

We Skoolhouse

Managing Circle Time





Objective of Circle Time (Morning Meeting):

Circle time, or morning meeting, is a staple event in early childhood classrooms, fostering a sense of community and setting a positive tone for the day. This time brings the class together, providing an opportunity for children to greet each other, share thoughts, and plan the day ahead. However, recent trends have seen an increase in the duration of circle times, with an expectation for young children to sit still for extended periods. This expectation runs counter to the developmental needs of young children, who thrive on movement and active engagement.

The essence of circle time is to create a collaborative, positive environment where children feel valued and heard. When circle time becomes too lengthy, it often leads to power struggles, with children being expected to sit quietly without moving or talking. These unrealistic expectations can result in negative experiences, where children become disengaged and are singled out for not adhering to the rules, leading to feelings of shame, embarrassment, and disconnect. Instead of fostering a positive community, such situations can create tension and anxiety among the children.

By focusing on creating a collaborative and interactive circle time, teachers can foster a sense of community and make the learning experience enjoyable and meaningful for children. Keeping circle time short, positive, and engaging respects the developmental needs of children, ensuring joy and connection, rather than a struggle for control.

Duration of Attention Span & Circle Time

This chart depicts the average duration of children's attention span based upon age, as well as the average duration of how long a morning meeting / circle time may persist. **Keep in mind these are averages**, and ultimately we should always be flexible and receptive to each child and the group dynamic. Meetings are show to surpass attention span in this chart as there are often different elements that will reengage children (songs, read-aloud, etc.)

| Age Group | Attention Span | Duration | Meeting Activities |
|-----------------------------|----------------|---------------|---|
| Infants (0-1 year) | 1-3 minutes | 5-10 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Short songs and lullabies• Simple finger plays• Brief visual stimulation (Short book) |
| Toddlers (1-2 years) | 1-5 minutes | 5-10 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Short, interactive songs• Simple stories with large pictures• Basic movement activities (e.g., clapping, stomping) |
| 2-3 years | 2-6 minutes | 5-15 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interactive songs and rhymes• Very short stories with repetitive text• Simple group movement games (e.g., passing a ball, dancing) |
| 3-4 years | 5-12 minutes | 10-15 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Songs with movements (e.g., "If You're Happy and You Know It")• Storytime with engaging books• Simple discussions (e.g., daily plans) |
| 4-5 years | 7-15 minutes | 15-20 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engaging songs and chants• Interactive stories with questions• Group discussions (e.g., feelings, weekend activities) |
| 5-6 years | 10-20 minutes | 20-25 minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complex songs with actions• Storytime with interactive elements (e.g., predicting endings)• Group discussions and sharing time• Introduction to group projects |

Tips for Effective Circle Time

Tip 1: Keep it Short & Sweet

Aim for shorter, more engaging circle times. A brief, focused meeting is far more beneficial than a prolonged session filled with constant redirection and tension. Children have limited attention spans, and keeping the meeting concise helps maintain their interest and participation. You may begin to add to the duration of these meetings as attention span grows and you have become more familiar as to what engages children and what “loses” children. Remember quality over quantity!

Avoid experiences where every child has a turn to do or present something (e.g. every child comes up to draw something, or every child having a turn for show and tell). While the intention is inclusivity for all, this equates to a lot of time on the carpet and a lot of waiting. If children are old enough for show-and-tell, have 1 or 2 children go a day. If its something experimental relevant to the investigation, have a center open after morning meeting where children can come and observe at a comfortable pace.



Tip 2: Be Positive and Receptive

Lead circle time with a positive attitude and be receptive to how the children are feeling. Start the day with a welcoming and cheerful demeanor, and be attuned to the group's energy and mood. Flexibility in your approach can make circle time more enjoyable and meaningful for everyone - which is the overall intention for this event!

Tip 3: Encourage Movement

Integrate movement into circle time. Simple activities like stretching, dancing, or singing action songs can help children channel their energy positively. This not only keeps them engaged but also addresses their need for physical activity.

Tip 4: Foster a Supportive Environment

Avoid calling out children in front of the group (e.g. not sitting still, "calling out," talking while you're talking, etc. Public reprimands can lead to embarrassment and shame, undermining the supportive atmosphere circle time aims to create. If children are becoming restless, it may be an indication they are losing interest or expected to attend beyond their attention span. This may also suggest they are not being engaged in a way that is interesting or relevant to them. If you have some children who want to attend but may struggle a bit more with self-regulation, consider some tools that can help them be present and regulate simultaneously (e.g. sensory toy, sitting on a teacher's lap, etc.).



Tip 5: Allow Autonomy

Give children the freedom to move away and come back to circle time independently without pressure. Forcing a child to sit or pay attention can be counterproductive. When children are allowed autonomy and the session remains fun and engaging, they are more likely to rejoin on their own.

Tip 6: Promote Collaboration and Interaction

Ensure that circle time is a collaborative and interactive experience, not a passive one. Refrain from rote memorization drills and going over stagnant passive charts (colors, numbers, shapes, weather, calendar, etc.). Encourage participation and engage children with songs, dancing, and interactive read-alouds that include varying intonation and volume to keep it interesting and developmentally appropriate.

Tip 8: Allow Physical Comfort:

Do not insist that children sit "criss-cross applesauce." Allow for physical mobility and comfort. Many children may find this position uncomfortable and spend more time adjusting their bodies to meet adult expectations, missing out on the main objectives and meaningful moments of the meeting. Some children benefit from chairs, while others prefer the floor. Some children prefer to hold a sensory object, while others may want to stretch out. Remember, movement is what turns the brain "on" and all children learn and attend in their own unique ways - its never a one-size-fits-all approach.





Why No Charts In Circle Time?

During morning meeting, the focus should be on developmentally appropriate practices that foster natural learning and curiosity. Traditional elements like weather charts, calendar, shape, number, and letter charts, are often used with the intention of teaching basic concepts. However, these practices primarily promote rote memorization rather than meaningful understanding. Here's why these elements are not recommended:

Rote Memorization: Repetitive recitation of shapes, numbers, and letters during morning meetings does not foster deep understanding. Young children benefit more from experiential learning, where they can explore and interact with these concepts in a meaningful way.

Developmental Appropriateness: Calendar concepts, such as days of the week, months, and understanding time, are abstract and typically beyond the cognitive grasp of young children aged 0-6. Expecting them to comprehend these during morning meetings can lead to confusion and disengagement rather than authentic learning.

Real Context Learning: Colors, numbers, shapes, and letters are all around us in the natural environment. Children learn these concepts more effectively through real-life experiences. For example, counting apples during snack time, identifying shapes during block play, or discussing the weather while playing outside makes the learning process relevant, engaging, and meaningful.

Engagement and Interaction: Morning meetings should be interactive and child-led, focusing on activities that engage children's interests and promote active participation. Instead of static charts, incorporating songs, storytelling, and discussions about their immediate experiences fosters a more engaging and meaningful learning environment.

Visual Overload: Young children are particularly sensitive to their surroundings. Large, colorful charts can create visual clutter, making it difficult for children to focus and feel at ease. A clutter-free environment helps reduce sensory overload, allowing children to concentrate better and feel more relaxed.

Alternative Displays For Circle Time

Instead of traditional weather charts, shape, number, letter charts, and calendar time, consider incorporating these alternative displays that are more developmentally appropriate and engaging for young children:



Visual Daily Schedule:

- **Purpose:** Helps children understand the flow of the day and what to expect next.
- **Implementation:** Use pictures and simple words to represent each part of the day (e.g., arrival, snack time, outdoor play, storytime). Place the schedule at children's eye level and review it briefly during morning meetings to provide a sense of structure and predictability. Ideally you can use images you've taken within the classroom environment, and if children can, have them create the labels.

Images of Children in the Space:

- **Purpose:** Builds a sense of community and belonging.
- **Implementation:** Display photos of the children engaged in this area, e.g. listening to a story, playing on the carpet, etc. These images help children see themselves as active participants in their learning environment.

Relative Documentation Representational of the Current Investigation:

- **Purpose:** Makes learning visible and connects children's experiences to their ongoing projects and interests.
- **Implementation:** Create documentation panels that showcase children's work and explorations related to the current investigation or theme. This can include drawings, photos, quotes from the children, and observations made by the teacher. This allows the class to review as a whole, while preparing the children to jump back into investigation-related experiences.



MADE FOR CHILDREN. DESIGNED FOR YOU.

Proprietary and confidential content of We Skoolhouse LLC. Intended for recipient use only. Do not reproduce, distribute, and/or adapt any part of the content. All rights reserved. Copyright We Skoolhouse LLC

[Weskoolhouse.com](https://www.weskoolhouse.com)



All Rights Reserved