

Superior Circle and Sensational Calendar

Simple Adjustments for Getting the Most Out of Whole Group Instruction

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Tips for Superior Circle Times

1. Schedule your circle times **AFTER an active time**. It might seem like this gets kids all rowdy, but it actually has the opposite effect; they are ready for a quiet, mellow activity after being physically engaged. If you must do circle time right after a calm activity, take 90 seconds to do a **wiggle song** before expecting kids to sit quietly.
2. Keep circle time **short and sweet**. You can do several circle times throughout the day. Plan on 3-5 minutes for toddlers and 2-year olds. Plan on 5-7 minutes for 3-year-olds. Plan on 10-12 minutes for older children.
3. Gauge the length of circle time by **carefully observing** your children. Are they wiggly, bored, disengaged? Then move on to small groups.
4. Think about the **layout**. It's called circle time, but it definitely doesn't have to be a circle shape. Can all of the children see? Can they sit comfortably? Criss-cross apple sauce may hurt some children's knees or backs. Encourage children to sit comfortably but politely so that others may see and hear. Is there a way children can sit against the wall so that their backs are supported? Consider adding a **back row of chairs** rather than insisting that all children sit on the floor. For older children, yoga balls have been shown to improve attention, alertness, and posture. The layout can be **flexible**. Consider allowing children to choose where they sit. This is a chance for them to learn some self-regulation.



5. Don't expect children to sit quietly while **waiting** for others to join the circle or for others to be ready to begin an activity. This wastes children's time and causes misbehavior. Use **transition activities** such as songs, finger plays, and movement activities. Choose activities that the new arrivals can quickly join.
6. Is it really **reasonable** to require children to **sit quietly to be released** from circle time? Although this is traditional, what purpose does it serve? Try releasing children quickly and using a transition activity. For example, before you leave the circle show me the number of sides on a triangle, tell me the first letter of your last name, or point to something red, etc.
7. Adapt circle time for children with **special needs**. A small tub of **fidjet items** to hold or ribbons sewn on to the edge of a carpet square may help children with attention or sensory issues. Have a child be a **special helper** to keep him/her engaged.
8. If children are disruptive, have the child sit for the first song/activity then be **allowed to go** to a quiet or peace place. This is definitely better than time out for not participating or inappropriate behavior. **Gradually extend** the time the child is expected to sit in circle so that the child develops focused attention in the whole group setting over time. Reinforce positive behavior, especially in the beginning to get the child "hooked."
9. Circle time does not have to be a "hands in your lap" experience. **Keep children active!** Physically touching, moving, and signaling responses ("thumbs up if you also have a cat") keeps children engaged and learning. For example, pass out shapes to have children hold up as you read a book about shapes or have children hold up letters as you read a book about the alphabet. Include ALL children.

10. When choosing lessons or activities for circle time, consider whether the objective could be learned better in a **small-group setting**.
11. Calendar, months and days, weather, flashcards, the pledge, the alphabet, and rote counting beyond 20 are **not DAP** for 2s or 3s. Music, puppets, finger plays, flannel board stories (short, with predictable text), and short books with few words and large illustrations **are DAP** for 2s and 3s.
12. Calendar, months and days, flashcards, the pledge, and rote counting beyond 50 are **not DAP** for 4s. Weather observations, alphabet learning, music, puppets, finger plays, flannel board stories, short books with predictable text and anaphoric cloze (lines that children can fill in themselves) **are DAP** for 4s.
13. Think about it: Is your circle time more about **children being compliant or learning?**



DAP Circle Time Activities/Fingerplays/Songs

Hello, Neighbor

Hello, neighbor. Whattya say? (wave hello)
 It's gonna be a happy day. (smile and jump)
 Greet your neighbor and boogie on down.
 (shake hands and twist)
 Give him a bump and turn around. (bump hips
 and spin to face a new friend)

Where Is ???

Where, oh where, oh where is (child's name)?
 Where, oh where, oh where is (child's name)?
 Where, oh where, oh where is (child's name)?
 Where can (name) be?
 [Child hides under a blanket. Then jumps up and
 shouts, "Boo."]

Little, Bigger, Biggest

A little ball, (make a ball with finger and thumb)
 A bigger ball, (make a ball with two hands)
 And a great big ball. (Make a ball with arms.)
 Now help me count them.
 One, Two, Three! (Repeat gestures for each size
 ball.)

Walk the Circle

Children walk in a circle. The leader calls out a
 certain style of walking, such as
 "Walk faster!" and everyone does as
 directed until the next direction is given. Other possible directions
 include: slower, heavier, lighter, taller, shorter,
 or longer.



What Makes a Book "Just Right" for Circle Time?

1. **Brief.** Few words on a page.
2. **Rhythmic** or lyrical text.
3. Have kids **join in**. Parroting or filling in predictable text builds comprehension, rhyming, and attention.
4. **Pause** thoughtfully. Occasionally, stop reading and ask children to **predict** what will happen next. Doing this helps develop **problem solving skills**.
5. High quality **illustrations**.
6. Lift-the-flap or movable books are terrific. Remember to read them through quickly in circle time then **place them in the reading corner** for individual children to interact with up close.
7. Wordless picture books are great, too. *Goodnight, Gorilla* and *Peek a Who* are favorites. When **children tell the story in their own words**, they develop language skills, sequencing, and attention to story structure. Doing a turn and talk gives everyone a chance to "tell" the story.
8. Not all books are "just right" for a whole-group reading situation. Some books are too long or have too-small-illustrations. That doesn't mean you can't have them in your classroom. Try to **find time during the day for lap**

reading those books that just don't lend themselves to a whole-group experience. In fact, make lap-reading with your children a priority. You can be one of the centers!

Tips for Sharing a Book with Wiggly Little Friends

1. Pick a "just right" book. (see suggestions above) **Read the book ahead of time** so that you're confident in your delivery. 😊
2. Get children excited about the book by **previewing it**. Show the cover. Ask what they think it might be about. Tell them something intriguing about the story.
3. Read the title and **author** and **illustrators'** names.
4. Be engaging in your reading. Don't be embarrassed to use **silly voices or make animal sounds**. This is preschool! No one will look at you funny.
5. Talk about the illustrations. **Point to items and ask children to name them**. In fact, you don't have to actually "read" the book if you don't want to. Just point out the pictures, make the animal sounds, ask questions, and so on.
6. Ask **open-ended questions** — "Why do you think the boy is going into the woods? What do you think will happen next?" This encourages children to think about the story and to ask questions.
7. Don't be surprised if children want to hear a book **over and over**. That's means you're doing something right! In fact, you might want to allow the children to choose the book you read during the lap read time.
8. You may find that a very active **child sits still better while coloring or playing with a favorite toy** while you read. Don't assume that because the child isn't looking at you or the book that he or she isn't interested or listening.
9. You want your children to have positive associations with reading, so if you are feeling tense or your children are resisting, **consider setting the book aside and returning to it later**.
10. Remember, the book **might be a better lap read** or exploration for an individual child in the reading corner.



Why Calendar Doesn't Do All It Could

1. Our numbering system is base ten. The calendar is base seven.
2. Young children typically know the 1-9 sequence and a bit beyond but often have difficulty identifying the counting patterns for decades (10, 20, 30) and transitions (for example, that 39 signals 40 next) (Baroody & Wilkins 1999). The calendar does not give any counting practice beyond the number 31.
3. Preschool-age children do need to know about passage of time (not telling time) but this is best learned within a school day. E.g. "Before lunch we had centers time. After lunch we will have quiet time."
4. Patterns on the calendar cards often rely on AB pattern. E.g. circle, square, circle, square.
5. Takes time away from more effective, time-efficient math experiences such as centers.
6. It's whole group! Remember that children generally learn better when they can get their hands on materials, talk with peers, and engage with big ideas rather than sit passively, watch another child doing something, or chant repetitiously.



Ten Powerful Ways to Interact with the Hundreds Chart

(my favorite type is this pocket chart style)

1. Since the cards are moveable, you don't have to use all 100 numbers in the set. Fill in only the first twenty numbers or even ten or five. Use the chart to practice the number sequence. Mix up the cards and have children "fix the chart." Do lots of discussion but keep it brief.
2. If children struggle with teens, build the chart just to twenty. If desired, flip the teens numbers over to red to make them stand out. Do lots of discussion like, "What number is ONE LARGER than 17?" "What number comes BEFORE 15?" Support this experience by having children make sets of fewer than 20 objects (buttons, counters, flat marbles) in a center then having the children show you how many objects there are by pointing to the correct number on the hundreds chart.
3. Build the chart to 50 then show the multiples of ten in red, the multiples of 3 in red (cool design on the board), etc.

4. Ask the children to identify a missing number.
5. Ask the children to flip over a number then tell why that number is special (E.g. it's the number of puppies my dog just had, it's the number in my address).
6. Ask the children to complete a row or column on the chart. (The column one is tough!)
7. Build the chart to 100. Play "Secret Number." For example: Start at 27. Go down one, go to the right one, go down two. Where did you land? 58. Can the kids do it in their heads after a while?
8. Play games where you say a number and the child tells what is one more/one less.
9. Flip the number cards over to create patterns (red, white, red, white for skip counting), red for every multiple of five or red for every multiple of ten, etc.
10. Make the chart one of your centers so that more children can interact with the materials.

Would Small-Group Instruction or Centers Be Better? Try to Do as Much as Possible in Centers

- **Can children explore?** Rich, open-ended materials should stimulate children's curiosity and learning. Give children ample time to fully experience the play. Don't rush.
- **Plan intentional small-group activities.** Remember learning can be very playlike. No worksheets, baby! We have time for that in public school. ☺
- **Introduce centers** activities during whole group, if desired. Model how to use materials but don't take over the thinking.
- **Authentic assessments.** Look at the assessments that you are required to make in the coming week or so. Which of these can be completed while children play?
- **Position yourself at a center** to complete an activity with small groups of children. This might be playing a game, reading a story, introducing a new center material, etc.
- **Allow time for clean-up** and transitioning between centers. Letting children have choice of centers limits the need for whole-group transitions.
- If kids aren't visiting a certain center, **jazz it up.** It might be boring. Change the materials, make it more appealing, or move it to another area of the room.



Six Great Centers to Get You Started

[Birthday Candle Counting](#)

Materials: birthday candle picks with digits 0-9, regular birthday candles, paper cupcake cups, playdough
 Instruction: Children roll playdough into ball and place in cupcake cup. They poke a digit in the dough and the correct number of candles.

[Hole Punch of Fun Counting](#)

Materials: hole punchers, quarter-sized sheets of construction paper
 Instructions: Write a number on the paper. The child punches the correct number of holes in the paper. Don't forget zero!

[The Disappearing Train](#)

Materials: dice, linking cubes
 Instructions: Make a train 20 cubes long. Take turns rolling the die and removing the number of cubes shown on the die. Whoever take the last cube is the winner.

[Lose a Tooth Counting Game](#)

Materials: small marshmallows, drawing of mouth with spaces for about 20 teeth, die
 Instructions: Children place marshmallows in mouth for top and bottom row of teeth. Roll the die and remove that many teeth from the mouth. Place the removed teeth in a cup. Whoever loses all their teeth first is the winner. Eat the marshmallows!

[Straw Triangles](#)

Materials: straws, scissors, playdough
 Instructions: Children cut straws to different lengths then connect them with balls of playdough to form different types of triangles. Grouping similar triangles is an extension.

[Number Bond Baggies](#)

Materials: baggies, counters
Instructions: Draw line down middle of zippered bag. Place counters inside. Shake then draw the break-apart partners using dots.