



**Oide**

Tacú leis an bhFoghlaim  
Ghairmiúil i measc Ceannairí  
Scoile agus Múinteoirí

Supporting the Professional  
Learning of School Leaders  
and Teachers

# Using Circle Practice in the Classroom to Build a Positive Culture and Environment





# Using Circle Practice in the Classroom

## What circles can be used for

- Relationship building through check-ins/outs, “go-arounds”, share experiences, explore opinions, exchange ideas.
- Reinforcing norms: plan and discuss expectations, behaviours and procedures.
- Informative/Academic: explore content, evaluate work, set goals, monitor progress, give feedback.
- Problem-solving: addressing behavioural issues, reflecting on incidents, group and peer problem-solving.
- Responding to an incident to promote healing and give support to everyone involved.

## Types of circles

- Go-around Circles: in sequence, high participation, general topics, responding to prompts, introductions
- Popcorn Circles: less structured, no particular order, participation encouraged but not mandatory, interested parties
- Problem-solving Circles: structured, formal, focused

## Circle considerations

- Shape: Consider how to best use the physical environment so that everyone in the circle can be seen and heard. Where practicable try to have no objects in between participants.
- Prepare: Topics/content of the circle prepared in advance. Consider what icebreaker (game/question) you might begin with and use a layered approach to your questions for the rounds. Begin with lower order questions until trust and positive relationships are established in the group.
- Procedures: Introduce a listening piece and explain that only when you are holding the listening piece can you speak and that everyone else must listen to the person who is speaking. Explain/Remind all participants of the ground rules.
- Set the intention: Welcome everyone to the group and explain the intention of the group. Remind participants that they can pass if they wish.
- Check-in: Begin with an opening check-in. Sentence starter, one word whizz
- Maintain focus: Consider the intention and why they are joined in a circle today. Choose the most suitable circle format to explore.
- Check-out: Thank everyone for their participation. Finish with a check out sentence starter.



# Using Circle Practice in the Classroom

## Background/History of a circle

*To gather in a circle is an ancient tradition used by different peoples around the world when there is a need to talk and find solutions that have occurred. Our forebears gathered in circles for many purposes: around the campfire to share the day's hunt, when important decisions were to be made or when conflicts needed to be resolved. In other words, there is something natural about this way of organising a meeting, but for various reasons modern man has in many ways forgotten or chosen not to conduct meetings in this way.*

*“Using Restorative Circles in Schools” by Follestad and Wroldsen - page 22*

The circle format emphasises CORE VALUES such as;

- Equality
- Safety
- Trust
- Responsibility
- Justice
- Democracy



*To participate in a circle gives a sense of belonging. In the circle everyone can see everyone else and takes turns in speaking, and what everyone says everyone can hear. To meet and communicate in a circle increases the possibility for positive safe relationships and a psychosocial atmosphere best described as a collective attention- a sense of ‘we’.*

*“Using Restorative Circles in Schools” by Follestad and Wroldsen - page 22*

The circle promotes a sense of we, a building of strong relationships amongst circle members.

## Why do we use circles?

- Build community - feeling connected, sense of belonging
- Engage everyone in the group
- Promote a sense of shared ownership
- Promote equality
- Build trust
- Encourage development of empathy
- Promote and practise use of emotional language
- Develop problem solving skills
- Develop and promote student voice



# Using Circle Practice in the Classroom

## Listening piece

An object passed from person to person in a circle to facilitate personal sharing. Participants holding the listening piece may choose to share or respectfully pass.

### Examples

- A soft toy
- a bean bag
- a juggling bag
- something from nature (pine cone, shell etc)

Children may choose to bring in their own listening piece to share with the group. You can select a different piece each time you run a circle or ask someone to choose the listening piece from a selection. A variety of listening pieces can be collected and used for circles.

Please note if using the pop-corn format the listening piece may move across the circle multiple times so consider what listening piece might be most suitable for this.

## Alternative circle ideas/ activities

**Show and tell:** Invite children to bring in something to the circle to show their classmates

- A favourite toy/ item from home
- A piece of work they are proud of
- Something from nature
- A favourite book
- A photograph that means something to them

**Mindful breathing activities**

**Listen and reflect upon a piece of music**

**A body scan/ a guided visualisation**

**Pass a compliment**

**Rhythm clapping**

**Follow the leader - mirror movements**





# Using Circle Practice in the Classroom

## Circle Structure Overview

### 1. Check in

- Establishes good listening
- Opportunity to communicate and find out about each other
- Develops relationships
- Everyone has the opportunity to speak or pass
- Establishes mood and readiness for learning
- Should be a non-threatening start to session

### 2. Mixer

- To separate groupings and create new pairings
- Reduces intimidation
- Helps with the equality of the circle

### 3. Focus activity

- A teaching point
- Problem solving
- Introduction of new topic

### 4. Energiser

- To create energy
- To relax people
- To have fun and explore connections

### 5. Check out

- Clear end to the session
- Opportunity for reflection on learning
- Can be used to check understanding/learning



# Using Circle Practice in the Classroom

## Circle Planning Template

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Check-in	Resources
Mixer	Resources
Main Focus	Resources
Energiser	Resources
Check-out	Resources



## Circle Time - Sentence Starters

# Friendship

- A friend is someone who ....
- A quality I look for in a friend is ....
- Something I like to do with a group of friends is ....
- The sort of people I like best are ....
- The sort of person I would trust is ....
- I respect friends who ....
- If a friend has deceived me ....
- The way I show my friends I'm angry/ annoyed/ upset is ....
- I laugh with my friends about ....
- Something my friends do that make me laugh is ....
- The kind of behaviour I would expect from my friends towards me is ....
- The kind of behaviour I prefer to see from my friends when we are out is ....
- If my friends have a disagreement I try to get them back together by ....
- An irritating habit that would annoy me is ....
- Friends take advantage when ....
- I take advantage of friends when I ....
- I feel let down by my friends when ....
- I have been pleasantly surprised by friends who ....
- The thing I like to do most with my friend is ....
- The sort of friend I believe I am is ....
- I would be a better friend if I .....
- With my friends I see myself mainly a leader /follower because ....
- I would not help my friends if ....
- The most difficult thing about making a new friend is ....
- The most difficult thing about starting a new friendship is ....
- With my friends I see myself mainly as a giver/ receiver because ....
- If I disagree with my friends I ....
- I find it easy/ difficult to disagree with my friends because ....
- One thing I believe my friends would say about me is ....
- I get friends to do what I want by ....
- In the past a time I felt left out was when ....
- In the past I have left somebody out by ....
- My friends and I have fun when we ....
- My friends and I like to play ....



# Community

- The person I most admire in school is ....
- The person I most admire in my community is ....
- The sort of person I am inspired by is ....
- The sort of person I am inspired by is .... because ....
- At home the sort of person I am is ....
- The sort of teachers I admire are ....
- One thing I would like to change about this school is ....
- One thing I would like to change about this class is ....
- The best thing about where I live is ....
- The worst thing about where I live is ....
- One thing I would like to see in my community is ....
- The people in my community help others by ....
- With my friends the sort of person I am is ....
- The place I like to visit in my community is ....
- The celebrations/ events I like most in my community is/ are ....
- My community takes care our our local environment by ....
- I keep my community clean by ....
- I think .... would make our community a better place to live
- I help people in my community by ....
- We can keep safe in our community by ....
- Our community celebrates different cultures by ....
- I feel safe in my community when ....
- The places I like to play with my friends in my community are ....
- A group in my community that I enjoy being a member of is ....
- I would like to be part of the .... group in my community because ....
- If I could live somewhere else it would be .... because ....
- If I was to describe my community in three words they would be ....
- List one thing we could do to make new people to our community feel welcome by ....
- The best way to make new friends in my area is by ....
- If there is an issue in my community we .... to resolve it.
- I wish my community had more ....
- My community makes me feel like I belong when ....
- I support my community by ....





# Family

- My favourite family tradition is ....
- I enjoy it when my family and I ....
- The way I show my family I'm angry is ....
- Something I admire about my mam/ dad/ important adult is ....
- A good time I had with my family was ....
- I laugh with my mam/ dad/ important adult about ....
- I laugh with my brothers/ sisters about ....
- The thing I admire about my (sibling) is ....
- The thing that most annoys me about my (sibling) is ....
- I'm most proud of ....
- I'm good/not good at being on my own when ....
- When I'm on my own I prefer to ....
- An activity I like to do with my family is ....
- The family member I would most like to be is ....
- I wish my parents/ guardians would ....
- When I argue with my parents/ guardians they ....
- When I argue with my (sibling) I ....
- When I argue with my parents/ guardians ....
- Something I rely on my family for is ....
- Something I would really miss about my (sibling) (parent/ guardian) is ....
- I still need adults for ....
- My siblings help me when/ by ....
- I can talk to .... when I have a problem
- I enjoying spending time with my relatives by ....
- The one thing I wish I could do more with my family is ....
- The funniest thing that has ever happened to my family is ....
- The best family day out I have ever been on was ....
- If we could get a new pet I would choose ....
- The best movie I have watched with my family is ....
- The best board game I have played with my family is ....
- A programme/series my family and I enjoy watching together is ....
- I consider .... as part of my family because ....
- The three words I would use to describe my family are ....
- A time I enjoyed with my cousins/ grandparents/ aunts/ uncles was ....



# Self Awareness/Knowledge

- One way I am different from other pupils is ....
- One way I am the same as other pupils is ....
- I sometimes wonder how ....
- I sometimes wonder why ....
- I sometimes wonder if ....
- I believe in ....
- .... is important to me
- Someone I hope to be like is .... because ....
- I am worried about ....
- When I leave this school I hope people will remember me as ....
- The kind of person I am influenced by is ....
- I am not pleased with myself when ....
- A time I was brave was ....
- A fear I have overcome was ....
- A fear I would like to overcome is ....
- I worry about ....
- If I were the President of Ireland I would ....
- If I could make one change in this world I would ....
- Something that makes me sad/ happy/ miserable/ angry is ....
- Something I am not good at yet is ....
- Something I have achieved recently is ....
- Something I have learned to do recently is ....
- Something I think is good about being a child is ....
- Something I would like to do again is ....
- Something I will never do again is ....
- Something I avoid doing is ....
- When pupils make mistakes teachers should ....
- The kind of person I see myself as is ....
- I calm myself down by ....
- What makes me unique is ....
- My party piece is ....
- When I feel down I know I can talk to ....
- I can lift my spirits by ....
- .... helps to motivate me to achieve my goals.



# Feelings

- Today I feel ....
- I feel .... about myself
- I feel .... about circle time
- I feel.... about the future
- I feel ... about this school/ school rules
- I feel ..... about society
- I feel ... about adults/teachers
- I feel good about ...
- I don't feel good about ....
- I feel .... about my appearance
- I feel .... about war/ peace/ stealing/ bullying/ pollution/ violence/ the environment
- I feel happy/ pleased when ....
- I feel unhappy/ angry/ miserable when ....
- A time I felt afraid was ....
- When I first came to school I felt ....
- Before I came to this school I felt ....
- New experiences/ the unknown make me feel ....
- I feel hopeful when ....
- I feel powerless when ....
- I feel helpless when ....
- I feel lonely when ....
- .... makes me feel happy/ pleased/ angry/ miserable
- I am passionate about ....
- Making decisions makes me feel ....
- If I make a mistake I feel ....
- If someone else makes a mistake I feel ....
- I am worried about .....
- I am proud of myself when ....
- I am proud of my friends when ....
- When I succeed at something I once found difficult it makes me feel ....
- When someone shares some sad news with me I feel ....
- When someone asks me to keep a secret I feel ....
- When someone asks me to help them with something I feel ....
- When someone praises/ compliments me I feel ....



# Favourites

- My favourite tv show is ...
- My favourite movie/film is ....
- My favourite book or story is ....
- My favourite computer game is ....
- My favourite food is ....
- My favourite meal is ....
- My favourite time of the year is ....
- My favourite person in my family is ....
- My favourite music to listen to is ....
- My favourite time at home is ....
- My favourite time at school is ....
- My favourite season/ month is .... because ....
- My favourite computer/ board/ yard game to play is ....
- My favourite thing to do with my friends is ....
- My favourite thing I own is ...
- My favourite toy is ....
- My favourite place in my house is ...
- My favourite place to go is ....
- My favourite type of weather is ...
- My favourite thing to wear is ....
- My favourite take-away food is ....
- My favourite song is ....
- My favourite animal is ....
- My favourite thing to do on a rainy day is ....
- My favourite subject in school is ....
- My favourite joke is ....
- My favourite character from a book/ programme/ game is ....
- My favourite sports team/ person is ....
- My favourite flavour ice-cream flavour is ....
- My favourite hobby is ....
- My favourite thing to drink is ....
- My favourite occasion/ celebration is ....
- My favourite school event is ....
- My favourite school tour was ....



# Wishes

- I wish I could ....
- A wish for my friend is ....
- A wish for my family is ....
- My wish for the world is ....
- A skill/ hobby I wish I could do is ...
- If I had three wishes, I would wish for ....
- A sport I wish I could play professionally is ....
- A place I wish I could visit is ....
- Someone I wish I could meet is ....
- When I was little I used to wish ....
- Now what I would wish for is ....
- When I grow up I wish ....
- I wish my pet could ....
- Something I wish for my class is ....
- Something I wish for this school is ....
- Something I wish I could do is ....
- I wish my parents would let me ....
- I wish I could speak fluent ....
- I wish my teacher/ our principal would let us ....
- If I could turn back time, I wish I could visit ....
- A superpower I wish I could have is ....
- If I was to win an Olympic medal, I wish it was for ....
- I wish I was better at ....
- I wish I could be in (movie/ tv show) ....
- If I could have a conversation with a famous person, I wish I could speak to ....
- I wish that Ireland ....
- I wish that where I lived ....
- I wish I could turn into a ....
- In the future I wish ....
- If I won the lottery, I wish I had enough money to buy ....
- If I was to represent Ireland in a competition, I wish it was for ....
- If I could eat one cuisine for the rest of my life, I wish it was ....
- I wish I was famous for ....
- I wish that someone would have told me ....



# Personal Skills

- I like myself most when ....
- I like myself least when ....
- At home I am good at ....
- In school I am good at ....
- In my community I am good at ....
- I like doing ....
- At home I am not very good at ....
- At school I am not very good at ....
- I dislike doing ....
- Something I like doing but am not very good at is ...
- Something I had to work hard to learn was ....
- Something I would like to learn how to do is ....
- I am at my best when ....
- A hard decision for me was when ....
- I would like to take responsibility at home for ....
- I would like to take responsibility at school for ....
- A time I was given responsibility was .... and I did it very well
- A time I was given responsibility was .... and it did not work out/was too much
- Something I am proud of is ....
- If I could turn the clock back to change something I did it would be ....
- In order to be better at something I have to ....
- Something that others don't know I am good at is ....
- .... is the person I ask to help me to learn things
- Something I could help others with/ to do is ....
- It took me a long time to learn how to ....
- I quickly learnt how to .....
- People would be surprised to know I can ....
- I like working with a team/ others because ....
- I don't like working with a team/ others because ....
- When faced with a challenge I ....
- The most creative thing I have ever done was ....
- I am creative when I ....
- If I was to ask a family member/ friend what my unique skills were I think they would say I am ....
- The best thing I do to resolve an argument is ....



# Energisers to Promote Connection

## **Pattern Ball:**

A small group of pupils stand in a circle. A ball is thrown from one person to the other in the circle until each person in the circle has received the ball once. No-one should be passed the ball more than once. The group must then remember and repeat the pattern. Two/three balls might be introduced to the circle or the pattern might be repeated backwards.

**Resources:** Ball or bean bag

## **Rocket Launch:**

Count how many people including yourself are in the room. Sitting in a circle, children count down from the starting number. Anybody can stand up and call the next number, but if two children stand up at the same time, the countdown has to begin again. When you reach 1, all the children stand, raise their arms and shout, 'We have Lift Off'.

## **Fizz Buzz:**

Go round the circle counting upwards. The group replaces any number divisible by three with 'fizz', any number divisible by five with 'buzz', and any number divisible by three or five with 'fizz buzz'. Count up and see how high you can go.

## **Mirror Mirror:**

In pairs one pupil does some gentle movement/ and the other child must mirror this exactly. After three or four movements switch the leader.

## **Spin the bottle:**

Pupils take turn to spin the bottle. Whoever the neck of the bottle is pointing at when it stops says one thing they really enjoy doing that they are good at.

**Resource:** Bottle

## **Oranges and Lemons:**

The group are given different fruit names e.g. Orange, Lemon, Pear. The teacher also names him/herself as a fruit. The teacher then calls the fruit s/he has named him/herself. Everyone who is that name must change seats. The teacher takes a seat also and the person who is left standing calls the next fruit. Any category of choice can be used for this game.



# Energisers to Promote Connection

## Walk the Walk:

Divide the group into smaller groups, assign one pupil as the caller. Each member of the group moves around the designated area, moving as they wish to. When the caller claps their hands, all freeze. The caller then calls an adverb e.g. happily, angrily, excitedly, scarily. Pupils then choose a movement and move according to adverb. Change the caller and adverb regularly. Invite each group to choose an emotion to express through movement, provide the other groups an opportunity to guess the emotion.

**Word Link:** Start with 2 claps and say a word based on the theme, the next pupil must say a word associated to the start, e.g. Summer, clap, clap, sunshine, clap, clap, ice-cream...

**Floating islands:** Put large sheets of newspaper on the floor, play pupil's favourite music, when the music stops pupils touch the newspaper with their feet.. Remove paper after each round, pupils work together to support each other to touch the newspaper.

**Resources:** newspaper

## Names Dance:

The whole group forms a circle, invite each pupil to say their name and perform a movement of their choice to represent their hobby as they say their name. After each person has said their name and completed their movement, the whole group repeats the name and completes the movement. Continue this process until everyone has had an opportunity to say their name and perform their movement.

Variations:

Pupils say their names and represent how they are feeling through making a shape their bodies.

Silent circle: Each pupil makes a shape only to represent their name and the group perform the shape too.

**Don't wake the \_\_\_:** A great game for younger children. Place a soft toy/puppet at the centre of the circle. The children must try to pass around a musical instrument (sleigh bells, tambourine, shakers) as quietly as they can without waking up the object in the centre of the circle.

**Resources:** Soft toy/puppet, musical instrument