

Lesson Plan: How to set up a Circle Meeting

Ready to Learn Unit 3: Behaviour Management - Active Citizenship, School & Parental Engagement, Circle Meetings

Lesson Objectives:

The teacher will be able to set up effective and useful Circle Meetings with their classes to allow the learners to discuss issues or topics in school that they think are important

Teachers will identify and create a bank of possible topics/questions to use in Circle Meetings during the year.

Learners will understand the purpose of the circle meeting and how to participate fully in the activity
Learners will benefit from circle meetings by developing self-confidence and learning how to express their opinions so that others listen actively

Materials: The member of the circle who is recording the learners' ideas should have a notebook and pen

Time: 2 lessons of 40 minutes

Lesson steps/stages

1. Welcome the learners to the class.
2. Write up the topic of the lesson: '**Circle Meetings**' – and draw a large circle on the blackboard
3. Ask if anyone has heard the term 'circle meeting', or if they can guess what a circle meeting is, and its purpose?
4. Elicit some ideas from around the classroom before giving a short explanation of circle meetings (CM) and why you want the learners to learn to participate in them. (See handout below)
5. Tell the class it is important for the school to choose CM topics carefully to be sure their discussions are useful and result in good decisions or changes. The school leadership will sometimes ask the circles to discuss particular topics that are of importance to the whole school.
6. Write these two topic examples on the board:

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Who is the head teacher of our school? B. How can we keep our classroom tidy? |
|---|

7. Then ask the class if they think those two topics are both appropriate for a circle meeting, or if one is a 'good' topic, and the other one is an inappropriate topic. Ask for an explanation for their answers.
The teacher must be sure to explain clearly why (A) is not a useful topic as it is a CLOSED QUESTION which has no opportunity for discussion.

8. **Think-Pair-Share** activity

Now ask the learners to think about possible topics for a future Circle Meeting.

Ask them to work individually to think of at least **2** topic ideas.

9. When the learners have come up with topics on their own, ask them to form pairs (or threes if there is an odd number of students) to share their ideas for CM topics. They should try to choose a joint list of their top 3 topics that they like best.
10. Now organise the pairs into groups of 4/5 to discuss and agree on their top 3 topics

11. Ask one of the group to share their topics that they all agree are the most important
12. The teacher will write each group's topics on the board. There may be topics that are common to more than one group and this will be discussed after the feedback session.
13. When all the groups have given their suggestions, read the list out loud. Ask the class as a whole if they agree that each topic is 'good' and 'sensible' and 'needed'. Remove duplicates.
14. Explain that for every circle meeting there will be an interesting topic that everyone will have a chance to talk about.

15. Now the teacher will give the class more details about how a Circle Meeting will always be organised and how they will function. (See handout).

The teacher will ask learners why they think the meeting will always take place in a circle; what are the benefits of the circle? The teacher will ensure that learners cover the following; the circle allows everyone to see everyone else, it is an easy shape to hear each other, everyone in the circle is equal, it is a perfect shape for moving from one learner to the next to hear ideas...

The teacher will emphasise that everyone is equal in the circle. The class will have a special object that will always be used in circle meetings (a soft toy, a bean bag, a decorative item such as an ornament or even a functional item such as the board cleaner) and when someone speaks, s/he needs to hold the special 'item'. The item will be passed from person to person around the circle and if someone does not have anything to say s/he can just say 'I pass.'

□ Ask the class for suggestions on what to use as their special item.

16. Now ask if anyone has any remaining questions or worries about the Circle Meetings. (Think about how you would answer these questions!)

Examples of possible questions at this stage:

- How do I get a chance to speak?
- What will happen if another learner speaks very loudly?
- What will happen if one student interrupts another when they are speaking?
- Who can speak first, second, third ...?
- Do we all have to speak - or can we just listen?
- What languages can we use?
- What rules do we follow?

17. Ask the learner which topic (from the list on the board) they would like to discuss in their first Circle Meeting. Use a voting activity to select one topic.
18. Summarise the main points on how to carry out a Circle Meeting again, and tell the class when the first CM will be held.
19. Thank the class for working hard, and for all their inputs.

In the next lesson hold your first Circle Meeting and get the learners' feedback on what they liked about the activity"

After your first CM, think about the following questions. Share them with your WhatsApp group:

1. What did you discuss as your first topic and why did you choose this?
2. What object did you use to pass around the circle or how did you take turns?
3. What worked well?
4. Is there anything you would do differently next time?

Handout for teachers: What are Circle Meetings?

Circle Meetings are meetings that take place in the school setting. The school leaders should identify a regular time (every week or every 2 weeks) on the timetable where all classes will have Circle Meetings at the same time. The Circle Meetings do not need to be a whole lesson: they can be 15-20 minutes, including a quick ice breaker or warm-up activity before starting the Circle Meeting.

Circle Meetings are a teaching tool that offer both learners and teachers the opportunity to share ideas and communicate with each other about issues affecting the school community, such as class activities, classroom culture, behaviour and other problems/challenges.

Learners and teachers sit (or stand) in a circle to allow everyone to be included and to participate in the meeting fully. The shape of the circle is important as it means everyone has equal importance in the meeting, including the teacher, and everyone can be seen and heard. The meetings are best to be held in an open space where everyone can see and hear each other easily.

Circle Meetings are important because they give further opportunities to the learners to develop their self-esteem, self-confidence, and positive behaviour, within a supportive school environment. The circles help to build a learner-centred learning community, aligned with the CBC, where learners can develop and build positive and supportive connections with others.

Learners also have opportunities during a Circle Meeting to be reflective and practise their social skills e.g. how to listen carefully and respectfully, how to take turns to speak, and to speak clearly so others can hear and understand them well.

In order to give every Circle member the chance to contribute, a soft toy (or another small object) is passed around the circle. When a learner or teacher has the special object, it is their turn to share their idea on the topic and for everyone else to listen and not interrupt; members of the group can also choose to pass if they do not feel they have anything they wish to say at that time.

Topics for Circle Meetings need to be chosen carefully.

Appropriate topics may include those that promote active citizenship, and encourage individual and social action, e.g. *How can we care for our school environment?* Using open questions will result in diverse ideas and responses. The topics should be consistent across the school and set by school leaders or by the staff, in collaboration. The topics must be something the learners know about so that the time spent is meaningful and all the learners' contributions are valued.

If the topic is challenging, or learners do not have many ideas, ask them to discuss it with a friend or to turn to the learner next to them in the circle to try to come up with some ideas collaboratively, before sharing in the circle. (Nobody should be forced to speak if they prefer not to.)

Circle Meeting Guidelines

1. Respect the person who is holding the special object, so they can speak without interruption.
2. When you don't have the special object, listen respectfully and think about what the others are saying so you can build on the discussions.
3. If you don't want to say anything, that is also fine. Nonverbal communication (gestures and facial expressions and even silence sometimes say more than words!
4. Speak for yourself, from your own experience by using 'I language' e.g. 'I think that...'. 'I have seen...'. 'I believe that...'
5. Be brave, honest and open with your own ideas and stories.
6. Listen actively, but do not give advice or argue with others.
7. Keep what others in the circle say in confidence, not gossiping or telling untruths later.