

The Longer We Sit Here Together, Together, Together, the Unhappier I Become.

*How to Create an Engaging, Interactive,
and Meaningful Circle Time.*

*Sheila George, Early Literacy Specialist,
Harford County Public Library*

4/17/26



DCEARLYEDX.ORG



Objectives

By the end of today's session participants will be able to:

- Identify the research that describes quality practices of effective class meeting experiences
- Identify the educational components of traditional circle time and compare them to the quality practices of effective morning meeting experiences
- Describe strategies for implementing effective morning meetings

Why are you here today?

Take a moment to honestly reflect on your thoughts regarding Circle Time or Morning Meetings and on what motivated you to attend this session.

*"Do the best you can
until you know better.
Then, when you know
better, do better."*

—Maya Angelou



Intentional teaching is playful, thoughtful, and purposeful.



Epstein, Ann, *The Intentional Teacher: Choosing the Best Strategies for Young Children's Learning Revised Edition*

What does research tell us?



Typically lasts longer than preschool attention span



Inconsistent goals



Lack of alignment to standards



Children are not developmentally ready to understand calendar concepts

Typical Preschool Circle Time Lasts 15-20 Minutes

- Often longer
- Pedagogy of watching
- Highly teacher directed
- Requires high expenditure of child resources

[Photo by Niklas Rhöse on Unsplash](#)





Inconsistent Goals

- Orienting children to the day
 - Greeting
 - Attendance
 - Calendar
 - Weather
 - Morning message
- This content lends itself to repetition and memorization

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Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework

Ages Birth to Five



2015



Lack of Alignment to Standards

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/head-start-early-learning-outcomes-framework>

Lack of Alignment to Standards

Mathematics

● Domain: Mathematics Development

SUB-DOMAIN: COUNTING AND CARDINALITY

- **Goal P-MATH 3.** Child understands the relationship between numbers and quantities.

DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRESSION		INDICATORS
36 to 48 Months	48 to 60 Months	By 60 Months
Begins to coordinate verbal counting with objects by pointing to or moving objects for small groups of objects laid in a line (referred to as one-to-one correspondence). Begins to understand that the last number represents how many objects are in a group (referred to as "cardinality").	Understands that number words refer to quantity. May point to or move objects while counting objects to 10 and beyond (one-to-one correspondence). Understands that the last number represents how many objects are in a group (cardinality).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When counting objects, says or signs the number names in order, pairing one number word that corresponds with one object, up to at least 10.• Counts and answers "How many?" questions for approximately 10 objects.• Accurately counts as many as 5 objects in a scattered configuration.• Understands that each successive number name refers to a quantity that is one larger.• Understands that the last number said represents the number of objects in a set.

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/head-start-early-learning-outcomes-framework>

Lack of Alignment to Standards

Weather

● Domain: Scientific Reasoning

SUB-DOMAIN: SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY (continued)

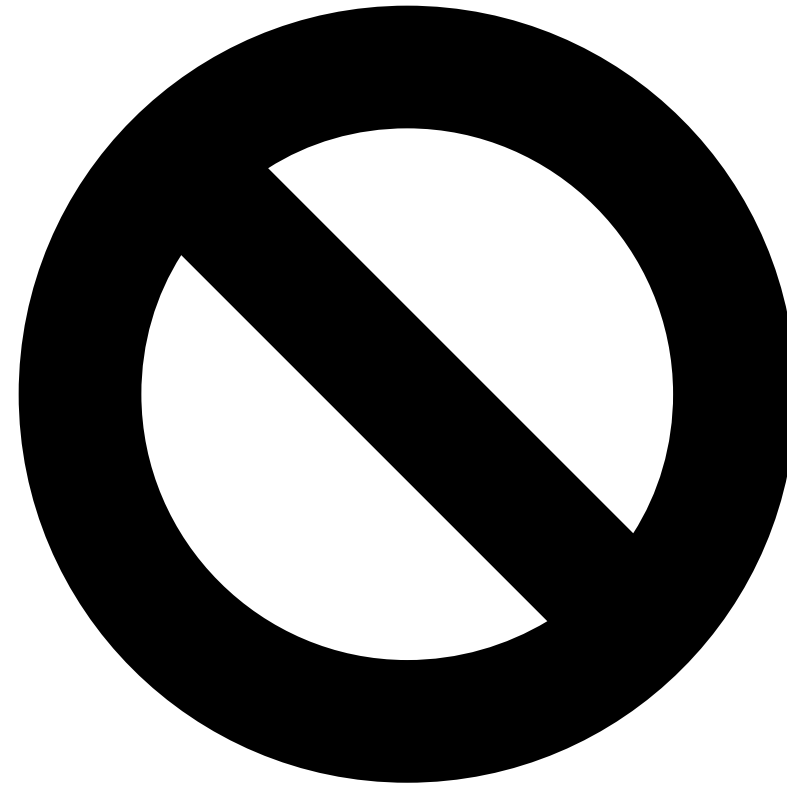
- **Goal P-SCI 3.** Child compares and categorizes observable phenomena.

DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRESSION		INDICATORS
36 to 48 Months	48 to 60 Months	By 60 Months
Sorts objects into groups based on simple attributes, such as color. With support, uses measurement tools to quantify similarities and differences of observable phenomena, such as when a child scoops sand into two containers and with adult assistance, determines which container holds more scoops.	With increasing independence, sorts objects into groups based on more complex attributes, such as weight, sound, or texture. Uses measurement tools to assess the properties of and compare observable phenomena.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Categorizes by sorting observable phenomena into groups based on attributes such as appearance, weight, function, ability, texture, odor, and sound.● Uses measurement tools, such as a ruler, balance scale, eye dropper, unit blocks, thermometer, or measuring cup, to quantify similarities and differences of observable phenomena.

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/scho-readiness/article/head-start-early-learning-outcomes-framework>

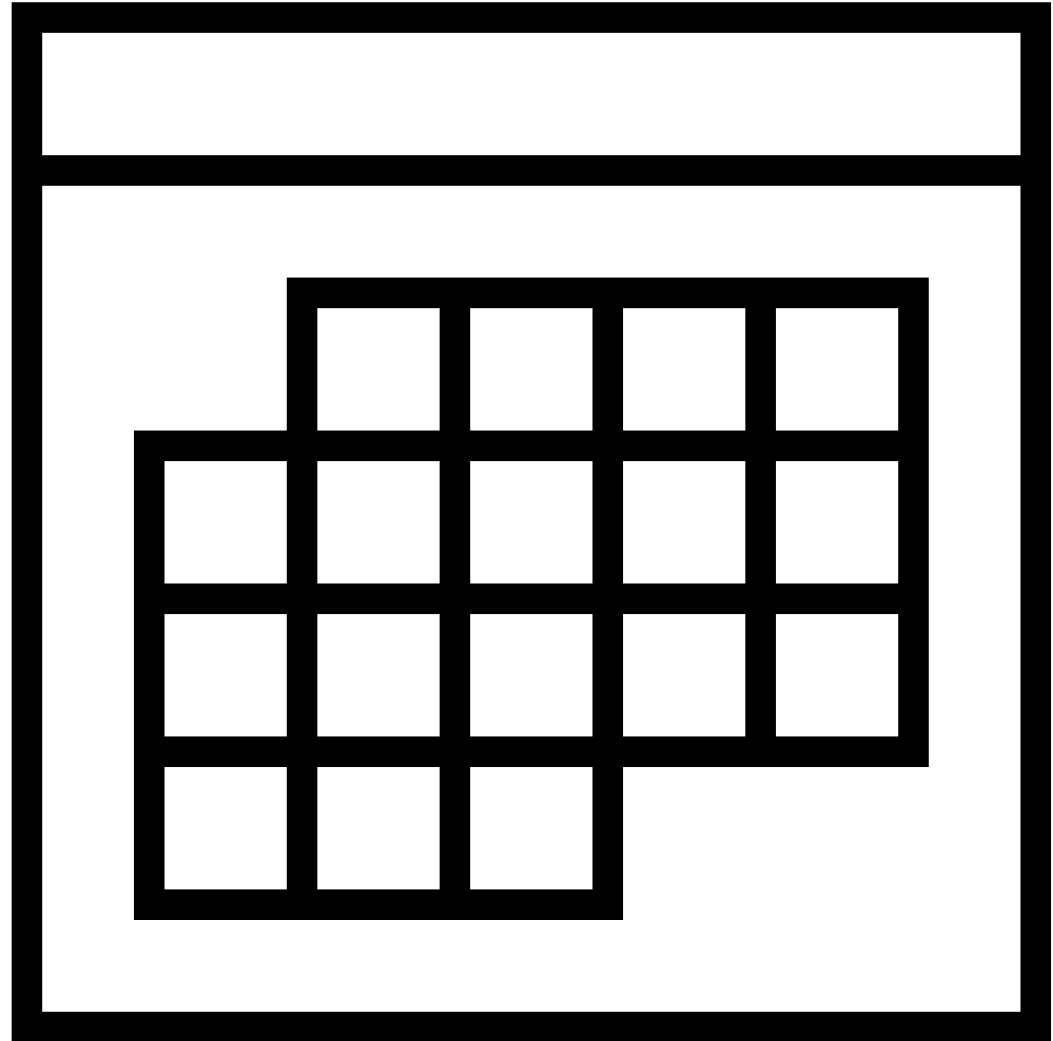
Lack of Alignment to Standards

Social Studies - Calendar



<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/head-start-early-learning-outcomes-framework>

Children are not
developmentally ready to
understand traditional
calendar concepts



Reflection Point



Take a moment to reflect on the information that has been shared.



How has what you just heard fit with what you already knew about the topic?



How is does it give you new information or insight?

Developmentally Appropriate Strategies for Implementing Effective Circle Times

Chart Walk



Circle Time Should Be a Community Experience



- This should be a time when everyone feels valued, gets to actively participate, listens to one another, shares concepts and ideas, and builds respect and support for one another.
- This requires conversation, back and forth exchanges, open-ended questions and true listening and responding to what children are saying. Children should be talking as much or more than the adults.

Circle Time Should Be an Interactive Experience



- Again, this is not the *Pedagogy of Watching or Listening* – children need to be actively involved – singing, playing a game, retelling a story, passing around an object. Plan your circle time with an intentional focus on what the children will be doing during the 10-15 minutes. How are you inviting the children to be active participants in their learning?

Circle Time Should Be a Hands-On Experience



- Hands in your lap for 10-15 minutes is just not developmentally appropriate and is not instructionally sound. Our little learners learn best by doing, so what are we going to give them to do – to touch and manipulate – to reinforce the learning goals that we have identified for circle time? How are we making Circle Time a “hands-on and do” rather than a “hands in your lap” experience?

Circle Time Should Be a Movement Experience



- Avoid the pitfall of extending circle time by spending time asking children to sit still and be quiet – that is not how they learn! Instead design the learning experience to meet their learning style – incorporate movement. Include actions rhymes, movement and songs – in addition to the hands-on and interactive instruction we have also intentionally planned. Circle Time should be fun!

Circle Time Should Be a Read-Aloud Experience



- Stories, books, and reading are a valuable part of our group time with our children. We want to make sure that we are selective and purposeful in our selection of books that we choose for our Circle Time Read-Alouds. They need to lend themselves to interactive reading experiences – question and answer exchanges, enjoyable for the children, and appropriate lengths for a group reading.

Circle Time should be a Visual Experience



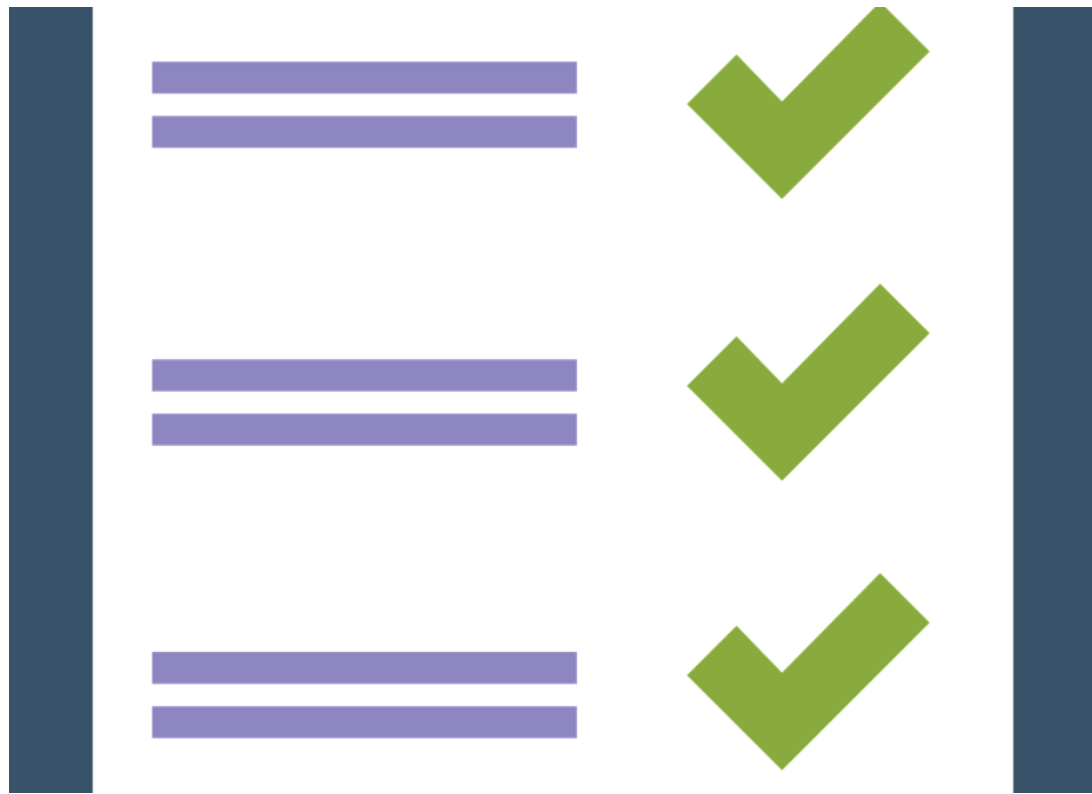
- Children should have something to look at as they build on concepts or hold group discussions. Visuals can include group graphs, flannel boards, magnetic boards, big books, or charts on the wall. The key to remember is that these are more than just posters, they have to incorporate our other principles of interactive and hands-on. The best visuals promote conversations and invite interaction.

Circle Time should be a Responsive Experience



- No matter how carefully you have planned your Circle Time, you need to remain responsive to the needs of your children. If you are in tune to the needs of the children, you can tell if you need to slow down, move on, do more or go deeper, take a movement break, in other words you can truly meet the children where they are. It's a matter of balancing your plans are with what they actually should be. Being responsive is being willing to modify your plans to meet the needs and interests of the children.

Circle Time should be a Routine Experience



→ Children thrive on routines, on knowing what to expect. Having a sense of predictability provides a sense of security. However, within that routine, we also need to provide enough variety that children are not bored. Keep in mind any routines need to be responsive to the needs of the children; if it is the first snowfall of the season, we may need to skip part of the routine and spend time looking at and talking about snow.

Circle Time should be a Sensitive Experience



- It is important to find the balance between what is best for the whole group experience and taking the time to listen to a single child share an important thought or experience. We want every child to feel valued, confident, and heard, and to know that there is a time in the day for them to share their knowledge and abilities.

Circle Time Should Be a Successful Experience

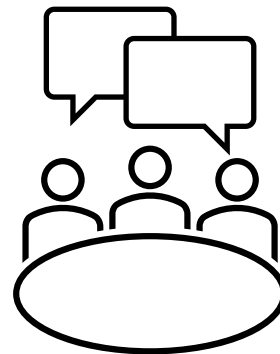


- As the opening of the day, we want our children to start the day with a positive and upbeat sense of success. If we create a Circle Time that is developmentally appropriate and engaging, we set our children and ourselves up for success. We are setting the tone for the rest of the day: what kind of energy and learning do we expect?

Which strategy do you think you currently use most often?

Which strategy would you like to try to use more often?

Your Turn



More Strategies



Welcome



Activities



Circle Time



Center Time

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Picture Schedules

Support the concepts of
before and later;
first, then; next

Calendars Throughout the Day

- Calendars to document closing reflections
- Calendar to identify important events (field trips, special visitors, birthdays)
- Calendars in dramatic play



Base Ten vs. Base Seven

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40
41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50
51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70
71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80
81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90
91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100

Sunday Sun.	Monday Mon.	Tuesday Tues.	Wednesday Wed.	Thursday Thurs.	Friday Fri.	Saturday Sat.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

From <https://www.carsondellosa.com/>

Number Sense

- Replace rote counting activities with Number Sense activities
- Use numbers as ***adjectives*** rather than **nouns**.
 - Number scavenger hunts...
 - Movement by the numbers...

Photo by [Susan Holt Simpson](#) on [Unsplash](#)



Create a Class Check-In Sign

Am I wearing... ?

blue

Yes

No

red

numbers

1 - 2 - 3

words

a - b - c

buttons



a belt



shoes with laces



pictures of animals



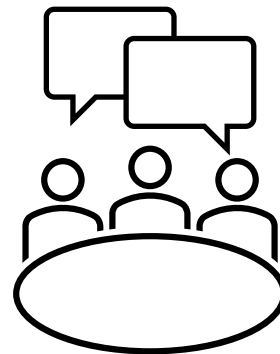
Patterning

- Read books that introduce language patterns...
- Provide children active experiences with patterns...
 - Model patterns
 - Music and body movement patterns



**What do these
strategies look like in
your program?**

Your Turn



Toddlers and Twos

For Toddlers and Twos

Stay developmentally appropriate

Simple songs with hand and body movements

Short stories with flannel boards or props

Schedule Circle Time **after** a gross motor activity

Have appropriate seating arrangements

Allow an opt-out option



Reflection Point



Take a moment to reflect on the information that has been shared.



Identify one way that you can use this information in your program.

Quality Practices

Traditional vs Quality Practices

Traditional Practice	Developmentally Appropriate Practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lasts 15-20 minutes – Based on Pedagogy of Watching	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10-15 minutes – interactive and hands-on
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inconsistent goals – content oriented to repetition and memorization	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear goals with high instructional quality – high language support
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of alignment to standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear alignment to Early Learning Standards
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Calendar Concepts such as yesterday, today, and tomorrow are not age appropriate prior to age 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Time concepts such as “Before, Now, Later, or Next and Then – Before and After”

Reflection Point



Take a moment to reflect on the information that has been shared.



Turn to pg. 3 in your Participant Packet and write two new ideas that you have and will use from this training.

Questions or comments?

Thank you for your participation!

Contact Information:

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