

COACH'S CORNER

Coach's Corner is a DIEEC blog dedicated to providing fresh ideas for all early childhood education professionals.



Meghan Pallante
DIEEC quality improvement specialist and
ECE blogger

Circle Time

By Meghan Pallante

Circle time is a well-known concept in the early childhood education community. It is also the subject of many debates in our field. Our hope with this article is to shed some light on the purpose of circle time and how to use this time effectively.

Circle time is said to have originated in Great Britain. It has since traveled to many other cultures and has evolved into different forms for different purposes. Originally it was meant to be a whole group “learning experience” where educators would focus on a theme or a particular topic. Modern day circle times usually serve as more of a “morning meeting.” There are many different ways to use circle time and it is important to be intentional about how (or if) circle time fits into your specific program.



The Great Debate

In recent years there has been a lot of discussion about circle time due to growing research that shows the value in smaller groups and more hands-on activities. This has resulted in the big question – is circle time necessary? The short answer is no, it is not necessary. Many high quality early childhood education programs do not utilize circle time. There are plenty of other ways to start the day with children! However, when used effectively, circle time can provide a familiar routine that children and educators look forward to and enjoy. Below are some benefits of an intentional circle time.

- It can be used as a way to gather and signal the “start” of the day.
- It provides a familiar routine that is predictable to the children.
- It can create a sense of community.
- It can encourage language skills and build confidence by using familiar and repetitive rhymes and songs.

Reflecting on Your Circle Time

When considering whether or not to utilize circle time in your program there are a few factors to consider.

- One of the most important factors is the ages of the children in your care. Circle time should be age appropriate. For example, a calendar activity would not be appropriate for an infant or young toddler group, but could be appropriate for older children.
- Group size is another important factor. Many times circle time is done as a “whole group” activity. We want to be mindful of the types of activities we do with larger groups of children. Too much time sitting will cause the children to lose interest. If your circle time contains songs, consider including songs that involve movement.
- The length of time is also important and should go hand in hand with the ages of the children and the group size. When in doubt, shorter is better. Even preschool age children will start to lose interest after 5-10 minutes. For our youngest children, a good morning song may be just enough!
- Consider the purpose of circle time in your program. What are you hoping to accomplish? Some programs utilize circle time as a morning meeting, others may use this time for a learning activity.

Tips for a Successful Circle Time

Educators should always be closely monitoring sensory play with all ages, but this is especially important with infants.

- Decide on what you would like the children to experience during circle time. For example, would you like to have a morning greeting that welcomes everyone each day? Share information and directions for using new materials, at a time when all children are together? For center-based programs, this could involve a conversation with staff to get their thoughts on the subject. It is important to be sure that the educators have a shared understanding of your program's philosophy on circle time.
- Be flexible! Even if you have a plan for your circle time, it is important to remember that it may not always go as predicted. It is okay to end early or change up your routine.
- Add in some movement! Circle time does not have to require the children to be sitting for the entire time!
- Make it interactive! Let the children contribute ideas. Consider having share out times for older groups of children.
- For programs with mixed age groups, be sure to have appropriate activities for the youngest participating children. If there is something that you would like to do specifically with preschool children, consider letting the younger ones move to free play.
- Most importantly, do not force participation! Invite the children and let them come and go as they please. Many times the younger children are still listening and learning rhymes and songs even if they aren't sitting right with you.



iStock image

For concrete examples of how one early childhood educator evaluated and made positive changes to her classroom's circle time practices, [check out this one-page article](#). Keep in mind that although circle time may be a whole group experience, we want to be sure that we are also encouraging small groups and individual activities throughout the day. Whole group experiences can be overwhelming for children when done in excess.

Does your program utilize circle time? We would love to hear about your philosophies and what types of activities you include in your circle time! Remember, circle time can be so much more than calendar and weather!

Source

[Circle Time Revisited: How Do Preschool Classrooms Use This Part of the Day?](#)

Resources

- [From Circle Time to Small Groups: Meeting Children's Needs \(NAEYC\)](#)
- [Successful Circle Times \(Penn State Extension, Better Kid Care\)](#)
- [Successful Circle Times with Young Children \(Crane Center, Ohio State University\)](#)