

# A Circle on the Floor

This book is intended to assist teachers in creating successful early childhood circle time. In most classrooms, day cares and preschools, there is a central area. This area has the most open space void of furniture. Hopefully this area is large enough for the various kinds of activities, that will take place, and for the number of children you have in the class.

To start, you need a circle on the floor. This can be done in a few different ways. Some schools have a carpet with a circular color line already. In many schools, this colored line is put on carpet or other flooring with colored cloth tape.

**How to make a Circle on the floor.** To make the circle close to perfect, you need a long piece of string. This string should be half as long as you want your circle to be wide. So if you are making a 8 foot wide circle, the string would be 4 feet long. Find a spot that is close to the center of the area. Tape one end of the string to that spot or have someone hold it in place. Use colored 2 inch wide tape. Stretch the string almost taught. Walk with the string around in a circle. That's how big the circle will be. Then with the string on the floor, slowly begin putting the tape down on the floor, right at the end of the string. Start moving the string in a circle. As you continue laying the tape down, keep the string taught. You have to gradually turn the tape a little bit at a time to make it curve. Go slow! This will give you a somewhat accurate circle. Some teachers make ovals. You can also draw a temporary circle on a carpet or floor with chalk.

## **How to Get Children to Come To Circle**

I remember well, a class I took from a teacher with many years experience. She talked about her little brass bell that she kept on a special shelf. At circle time, she would walk slowly toward the bell, and ring it softly. She told the children, it was time to clean up and put their activities away. After some weeks of repeating this, she noticed that some of the children watched her walking toward the bell, and were already putting their work away!

This is one example of gathering children for circle time. How you gather together children for circle time can vary day to day. A bell ringing is the most traditional. A song about cleaning up and putting away works too! Turning off the lights is a little more dramatic and better left for more hectic times. Let the children bring chairs sometimes. Especially if you have a special guest. They like to sit on chairs as well as the floor. Make sure they know that this is a special circle, otherwise they'll bring chairs every time!

Circle times last different amounts of time. At the beginning of the year they may be shorter than later on. Read the children. That is watch for body language, that lets you know they need movement, or that they are tired, etc. In order to be successful, you must be spontaneous to a degree. If you are rigid and try to hold to a particular course or list, then the children may not stay with you. Follow the child!

What we do as teachers at circle time varies from day to day. It might include science demonstrations, show and tell, a lesson in a new activity and so on. I think of Shari Lewis and Mister Fred Rodgers as great examples of people that understood children. For your circle time to be successful, you need to entertain as well as educate. So having read this far, hopefully you will continue as you are now officially enrolled in the Shari Lewis-Mister Rodgers school of entertaining and educating children.

## **Show and Tell**

A traditional activity at circle time is having the children bring something to “show and tell”. This is an opportunity for you the teacher to see which children have verbal skills. This is public speaking for children! Some teachers have a particular day of the week when everybody brings something. Other teachers assign particular children to the task. This event can be overwhelming, if you don’t set limits on size or the number of items. It can also take a long time. Some teachers use this task as a way to emphasize alphabet recognition. They have the children bring an item that begins with a particular letter of the alphabet.

## **Government and Sharing Time**

Circle time can and should be used occasionally for discussion. By this I don’t mean allowing children to ramble. Set time limits for when they share. Other wise someone will go on and on and on! I call this government because it’s a time when you can vote on a topic, i:e. pizza or pasta. You can also bring up issues and let the children express their opinions.

## **Group Lessons**

Circle time has always been a time for teachers to show a new activity. This can be something that everybody gets to do after the circle. Or it can be a toy or educational apparatus that will be available at a time when children choose their activities. Keep these lessons short and make sure you practice at home or before the children arrive!

**Discipline** In my 40 years of work with children, I have seen many situations arise at circle time. When playing an active game, a child may fall and be injured. At that point stop the game and have all the children sit down. If the reason the child fell was because of the action of a different child, this is not the time to punish or correct that child. Just talk about being careful, because we like to play.

## Montessori Circle Time

Maria Montessori created a unique method of educating young children. As a medical doctor, she had a special insight into the needs of children. She was the first to prescribe child sized furniture for schools. She helped develop a set of materials designed to promote individual learning. Her ideas have been adopted by educators all over the world. Her educational concepts continue to be rediscovered by educators unfamiliar with her work. Her discoveries have survived the test of time. Her ideas and those of educators, who have studied her work, have been proven to be quite successful. She had an amazing contribution to circle time too!

In a nutshell the philosophy of her method is one that is designed to “follow the child”. In traditional schools teachers tell the children what to do. This is a teacher dominated system. The teachers direct the students most of time. This method requires that the child sit still and be quiet. This is often referred to as “external discipline”. Montessori schools promote self direction, individual learning and movement. **To require a child to sit still is like fighting nature!** Nature requires the child to move and to explore. Through this philosophy and method of teaching, the child gains “self discipline”. At the same time there are also teacher directed group times or as we know it circle time.

Montessori recommended an ellipse or circle be a part of the classroom. “... A line in the shape of a long ellipse having been drawn on the floor (either with chalk, or painted to make it more durable) the child walks on it, placing the foot completely on the line, that is, so that the line lies along the axis of the flat of the foot.....The exercise not only demands an effort to maintain balance, but it exacts from the child the closest attention in order that the feet may be placed in the position required..... ....A mistress plays the pianoforte or a violin or a small organ, not to get the children to walk accordingly to a musical rhythm, but to give some animation to the movement, so useful when one has to make an effort.....”

“We have therefore thought out a method for helping little children to maintain their balance safely, whilst at the same time perfecting the movement which above all others is essential, that is walking.”

**Have you ever noticed children walking on the lines of a sidewalk?**

## **Activities or Exercises**

### **1. Walking on the line The learning of balance**

This is the first exercise or activity for the line. This can be a group activity or an individual activity.

You can show one child at a time or demonstrate to the whole group. Once an individual child starts walking the line, others are sure to follow. This first exercise is to help the child gain a sense of balance. Have the children remove shoes and socks. The bare feet touch the tape and they can feel that they are on the line. Just walking on the line can be difficult for young children.

**2. Heel to Toe** Once the children have become successful at basic balance, you can show them walking heel to toe. Take careful small steps with the heel placed right in front of the toe.

**3. Music to Move By** Often teachers will put on classical marches for this activity. It can be any instrumental music. This is a more formal approach and is not intended to be a dance or game activity. We'll get to those later.

**4 A the objects for walking on the line.** A few days into this activity, you may have some highly skilled walkers. Individually show them something they can carry. It is helpful to establish a shelf that contains colorful objects. Have them carry a flag, making sure to keep it up while they walk. Have them carry a glass with colored water making sure they don't spill. Have them carry an object attached to a rope (a pendulum) making sure they

keep it from swaying to and fro. This activity can go on and on. How about balancing a basket on your head.

**5. Silence Game** This is a traditional Montessori game. It is played as follows. All the children sit on the line. The teacher leaves the room after explaining to the children what is about to happen. An assistant should remain in the room. Silence is the absence of sound. Refrain from “shhh”. Instead put 1 finger up to your lips. The teacher that left the room quietly calls out the name of one child. This child then joins the teacher in the hall or adjacent room. One by one all the children’s names are called and they all remain silent in the new place. Then all return to the circle.

**6. Birthday Circle** When a child has a birthday, it is an important day in their life. Ask the parents to prepare a little book with one photo from birth, and one for each year of the child’s life. The parent can participate in this circle or the teacher can substitute. All the children sit behind the line, so that the birthday child can walk around the line. The child having the birthday holds a globe (the earth). A makeshift sun can be placed in the center of the circle. Candles ( real or imitation) can also be used. The child’s story is then told with the first picture being shown. Once upon a time..... The story stops for each year and the child walks around the line one time to a song. “The earth goes around the sun tra la la the earth goes around the sun, around and around and around and around The earth goes around the sun tra la la the earth goes around the sun. The child returns to their place and the next part of the story is told. This goes on till all the years have been completed. With care and forethought, this can become a very special event in a child's life.

**7. Active Games Using the line as a form for group activities.** Ring around the Rosie, Hookie Pokie, Loopty Loo as well as other movement games an important part of childhood.

The circle on the floor gives you a form to keep some order in these active games.

**8. Group Lessons** Very often a teacher will show the whole class a new activity. When all the children are sitting, the teacher will demonstrate a particular new work. Once this lesson is completed, then it will be placed on a shelf, and the children can freely use it in turn. Science Demonstrations, art projects etc.

**9. Chairs at circle.** This is a special circle. Once the children have all been given a lesson in the proper carrying of a chair, then the teacher can one or two children at a time, to bring one to circle. This is an opportunity for all to watch each other carry a chair. It is not necessary to correct a child if they carry it in some unusual manner, just have them repeat it carrying it correctly.  
singing rhymes, poems etc.

**10. Movement, Yoga, Storytelling , Show and Tell, Singing, Poetry etc.!** are all wonderful circle time activities.

### **Activities for Circle Time**

**Singing   Poems   Stories   Clapping Games**  
**Finger Plays   Musical Games   Acting Songs**  
**Puppets   Rhythm Instruments   Nursery Rhymes**  
**Line Games   Show and Tell   Pass Things Around**  
**Circle Games   Xylophone   Parachute Games**