and they!) feel frustrated each day at Circle.

DO be intentional about what you want to share WITH (not AT) the children by planning at least a week ahead of time as you do any other activity. Circle activities should be part of your lesson planning, not thrown together each morning.

Think about, for example, planning art activities for the week. You don’t set out the exact same materials every day. You planned for the children to explore and work with different mediums (perhaps finger painting, brush painting, gluing a collage and stamping).

5. Be Prepared.

DON'T be in a position where you (or a coworker) need to gather items or

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so that you have time to think of fun ways to read the books (using puppets or flannel stories).

Gather the items/props you will need in advance (the day before or prior to the children arriving). You have their attention for a short time—don't waste any of it by running around looking for items!

BE in Circle Time With The Children As Your Focus

You and your co-workers need to **be** in the Circle Time zone—physically AND mentally!

DON'T:

- Have personal discussions with co-workers or parents when your children are at Circle ready to go. You will lose them!
- Use threats or rewards to get their attention or focus. Some examples are:

“If you don’t all quiet down we won’t finish this story.”

“Sit quietly and listen and then we can have center time”.

These are not appropriate management tools nor are they effective with a group. Further, they set the children up to think that Circle is not enjoyable but rather something they “have” to do.

Another example I've heard that should never be used....

“If you do not quiet down, I’ll be telling your Moms” or “I’ll call your Mom or Dad”.

If you find yourself saying or doing these things, you should look at your activities and why your children are losing focus. Ask a coworker or the director to observe a circle time and give feedback so you can brainstorm together.

DO: Be prepared to end a story or activity when you see many of the children’s attention waning or slipping. Give yourself permission to say things like, “I think we all need to get our wiggles out. Let’s stop the story and do the Hokey Pokey!”. Or even, “I think we have been sitting a long time. Let’s go to our next activity and later today we’ll read this exciting

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I KNOW, *I know*, you spend hours of time developing your preschool themes, activities and preschool lesson plans each week. You are committed to planning preschool themes and activities that are engaging hands-on, interactive, fun AND meet the goal of supporting each child's level of growth and development.

I am committed to providing you, the preschool teacher, with everything you need to develop preschool lesson plans and preschool activities for your classroom all in one place!

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