

Creating a Caring Classroom Through Community Circles

“No significant learning happens without a significant relationship.”

-Dr. James Comer, Yale University

Why Community Circles?

- Build significant relationships—allow for significant learning (see quote above!)
- Support MTSS/PBIS and Restorative Practices in schools
- Promote a Culturally Responsive and Trauma Sensitive classroom
- Teaches Social Emotional Learning (SEL)/Emotional Intelligence

PROACTIVE CIRCLES: Morning Meetings (*The Responsive Classroom*/The Morning Meeting Book by Kriete)

- A Morning Meeting is a particular and deliberate way to begin EVERY school day. All classroom members- grown-ups and students- gather in a circle, greet each other, and listen and respond to each other's news. Morning meetings allow us to begin each day as a community of caring and respectful learners.
- Morning meeting is made up of four, sequential components:
 - Greeting: Children greet each other by name, often handshaking, clapping, singing, and/or other activities.
 - Sharing: Students share some news of interest to the class and respond to each other, articulating their thoughts, feelings, and ideas in a positive manner.
 - Group Activity: The whole class does a short activity together, building class cohesion through active participation.
 - News & Announcements: Students develop language skills and learn about events in the day ahead by reading and discussing a daily message posted for them.

RESPONSIVE CIRCLES: Class Meetings (*Positive Discipline* by Jane Nelson)

- A Class Meeting is held to problem solve issues or concerns that develop within the classroom community. They can be held weekly and as needed to address problems that arise within an open-minded and respectful circle of trust.
- Class meetings follow these four steps:
 - Affirmations: (Start the meeting off positively!) Each student has an opportunity to give a compliment or appreciation (i.e. I like the way you... You are really good at...Thank you for...). They may “pass” if they don’t have something to say. Have them focus on qualities

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and behaviors—discourage comments about appearance (i.e. clothes, hair, etc). Make sure students respond with “Thank you” and “You’re welcome.”

- Review Agreements: Have a student read aloud the agreements the class developed together at the first class meeting for the school year, and keep them posted throughout the meeting as a reference as needed (ex. listen with an open mind, be kind, be honest, work together to solve problems, you may pass).
- Old Business: Follow-up with the class as to whether or not the problem from the previous meeting was resolved, and if so, provide behavior specific praise. If it was not resolved, your class can decide if they would like to focus on new solutions for that problem as the current agenda item, or move on to a new agenda item.
- Problem Solving: Read over items students have suggested to problem solve (via agenda journal or box throughout the week as problems arise) and decide as a class which one is of most concern to focus on for the meeting. (The teacher screens these beforehand & deals with some privately, and can add items to the agenda as well.) Students brainstorm solutions without others responding negatively. You may have a student write down ideas—choose a “secretary” for each meeting (grades 3-5)—and read over them before the class takes a vote for the solution on which they can all agree. Teacher gets veto power! Lower grades can use a list/wheel of solutions such as take turns, use words, apologize, etc. to help them decide. Lastly, post the group’s solution(s) so students can be reminded throughout the week.
- Encouragement Activity: End on a positive note! Have a class meeting right before an already planned fun event, or allow 10 minutes after the problem solving circle for a short activity such as a cooperative game (knot, ball toss, hula hoop pass, etc.) or song/dance for example.

Use the Problem Solving A-B-C-D-E Model

Ask “What is the problem?” to identify exactly what needs to be solved.

Brainstorm solutions without judging—write all of them down in the agenda book.

Consider the Consequences—students think about what will happen for the solutions they suggest.

Decide/Agree (vote) on the best solution(s) and write down in the agenda book, as well as post in the classroom to refer to throughout the week.

Evaluate at the next meeting whether or not the problem was solved. If not, brainstorm once again.

Encourage Communication Skills such as Active Listening (eye-contact and reflecting words/feelings) and expressing selves appropriately by giving “I” Messages—“*I feel _____ when you _____, I need _____.*”