

Mental Health Circle Time Plan

Aims:

To recognise that they may experience conflicting emotions and when they might need to listen to or overcome these.

To explore strategies for keeping physically and emotionally safe.

To learn about people who are responsible for helping them stay healthy and safe.

I can identify the signs that someone might be struggling with their mental health and know how to get help and offer support.



Teacher Guidance

This session covers issues, thoughts, feelings and emotions associated with mental health difficulties. It is important all children feel safe and comfortable during the session and therefore adhere to the Circle Time Ground Rules. It is also important to avoid emotive language so the children can explore the facts within a safe environment. Please consider prior to the session any children for whom this topic may be sensitive and how you will manage this.



Circle Time Ground Rules

- Show people you are listening to them by looking at them when they are speaking.
- Only speak when you are holding the talking object.
- Treat all those who are a part of the circle with kindness and respect.
- People can say 'pass' if they would rather not contribute to the discussion.
- Personal issues and experiences are not disclosed or discussed during the session.



Getting Comfortable

Invite the children to sit in a circle. Ask each child to welcome the person on either side of them to the circle by saying, 'Welcome to the circle. It is lovely to have you here.' Then, pass a smile around the circle from one child to another, starting and ending with the adult leading the session.



Preparation

Struggling with Mental Health Image Cards	one set per class
Getting Help Poster	one per class
Offering Support Image Cards	one set per class

Resources

Circle Time Lesson Pack

Talking object (an object to pass around the circle to signify whose turn it is to talk and who all the children are listening to)

This resource is fully in line with the Learning Outcomes and Core Themes outlined in the PSHE Association [Programme of Study](#).

Reconnecting: What Can We Do to Help Our Body and Mind Be Healthy?

1. Remind the children of the Circle Time rules. Explain that we will be exploring and discussing feelings and emotions and it is important that everyone feels comfortable throughout the session. Encourage all children to share their thoughts and opinions but remind them that, if they would like to discuss or share a personal issue, that they can do so privately outside of the Circle Time session.
2. Ask the children to take a moment to think of something we can do to help look after the health of our body and mind. Pass the talking object around the circle and invite each child to share their response.
3. Summarise the key actions we can take and choices we can make to help our body and mind be healthy: exercise, have a balanced diet, drink plenty of water, get enough sleep, look after our personal hygiene, talk about our feelings with someone we trust, ask for help when something is troubling us, make sure we have time each day to be calm and quiet, spend time doing something we love, spend time outside, be creative, spend time with people who make us smile, help and be kind to others, remember we are valuable and worthy just the way we are, limit our time watching TV, on social media, the Internet and electronic devices).

Exploring: Mental Health and Uncomfortable Feelings

1. Explain that being healthy means that our body and our mind are in good condition. Discuss that mental health is all about how we are feeling and the thoughts we are having. Explain that our mental health affects how we behave and the choices we make.
2. Ask the children to think of a feeling, an emotion or a thought that, as humans, we might experience. Pass the talking object around the circle and invite the children to share the feelings, emotions and thoughts that they have come up with.
3. Of the feelings, emotions and thoughts that have been shared, ask the children to identify which they would classify as comfortable and which they would classify as uncomfortable or difficult. Ensure that the children understand that all people, children and adults, experience a range of feelings, emotions and thoughts. Highlight that it is OK to experience all of these, even the ones that are uncomfortable.
4. However, explain that sometimes people find it hard to cope with and manage uncomfortable thoughts and feelings and that this can affect their mental health. Discuss the fact that when people are struggling with their mental health, they may behave in a way or make choices which hurt themselves or those around them.

Exploring: Getting Help and Offering Support

1. Put the children into small groups and give each group a card from the [Struggling with Mental Health Image Cards](#). Ask each group to look at and discuss the image they have been given – what signs are there that the person shown might be struggling with their mental health? Invite each group to share their image and their thoughts. Summarise some of the signs that someone might be struggling with their mental health (constant anxiety which interferes with daily life, loss of interest in engaging in life, being sad and irritable for a long time, sudden and dramatic changes of mood – extreme distress and anger, persistent changes in sleeping patterns, feeling worthless, becomes quiet and withdrawn – regular self-isolation, ongoing and extreme appetite changes).
2. Highlight that people don't choose to have difficulties with their mental health, just like people don't choose to have difficulties with their physical health. Just like with any physical health issues, it is important that anyone struggling with the thoughts and feelings they are having to get help to feel better and for those around them to support them the best they can.
3. Ask the children to take a moment to think about what the people shown in the images could do to get help. Invite the children to share their thoughts by passing the talking object around the circle. Share the [Getting Help Poster](#) with the children to summarise the key steps that could be taken when struggling with mental health.
4. Ask the children to take a moment to think about how they could offer support to someone who is showing signs of struggling with their mental health. Invite the children to share their thoughts by passing the talking object around the circle. Summarise the possible key actions in offering support by showing the [Offering Support Image Cards](#).
5. Explain that sometimes people hide how they are really feeling, often because they don't know how to express it and that this can mean they feel increasingly hopeless and unable to ask for help. Discuss the importance of sharing the message that it is OK to experience times of difficulty with mental health, that it is nothing to be ashamed about and the necessity of getting help.
6. Thank the children for their contributions and remind them that you are available if they have any further questions or anything else they would like to talk about.

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Ending Game:

Remind the children that we often do not know the difficulties people are facing in their lives but that by being kind to all people we can help them to feel good on the inside and that this can help others in feeling well and mentally healthy. Ask the children to turn to the person next to them and tell them a positive quality they have. For example, 'I think you are a great listener', 'You make me smile', 'You look after others in the class', 'You have a beautiful singing voice', 'You inspire others', 'You are really good with numbers' etc. Then, end by passing a smile around the circle from one child to another, starting and ending with the adult leading the session.

Disclaimer

We hope you find the information on our website and resources useful. This resource is provided for informational and educational purposes only. It is intended to offer general information and should never be taken as professional advice on mental health. As information on mental health is complex and is a developing area, we do not warrant that the information provided is correct. You and your students should not rely on the material included within this resource and we do not accept any responsibility if you or your students do. As mental health is complex, you should undertake proper and relevant training before teaching on mental health. These resources are intended to support you once you have received such training. It is up to you to contact a suitably qualified health professional if you are concerned about your mental health and it is up to you to advise your students to contact a suitably qualified health professional if they are concerned about their mental health. When using this resource, you are responsible for the safety of those involved with using this resource, including staff and students. It is up to you to follow your school or organisation's safeguarding policies and procedures should your use of this resource raise anything covered by the policies or procedures.

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