Transcript
Circle Time: The Heart of Classroom Community

Slide 1: Introduction
Welcome to “Circle Time: The Heart of Classroom Community”. This 2-hour course will help you learn how to plan and implement circle time in your classroom, whether you work with infants, toddlers, preschoolers or school-agers. We will look at what’s involved in planning circle time, what children learn, and how circle benefits each child individually as well as bringing the class together as a community.

Slide 2: Learning Objectives
Let’s take a few minutes to go over the learning objectives for this course. By the time you finish this course, you should be able to:

- Define circle time
- Describe the benefits of circle time
- Plan an effective circle time for the children in your class

Slide #3: Learning Objectives (continued)

- Describe appropriate activities for circle
- Explain how transitions help children move from one activity to the next
- Describe strategies for keeping children engaged during circle

Slide #4: Defining Circle Time
Circle time, often called large group time, is a time when children come together as a group to learn and have fun, solve problems, talk things over and learn to be a part of a community. Circle time usually lasts about 10-15 minutes, depending on the age of the children, and happens several times a day.

Young children, by nature, view the world from the perspective of ‘me’ and ‘mine’. This is normal, expected and exactly where they should be, according to their age and development. Circle time allows children to begin looking at the world from the perspective of ‘we’ and ‘ours’. This gradual change in perspective is part of the growing process of early childhood and will not be complete for a number of years. As children and teachers come together to talk and learn, a feeling of community grows and children become more comfortable functioning as a group. (Boisvert and Gainsley, 2006)
During circle, you can do many different activities with children – read books, sing songs, dance, explore new materials, write together, vote on matters important to children, tell stories and reenact them, play group games and work on class projects.

You can include curriculum content in circle time by introducing an idea in the large group and then planning activities during center time that allow children to explore the idea on their own. For example, you may be learning about transportation. At circle time, you can talk with the children about how they got to school today, writing their answers on a white board and counting how many people came in a car, a bus, or walked to school. You could sing “The Wheels on the Bus”, read a book about transportation and then dismiss children to centers by asking them to pretend to be a car, truck or airplane as they leave circle. In centers, you could have trucks and cars in the block area, maps and road signs in the writing area, books about transportation, pilot uniforms and other props in pretend play. As you can see, this would give children the opportunity to experience what they are learning first hand through play.

**Slide #5: A Place for Circle Time**

One thing necessary for a successful circle time is a space that's large enough for everyone to gather together. A carpet or rug is great, but if you don't have that, individual carpet squares, place mats or even masking tape on the floor can be used to define your space. Including children's names to define a spot for each child is helpful in managing potential conflicts.

The teacher needs to have a place to keep the materials needed for implementing circle activities. Some of the things you need will be books, a large tablet or white board easel for writing, a cd player, props that children will use, and puppets, just to name a few.

A calendar, alphabet letter wall, job chart and weather chart may also be used during circle, depending on the age of your children.

**Slide #6: Benefits of Circle Time**

Imagine for a moment that you are a young child who goes to school or a childcare setting for a large portion of your day. What would it be like? How would you feel? It’s insightful to put yourself in the place of a child in your classroom. Even getting down on the floor and looking at the space from their perspective is effective. What you have placed on the wall for them to see may not even be visible from their perspective!

Circle time helps children, especially those who may be new to your group, understand how to engage with others. It gives children:

- A common experience that they can build on in their play.
• A sense of belonging to the group.
• An opportunity to practice leading their friends.
• An opportunity to solve problems together.

The skills that young children learn in circle time will be beneficial as they enter elementary school and even later in life. These important skills of learning to express yourself in a group, take turns, cooperate and be a part of a larger community are essential for successful living.

**Slide #7: Planning for Circle Time**

Successful circle times are the result of planning and preparation. Planning requires consideration of many things – the age of your children, their interests, their developmental needs, and how accustomed they are to large group activities.

When introducing circle time as a new component in your daily routine, you may need to plan for short periods of time together, until they learn how to participate in this type of activity. As time progresses, you will find that children are willing to sit and focus in group activities for longer periods of time.

When planning for circle time, there are 3 main categories to include: the beginning, the middle and the end.

**Slide #8: The Beginning: Introducing Circle Time**

As circle time approaches, give children a few minutes notice that it soon will be time to come to circle. This gives them a chance to finish up what they are working on, and begin thinking about the upcoming change. It is always helpful to let children know ahead of time what is coming next.

Begin circle time with a strategy for drawing children to the group. A simple, easy-to-join in activity will keep the first arrivals interested while they wait for their friends to come join them. The activity will draw the attention of the children, making the transition from what they are doing to circle time smoother.

Some examples of things you can do include songs that involve movement, that focus on individual children names, finger plays, rhyming games or playing follow the leader.

**Slide #9: Interactive – Planning activity form**

Let’s begin making a circle time plan that you’ll be able to implement with your children. Open the Word Document entitled “Circle Time Planning Form”. Fill out the “Introductory Activity” portion of the form. You may use the handout
entitled, “Introduction Transitions” which has activities suitable for helping
children come to circle time.

Slide #10: The Middle: Circle Time Content

Now that children have joined you on the rug, it’s time to get on with circle time! 
Greet the children by name, tell they you are glad they are here and w hat you
have planned for circle time. By telling children what is going to happen next,
you give them a sense of security and expectation.

There are many ways to approach ‘Content’ in circle time. As you plan, you will
have a learning goal for your time together. This goal will help you determine
what kind of activity to plan. Let’s look at some ways to teach children during
circle time…

Slide #11: Daily Routines – Attendance, Calendar, Weather

Daily routines such as a talking about who is at school today, what day of the
week it is, what the weather is like outside and other things that are important in
a child’s day are good to include in circle time.

Attendance gives children a chance to be recognized by their friends and
teacher. You can sing a song that names each child, use name cards or a sign-
in sheet to take attendance.

The calendar gives you an opportunity to teach children the days of the week and
the concepts of yesterday, today and tomorrow. You can use different shapes on
your calendar to make a pattern with the days. For example, your numbers can
be on triangles and circles. One day’s shape is a triangle; the next day is a
circle, then a triangle, and then a circle. Children will see the pattern emerge,
which is an important concept of early math. You can create a more complicated
pattern, using three or four shapes, as children become familiar with identifying
patterns.

Assigning each child a ‘job’ to do throughout the day provides a sense of
community and responsibility. Some common jobs that children do are line
leader, door holder, table cleaner, snack helper, weather helper, clean up
inspector – just to name a few. Make sure that you have enough jobs for each
child, and let children do their job for a week. This allows them time to be
proficient at the task, plus it minimizes the confusion of changing jobs daily.

Slide #12: Music

Children love to sing, and music is an important part of circle time. You may feel
a little self-conscious about singing, but children don’t care how you sing, they
just care THAT you sing! There are many ways to use music in circle time: you
can sing songs, listen to different kinds of music, play instruments together, listen to and imitate different rhythms using instruments or handclaps and make up songs and chants together. Children come to school with a wide variety of musical experiences. Offering them the opportunity to hear different genres of music will broaden their experience and appreciation of music.

You could invite a guest to come to your class who plays a musical instrument like the violin or guitar. Your children would love the opportunity to give it a try themselves.

Children of all ages enjoy singing, even babies.

**Slide #13: Video – Singing with Infants (Infants Call Response video)**

Here’s a short video clip which demonstrates how a teacher sings with the infants in her class and the children repeat back the tone and rhythm that she sings to them.

**Slide #14: Try to answer the following questions**

As you view the video clip, Infants Call Response, try to answer the following questions:

- How does the teacher encourage the babies to sing?
- How does the teacher/child interaction imitate conversation?

**Slide #15: Post Video Discussion**

In this video, we see a sensitive teacher responding to the babbles of the babies in her group. She responds to their babbles as if they were initiating a conversation with her! The taking of turns between the baby and the teacher mimics conversation and encourages the children to play with sounds and even imitate the teacher. Did you notice how the teacher also imitates the children, saying their sounds back to them? This exchange demonstrates how infants begin to link that the sounds they make communicate to others. Their efforts at engaging in the exchange are rewarded with smiles, praise and interchange with the teacher.

The teacher also uses sign language with her words, “That is beautiful singing! Beautiful!” Teaching infants simple signs for common words helps them communicate before they are able to express themselves verbally.

**Slide #16: Finger plays**

Finger plays are poems or rhymes that we recite, using hand motions to illustrate the words. You may be familiar with ‘Itsy Bitsy Spider’ from your own childhood. Finger plays are a great way to encourage children to participate and be involved
with the group. They require listening, watching, imitating, recalling the words and motions. They include rhyming words, alliteration (words which begin with the same sound), rhythm and gestures that indicate a message — all skills that are useful in emerging literacy.

In circle time, finger plays are often used at the beginning of your time together, to engage children and give them an opportunity to speak, wiggle and move their body — which is what they want to do when they are close together. A teacher can successfully use finger plays to get the attention of the whole group.

Many finger plays utilize simple language and phrases, which are appropriate for infants and toddlers who are just beginning to talk. Modeling language is very important with your youngest children — they need for you to simplify your language when speaking to them.

**Slide #17: Video – Singing with Gestures**

Here’s a short video clip in which a teacher is singing a song with gestures with a child. They sing the song with words and gestures, then just with gestures.

Viewing Time: 2 minutes, 44 seconds

**Slide #18: Try to Answer the Following Questions**

As you view the video, Singing with Gestures, see if you can answer the following questions:

- How do the hand motions match the words of the song?
- Do you think the hand motions help the children remember the words of the song?
- Does the little girl appear to sing ‘silently’ when the teacher does the motions?
- Are the other children gaining anything from this interaction?

**Slide #19: Post Video Discussion**

In this video clip, the teacher and child sing a song about fire and firemen. The hand motions match the words of the song by acting out the words or using meaningful gestures (such as pointing to the ear when singing, “hear the engines coming”) Using hand motions to illustrate words is a tool that helps children remember. When the teacher ‘sings’ the song with the motions only, the little girl appears to singing along silently, even moving her body in rhythm to the silent song.
The other children in the video, who are nearby by not actively participating, are also learning the song and the gestures. One child even plays some percussion to the silent song.

**Slide #20: Reading Books**

Reading books aloud with young children is one of the most important things you can do to support their language development. Researchers tell us that reading to children of all ages, from newborns to adolescents, is beneficial in helping them have enthusiasm, joy and success in their own reading experience. Vocabulary, language and comprehension skills are necessary for people of all ages – you are helping prepare the children in your class for success in the future career – what an important person you are in their lives!

Reading aloud provides an enjoyable experience with books and motivates them to want to learn to read on their own. It helps develop comprehension skills as they follow the story line, listen for predictable phrases, guess what might come next and think about what the characters in the story may be thinking or feeling.

**Slide #21: Helping Children Understand the Story**

There are few things that you can do when you read a book during circle. First, show the children the cover of the book, read the title and ask, “What do you think this book is about?” Whether they guess correctly or not, say “Those are some good guesses, let’s read the book and see.”

Another strategy you can use to help increase children’s understanding of the book is to give them a question to think about as you read. For example, “The cover of the book has a picture of a large fish with a big frown. As I read the story, think about this question, why is the fish sad?” When you are finished reading the book, you can revisit the question and ask children to tell you why the fish in the story was sad. As they answer the question, you can summarize the main points of the story, which will increase their comprehension skills.

**Slide #22: Learning New Words**

Children learn language best when they have the opportunity to experience and/or act out new words. Simply labeling an object or picture is ineffective in teaching children a new word. Rather, have them act out the word, for example, “awaken” (pretend to be asleep and then wake up). Then ask, “How do you awaken in the mornings? Does your mom or dad wake you up? Do you wake up by yourself? Does the sun in your window wake you up?” Acting out the word and linking it to their own life experience will help them remember the new word and eventually use it in conversation with others.
A rich vocabulary is an indicator of success in kindergarten and elementary school. As teachers of young children, we need to introduce uncommon words to children frequently to build their vocabulary. The difference between a common and uncommon word is how often a child hears the word in the course of normal, everyday conversation. For example, the words “brother” and “sister” are common words, and “sibling” is an uncommon word.

There is also a difference between the words that children understand when they hear them and words they can use in their speech and writing. Your receptive vocabulary is words you understand when you read or hear them. Your expressive vocabulary is the words you use when you are speaking. There is generally a big difference in the number of words you understand versus the number of words you use in conversation. We all have a greater receptive vocabulary then expressive vocabulary. Our goal is to increase children’s expressive vocabulary. This means that they not only are familiar with new words and what they mean, but they can also use the words correctly when speaking with others. (Beck, McKeown and Kucan, 2008)

**Slide #23: Storytelling**

Have you noticed how children love to tell stories? Research tells us that storytelling is “perhaps the most powerful way that human beings organize experience” and there is a sequential way in which children develop into storytellers. By age 3, a child is able to construct and tell a story, without the help of an adult. (Genishi and Honig, 2009)

In circle time, we can tell stories in several different ways. Teachers can tell familiar stories, such as fairy tales, using puppets, flannel boards or other objects. Children listen to the story and the props help them follow the story line.

Teachers can make up stories, using familiar topics, characters, even names of children in the class. This would be a great way to address problems you might be having in the class. For example, you could make up a short story using puppets that both want to play with the same toy. The puppet characters could resolve their problem by working out a way to share the toy by taking turns or playing with it together. You have just modeled to your children how to solve their own conflicts.

You may also give children an opportunity to tell a story on their own. You can ask individual children to tell a short story while their friends listen, or you can play a game where you pass a prop, such as a small car and a person, and let each child make up a line to the story then pass it to the next person.

Older children may be able to connect their ideas and spin a great story with this activity; younger children may state random things about the props that do not necessarily connect or simply repeat what the last person said. The process is
fun either way! Learning is taking place as children use language skills, imagination and self-expression as they contribute to the story.

You may want to write down children’s stories as they create them. Children can illustrate these stories by drawing pictures during center time and you have just created a class book. Put the class book in the library center and watch children “read” their book to each other.

**Slide #24: Flannel Boards**

Are you familiar with flannel boards? It is a board about the size of poster board that is covered with flannel fabric. You can place felt pieces that indicate the story as you tell it. The felt pieces can be made yourself or purchased commercially. Children can use the flannel board to retell the story themselves and with each other during free play.

**Slide #25: Reenacting the story**

A fun thing to do in circle is have children act out a story they have just heard. You can do this by providing simple props such as a hat, scarf, basket, or other objects that will help them pretend.

Reenacting a story helps with comprehension as children remember the characters and what happened in the story. As they act it out, you or another child can be the narrator, describing what the actors are doing and giving hints when they need a little help.

You can leave these props out when children go to centers so they can continue this important type of play throughout the day. You may want to put the props in your pretend play center.

**Slide #26: Sharing Time**

An important function of circle time is giving children a chance to speak while their friends listen. You can create a systematic way of giving each child their turn at ‘having the floor’ during circle.One way to do this is “Daily News”. In Daily News, one child tells the group something that is of interest to them. This may be that they went to the donut store for breakfast, they are wearing their new light-up shoes today, or their toy broke last night. Whatever the child says is okay. You will summarize what the child has said to insure that you have the details right, then ask the children, “What shall I write to describe David's news?” They may say, “He had donuts for breakfast!” Then you can write in big print, *David had donuts for breakfast*. As you print, talk about the letters in the words and what they sound like. Ask children to tell you what letters to use. Say the letters as you write them, and as you complete a word, say out loud that you are
going to skip a space to separate the words. At the end of the sentence, tell the children you are putting a period, which means 'stop here'.

When you have written all David’s news, read them out loud and ask David to write his name (or a letter of his name or a picture, depending on his ability) on the paper. Keep the ‘Daily News’ in a place where children can go back and read it throughout the day.

This activity helps children begin to understand that print is meaningful in their daily lives and has different functions. Spotlighting a child and letting them give their news is a great way to build self-esteem and confidence. It also allows other children the opportunity to give someone else a turn, an important task in early childhood. And of course, you are modeling writing and reading with Daily News, which is key in learning to read. This shared writing activity has many benefits. (National Research Council, 1999)

**Slide #27: Exploring New Materials**

One way you can present a new idea or teaching topic in circle time is to bring some items or objects in for the children to touch, handle and explore, simply letting them experience on their own. Perhaps you are going to be learning about the seasons. You could bring a box to circle with silk flowers, sunglasses, mittens, fall leaves, packet of vegetable seeds, a sweater, a tank top and other items which are used in different seasons of the year. Let the children explore the items and talk about what they find. Give them the opportunity to draw their own conclusions about the items before you talk with them about the upcoming topic.

Listen carefully and observe the children as they explore. This will tell you what they already know about seasons of the year, as well as what they still need to learn. This will help you plan learning activities that will meet the needs of your children.

**Slide #28: Video – From Exploring Seashells video B**

Let’s look at a video clip that demonstrates the idea of exploring new materials. These children are exploring seashells during circle time.

Viewing time: 2 minutes, 2 seconds

**Slide #29: Try to Answer the Following Questions**

As you view the video, From Exploring Seashells, see if you can answer the following questions:

- How does the teacher set up the seashell exploration activity?
• What are some things you notice about the set up?
• What do you observe the children doing with the seashells?
• What kinds of activities would be a good follow-up to this time of exploration during circle time?

**Slide #30: Post Video Discussion**

The teacher has created a space for exploring the seashells by placing a plastic mat on the floor. This mat catches the sand from the shells as well as giving children a place to sit as they explore and gives boundaries to where the shells are handled. Did you notice that the teachers were not concerned when children spilled sand on their clothes or outside the mat? They knew it was an easy cleanup with the broom and that the learning taking place was much more important!

We can see that the children appear to be interested and ready to engage in pretend play, using the seashells in many new ways. Isn’t it interesting all the different ways the children play with the seashells? Did you observe them exploring the various aspects of the shells, as well as using them for pretend play props as a telephone, a whale, a pitcher for pouring, a cup and a person?

After plenty of time for exploration is allowed, the teacher could propose to the children that they are shipwrecked on a desert island. This might encourage them to consider ways the shells could be used in different ways. For example, shells might be used for cooking, fishing, making music, eating, hunting or communicating with others. Teachers can expand on children’s ideas to bring their thinking to a higher level and give them things to consider that they may not have come up with on their own.

If you were the teacher in this class, you could set out pipe cleaners, string, glue, paper, and other materials that would encourage the children to think about the seashells as tools. Do not be too concerned about making models for them to copy. It is their thinking that will make the project a relevant learning experience, not making a replica of your ideas. (Videative)

**Slide #31: Problem Solving**

Circle time is a great place for teachers and children to discuss things that are relevant to everyone. These discussions can range in subject from putting your paper towel in the trash can after you wash your hands, to rules for sharing toys, to ways we can help a child who is having difficulties, brainstorming ways to learn about a subject that children are interested in to solving problems together.

This collaborative effort of coming together as a group to discuss things of interest creates a feeling of community and belonging in the classroom. Children
need to feel that they have some degree of control in their world. This activity gives them a voice and teaches them to listen to the voices of others as well.

Teachers can facilitate this in several ways. Let’s watch a video clip and get some ideas.

**Slide #32: Video** Doghouse Doors video B

Here’s a short video clip, which demonstrates children planning together during circle time. The teacher is facilitating a discussion, which follows up on a project they began the day before. They are trying to decide whether or not their doghouse should have doors, and if so, what type of doors they should make.

Viewing Time: 5 minutes, 47 seconds

**Slide #33: Try to Answer the Following Questions**

As you watch this video – Doghouse Doors – try to answer the following questions:
- What kinds of questions does the teacher ask to encourage the children to think?
- How does she include each child in the discussion?
- How does she encourage children to listen to one another?

**Slide #34: Post Video Discussion**

Did you notice how the teacher asked open-ended questions to encourage the children to think? An open-ended question is one that cannot be answered with the word “yes” or “no”. It is a question that is answered with an idea. Although her questions are open-ended, they are focused on the specific task of making the doghouse.

When she asks a question, she gives children time to think, she doesn’t rush in to answer it for them. She asks questions that encourage higher level thinking as well. When children give their ideas, she considers each idea and the group discusses the idea. This gives each child the knowledge that their thoughts are relevant, important and worth consideration.

She insists on children listening to one another and not speaking on top of each other. She speaks respectfully to the children, not ignoring anyone. This display of respect for individuals is reflected in the children’s behavior with one another.

By the end of the discussion, the children have come together to find a solution, they have learned about the form and function of doors and they have insight into how doors have specific purposes in the care of a pet dog.
As you can see, there is much to learn from a group problem solving activity!

**Slide #35: Creative Movement**

Creative movement is movement that reflects the mood or inner state of a child. In creative movement, children are free to express their own personalities in their own style. They do not need an example to follow or an adult to imitate. Including creative movement during circle time is a way to encourage children to act on what they are learning and express their individuality. Creative movement activities help children control their bodies, gain coordination, respond to music and rhythm, and express their creativity in physical ways. (Mayesky, 2009)

For example, you could ask children to use their body to illustrate a certain word, like ‘tree’. You might be surprised at how expressive and accurate children can be when using their bodies as a communication tool. You may even know a little yoga, and note that children come very close to the yoga pose “Tree” in their creative expression of the word.

Some other ideas for creative movement include dance, moving your body to poetry, playing ‘mirror image’ with a partner, imitating a partner or making letter shapes with your body. (Mayesky, 2009)

Creative movement teaches children to be more aware of themselves and provides opportunities for interaction with others, release of energy and fun.

**Slide #36: Video – Dancing the Freeze**

In this short video, you will see four-year-old children having a great time dancing to music in their classroom.

Viewing Time: 1 minute, 49 seconds

**Slide #37: Try to Answer the Following Questions**

As you view the video, Dancing the Freeze, see if you can answer the following questions:

- What do you think children are learning from this activity?
- What do the children have to do to know how to move their body and when to freeze?
- What would be a good follow-up activity to this activity?

**Slide #38: Post Video Discussion**
In this video, a group of children have spread themselves throughout the classroom so everyone will have plenty of room to dance and move about. They have to listen carefully to the music and freeze when the music stops.

What did you come up with for the first question, ‘what do you think children are learning from this activity?’ Hopefully you listed listening as the primary cognitive skill gained from an activity such as this. But there are many other things going on – the children are moving their bodies in response to the music and mimicking the rhythm of the music. They are interacting with one another by partnering with a friend for some of the song. They are following the verbal cues of their teacher who tells them when to jump, shake and freeze. She clearly is familiar with the song, giving warning when a change is coming. I hope you noticed that the teacher is dancing with the children and enjoying the activity with them!

A great follow-up activity would be to do the same song (or one similar in tempo) that has pauses throughout with no verbal directions. This would make it a little more challenging and encourage better listening skills, an important component of emerging literacy in young children.

Slide #39: Developmental levels of children

One of the most important things that you can consider as you plan for the children in your group is their developmental level. Understanding what is typical behavior, what is too challenging or not challenging enough and what children need at different ages is most helpful for a teacher of young children. Let’s look at what you can expect from different age groups of children as you gather together for circle time.

Slide #40: Older Infants and Toddlers (10 months-2 years)

Older infants and toddlers will enjoy gathering for circle time, however it will be much less structured than with older children. They are able to listen to stories for a short while, and enjoy speaking and engaging in conversation. They enjoy imitating, following someone else’s lead, so finger plays work well with toddlers. They need activities with minimal directions. They can learn short, simple songs. They enjoy moving to music. Circle time for this age group should last 5-10 minutes. Be sensitive to their attention span -- when they’re fidgety, it’s time to stop and move on to something different! (Mayesky, 2009)

Slide #41: Preschoolers (3-4 years)

At age 3, children begin to have more self-control so circle time is a little easier. Their attention span is longer, they are interested in books and stories, they are beginning to enjoy rules and following directions, they can wait for a turn, can sing longer songs and move their bodies creatively. They will begin to show
initiative in coming up with their own ideas, as we observed in the video where children were deciding about the door on their doghouse.

Circle time for preschoolers can last up to 20 minutes, if it is planned appropriately and children are engaged with what is going on. (Mayesky, 2009)

**Slide #42: Schoolagers (6-9 years)**

At this age, children are interested in literature, acting out stories, problem solving, group games and sharing in the interests of others. They will be able to have group discussions, and enjoy experimenting with different kinds of music and creative movement.

Circle time with older children can last longer, up to 20-25 minutes.

**Slide #43: Interactive: Work on Circle Time Planning Form**

Now that we have learned about the different activities you can do in circle time, how to plan for different ages and developmental levels, let’s return to our Circle Time Planning Form. Think about the different activities described and select one or two for your class. What would work with your children? What materials do you presently have to support the activities?

Take a few moments to complete this portion of the plan.

**Slide #44: Transitions**

Think about a typical day at school or childcare - there are many instances that children move from one activity to the next. There’s arrival, snack time, center time, circle time, lunchtime, outside time, naptime plus many others. Each of these changes presents an opportunity for a child to either easily move to the next thing, or resist vehemently because he is engaged and focused on what he is doing. Imagine you are in the middle of a great book, nearly to the end of the chapter, and someone says to you, “Come on, it’s time to..., right now! Come!” Your response would be, “Hey! Wait, I’m nearly through, let me finish. Why didn’t you tell me it was time to go?”

This scenario gives us insight to what children feel like as we move them throughout the day. A sensitive teacher provides children warning when changes are coming. A bell, blinking the lights, or singing a song to indicate upcoming change is helpful for children.

**Slide #45: Transitions**

Transitions should be quick, fun, purposeful, provide a change in pace, gain children’s attention, and provide learning or teaching connection. They should
help keep children on task, get their attention and provide a time filler between activities.

In circle time, we have two points of transition. One, the introduction, has already been discussed. The next point of transition is at the end of circle time. It is important to plan a way to move children to the next activity in a purposeful way. You can plan transitions that repeat or emphasize what you've just learned – like in the transportation example earlier.

**Slide #46: The End: Closing Transitions**

In the handout entitled “Closing Transitions”, you have a list of transitions that encourage thinking as children move from one activity to the next throughout the day. Take a few moments to read over these transitions and mark the ones that would work with your age group.

**Slide #47: Interactive: Work on Circle Time Planning Form – Closing Transition**

You are nearly finished! Let’s complete the Circle Time Planning Form by completing the last section of the plan. Look over the ‘Closing Transitions’ handout and select one that will work with your children.

Take a few moments to complete this portion of the lesson plan.

**Slide #48: Strategies for a Successful Circle Time**

Now that you have planned a circle time to implement with your children, let’s talk about a few strategies that will help it all come together smoothly.

In addition to planning in advance for circle time, it’s important to discuss with your co-teacher how you will work together to make circle successful. Talk about what each adult will be doing, for example, one person will lead circle while the other sits among the children, participating as well as watching for children who may need assistance. Sometimes just one child who’s having difficulty can lead to the breakdown of the best laid plans – so taking someone away from the group to work out problems is helpful.

If you do not have a co-teacher and will be leading circle time on your own, have a plan in place for helping children who are not able to be at circle time. You might have a quiet activity placed on a table that a child can be directed to if they are unable to keep from disturbing others during circle. Or you might have a place for children to go when they need to be alone. One idea is to have a large box with a door cut out, pillows inside, labeled “Australia”, modeled from the book, *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*. In this book, Alexander says throughout the story, every time another thing goes wrong,
that he is going to Australia. Sometimes children just have a bad day and need a little space – they need to go to ‘Australia’. A sensitive teacher recognizes this and gives children a place to work things out.

**Slide #49: Planning for success**

Another strategy for implementing a successful circle time is how children are seated. There are several different approaches to this. One is to simply let children sit wherever they wish, with the simple rule of “keep your hands and body to yourself”. Many teachers like this approach because it is simple and easy.

Some teachers have a rug for circle time that is designed to give children a place to sit. For example, on the border of the rug there are letters or pictures, giving each child a ‘spot’.

Some teachers use carpet squares or even plastic place mats to give each child a spot to sit. Others use masking tape on the floor with the child’s name written on the tape.

The method you choose will depend on the age of your children as well as their ability to sit together in close quarters. You know your children – do what is best for them!

**Slide #50: Selecting Children**

During circle time there are often times when you need a child to do a particular task or answer a question. It is important to be purposeful in your selection of who gets chosen, keeping in mind that everyone needs to have a fair chance at being selected. Only calling on ‘the children who are sitting quietly’ will leave certain children out every time!

Try making name cards or even use popsicle sticks with children’s names on them. Have them accessible as you lead circle, and when you need a helper, randomly choose a card or stick. This prevents you from accidentally neglecting any children as well as giving them the assurance that you don’t have favorites!

**Slide #51: Chooser Bags**

Another approach to selecting children is a “Chooser Bag”. The Chooser Bag provides a tool for choosing children, creating a neutral and fair system for selecting helpers and/or participants for activities. The selection system is not based on merit, rather on observation and identification skills, allowing each child to have a chance, even wiggly, talkative children!
A bag of any kind is used – a fabric drawstring or even a small gift sack would work. Print the “Chooser Bag Cards” on cardstock, cut them apart and place them in the bag.

Whenever you need a helper or participant, pick a card from your bag. If more than one child fits the category, you may have those children stand up and then pick another card to further the selection process OR you may tell the children you are thinking of a number between 1 and 5 and ask them to guess a number.

**Slide #52: Be Flexible!**

One characteristic of a successful early childhood teacher is flexibility. Sometimes things just don’t work out the way you planned – and that’s okay. Be ready to put a book down and stop reading if the children simply are not interested, or to end circle time early if there is conflict among the children.

It’s a delicate balance, knowing when to insist that children follow directions and when to say, “Hey, this isn’t working right now, let’s go play outside where you can be as loud and active as you wish.”

Make note of what works with your particular children and what doesn’t. Always be willing to adjust the plan. Children rarely have a problem with this; it’s grownups that tend to get a little stuck in doing the same things day after day. Try new things, new approaches and be creative. Have fun with your children!

**Slide #53: Review**

As we near the end of this course, let’s take a moment to review what we’ve learned about implement creative circle time routines with your children.

- Know the abilities of your children and plan according to their developmental levels
- Plan well and have all your materials ready before you begin
- Include books, music, creative movement, writing, problem solving, storytelling and exploration in circle time
- Include daily routines such as calendar, daily jobs and weather
- Begin and end circle time with a transition that keeps children engaged and interested
- Insure fairness by using a systematic approach for selecting children that is not based on behavior only
- Work with your co-teachers to insure that you support one another in circle time
- Be flexible and have fun!
Slide #54: Conclusion

This concludes the informational portion of this course.

References


