



# Every Child a Talker

## Making the most of groups: general principles

We plan for children to take part in groups as part of their day. To make the most of these times, it is important to think about the aims of each group. What is the group for?

- Starting the session
- Developing social skills ('Circle Time')
- Sharing songs and rhymes
- Sharing a story
- Reflection and planning
- Getting together at home time

**Getting the adults right** is the first step to getting the children right! Plan for as many adults as possible to join the group. Adults can sit with the children, and take turns and join in: to model the right behaviour for children. It is essential to bear in mind that although children in your group may be in the same age range, they are likely to differ a lot in the way that they feel comfortable in a group or can join in. Discuss with colleagues how to encourage appropriate behaviour. Giving lots of praise, and adults showing how to respond, are the most effective ways to help children learn how they should behave.

**Helping children know what the group is for.** There is a big difference between Circle Time, where you encourage turn taking, talk and listening, and storytime, where children focus on one idea. Building up a routine and using props for each type of group; e.g. through a 'come and join in' type of song, sitting on a 'story rug', having a 'listening teddy' or a puppet who doesn't know how to behave, can all help children realise what type of group they are in, as well as helping them to join in.

**A balance of activities** helps a group to 'swing'. In Circle Time you can start with a name song, pass a noisy toy round the circle, pass a noise or a clap, and then have a talk activity. Finishing with a song, or singing instructions for what to do next, brings a nice close, and particularly helps children who need more support with understanding language.

**Size matters.** A maximum of 10 children is often quoted as the best number for a Circle Time in Early Years. The more adults who join in, the more effective the group will be.

**Shape matters.** In a circle everyone has a chance to listen and take turns in joining in. At storytime and rhyme and song time you may prefer children to face the adult who sits at the front. Experiment with sitting in a circle, and see if the children enjoy this.

**Timing matters.** Deciding on the time of day for different groups is vital. Storytime in a small group in the middle of a session can be more valuable than at the end, when everyone is hungry or tired. Think also about how long the group should last for. If children are enjoying themselves and are very involved, can the group be extended, or shortened if children are restless?

Above all, work together with your colleagues to make the group 'swing'. Take turns to lead different parts of the group, and support each other as your skills develop.

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