

I Know the Routine!

Children can show how well they know their environment by showing a new friend around!

HOW-TO

1 Hide the puppet in the pillowcase. Introduce it at circle time with a sense of mystery: *I have a new member of our class to introduce to you today. But she is very shy and a bit frightened about coming to school. Do you remember how you felt when you first came to our class? Can you help her feel comfortable?*

2 Once you have elicited children's support, slowly take the puppet out of the pillowcase and introduce her! Invite children to introduce themselves around the circle one by one. Keep things dramatic by whispering to the puppet or making it move or react now and then.

3 Ask children to tell the puppet about their day: *Can you tell our new friend what we do at circle time? What do we do after circle time?*

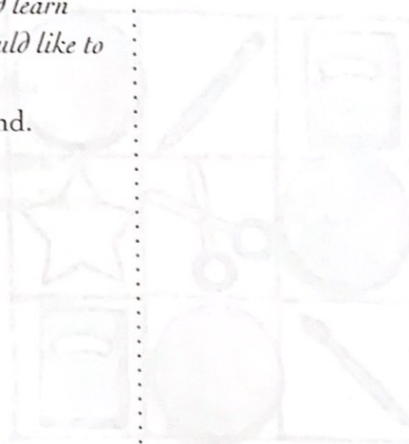
4 Ask a few children to be in charge of showing the puppet around the room for the day. Say: *Do you think you could help her feel comfortable and learn how to do things here in our classroom? I bet she would like to play with you today!* Children can take turns throughout the day showing the puppet around.

MATERIALS: puppet (or soft doll), pillowcase

SKILLS: expressive language, following directions, cooperation, manners



- At closing circle, have the puppet thank children for all it has learned—and perhaps make plans for tomorrow!
- Take photos throughout the day. Put these together in a "Meet Our New Friend" book.



The Cooperation Song

Here's a musical way to remind children of the goals of cooperating and creating a classroom community.

HOW-TO

1 Start a discussion about cooperation. Write the word on chart paper and add children's dictated definitions of the word. Ask: *What does it mean to cooperate? What do we have to do to cooperate with one another at circle time?*

2 Use this song to illustrate your conversation about cooperation at circle time:

Cooperation

(tune: "Frere Jacques")

Coop-er-a-tion, Coop-er-a-tion

SHARE! CARE! FAIR!

SHARE! CARE! FAIR!

We are all connected,

We are all connected

In our class, in our class.

3 Invite children to add words from their list to replace the second and third lines of the song, and sing it again!

MATERIALS: chart paper, markers

SKILLS: cooperation, collaboration, expressive language, singing



- Sing this whenever you introduce a new cooperation activity or game—it makes a wonderful reminder of how to work together.

Balance Pairs

Cooperative games are great for helping children work together as a community. Here's a physical example of what cooperation can accomplish!

HOW-TO

- 1 Always start a cooperative game with a short discussion of what it means to cooperate: *When we cooperate, we work together to solve a problem or get things done.*
- 2 Show the pillows or boxes and ask children to consider how they might work in a pair to carry them from one side of the circle to the other without touching them with their hands.
- 3 Help children pair off. Give a pillow or box to each pair and invite them to spend a few minutes experimenting with holding it between them — without hands!
- 4 Put on movement music and ask the pair to start moving toward the large bin or box set up at the other end of the circle. When they get there, they drop it in the box and go back to their original seats.



MATERIALS: movement music, small pillows or boxes, large box or plastic bin

SKILLS: balance, creative thinking, gross motor coordination, cooperation

Tips

- Try using balloons instead of pillows or boxes!
- Ask children to suggest what else they can balance between them. Can they balance a paper napkin on top of their heads and move around the circle?
- Bring in a Ping-Pong ball or balloon and ask children how they would move it across the circle without touching it. Or ask: How can we move across the circle without using our feet? How can we move a heavy box of balls across the circle without using our hands?

Blanket Toss

What can a group of young children do with a blanket and a ball?
 Try these games to find out how many children it takes to keep a ball in the air!

HOW-TO

1 Ask children to describe a time this week that they cooperated with someone: *What did you do? How did it feel?*

2 Bring out the blanket and balls and invite children to think of different ways they could use them in a circle game. (You might start them off by asking them to hold the edges of the blanket as they stand in the circle.)

3 Experiment with the different ideas that children suggest. A great game is to put the ball in the center of the blanket and have children try to bounce it with the blanket (it's not as easy as it sounds)!

4 Try using different-size balls. Ask: *How do they move differently? What would happen if we used more than one ball at a time? Can we roll them from side to side? What happens if we bounce them all?*

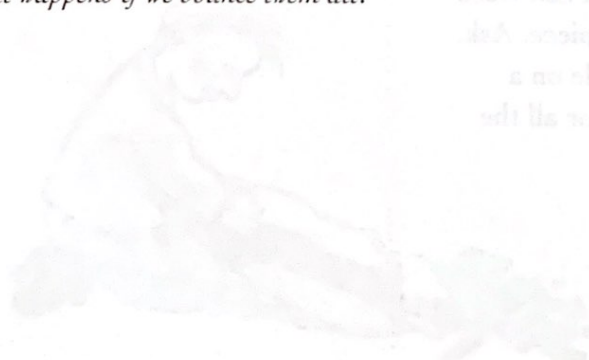
MATERIALS: old blanket or sheet, different-size balls

SKILLS: gross motor coordination, sharing, cooperation



Try a name game in which children move the blanket up and down to create a billowing shape. Then, when the blanket is at its highest point, call two children's names, have them run under it, and let it fall on them! Have them wait until the blanket is billowing again to run back out again, then call two more children and have them do the same thing.

Go outside and use two blankets and a ball. Create two teams that work together to "throw" the ball from one blanket to the other!



Help the Teacher

Young children love to feel they can help. It helps them feel mature and successful. So “play dumb” once in a while and invite children to help you solve a problem!

HOW-TO

1 Be dramatic! Arrive at circle time with the bag filled with art materials and a very befuddled look on your face. Say, *I have a problem. I arrived at school today with this bag full of art materials for us to do a special art project, but now I can't remember what we were going to use them for. Can you help me?*

2 Spill out the contents of the bag into the center of the circle and allow children to examine the materials. Ask: *What do you think we can make with all these things?*

3 Have children suggest ideas. Children may like to illustrate their ideas by demonstrating with the materials themselves. As children suggest ideas, write them down on chart paper and add their names. Hang the list in the art area for inspiration. Children can create their art during center time.



MATERIALS: chart paper, marker, large bag filled with various items: large Styrofoam pieces, fabric scraps, aluminum foil, tongue depressors, buttons

SKILLS: collaboration, creative thinking, expressive language, cooperation

Tips

- Remember, there is no right or wrong answer to your question. At art time, children can choose to work on their own idea, or that of someone else!
- Use this technique to introduce any art activity. Just put the materials you plan to have in the art center in a bag, and have children help you come up with an idea for a project. If you want them to make something specific, give them clues so that they can guess what it is.

Reflective Listening

An important part of feeling welcome in a group is knowing that you are being listened to. Help children learn the skill of reflective listening at the beginning of the year.

HOW-TO

- 1 Talk about the importance of listening and being listened to at circle time: *How does it feel when someone doesn't listen to you? How does it feel to have someone listen to you?*
- 2 Demonstrate how to use reflective listening. Invite a child to tell you about what they did last night or what they want to do this weekend. As the child speaks, quietly look at him. Afterward, tell the group what you heard him say: *Jimmy was telling us about the kitten that he got last night. It is black and white. Does anyone remember something else that Jimmy said?*
- 3 Now, invite another child to share, and say, *Let's see how well we listen. Listen carefully to Amanda, and when she is finished, raise your hand if you can tell me something she said.* Check back with the speaker to see if the children's recollections are correct. This validates both the speaker and the listeners!

MATERIALS: chart paper, markers

SKILLS: listening, expressive language, taking turns, cooperation



- You can use a song to help this activity along:
Are you Listening?
 (tune: "Are You Sleeping?")
*Are you listening,
 are you listening?
 To what (child's name)
 has to say?
 What did s/he share?
 What did s/he share?
 Tell us please, tell us please.*
- Use reflective listening as a "way of life" in your circle time. It will take children time and attention to develop the skill, but it will quickly become a natural part of your classroom community.
- Apply reflective listening skills to show-and-tell activities.

Follow My Move!

Here's a new twist on follow-the-leader—add music and make it a movement game! Children take turns being leader or followers.

HOW-TO

- 1 Start the game by playing a quick version of traditional follow-the-leader (with you as the leader). Do simple motions that children can follow as they sit in the circle. Then, explain that there is a different way to play the game: *In this game, the leader dances around!*
- 2 Introduce the leader hat. Explain that whoever is wearing the hat is the leader and the rest of the children must follow the leader around, doing whatever he or she does!
- 3 Have everyone stand up and find a comfortable space in the circle where they will not bump into anyone. Start the music and off you go!
- 4 When the music stops, pass the leader hat to someone else and start again!

MATERIALS: a variety of energetic music, a hat for the leader

SKILLS: following directions, observing, listening, social interaction, cooperation



- Play this outside on a nice day. In follow-the-leader tag, the leader makes a movement that others copy. But at the same time, he or she is trying to tag someone. The child tagged becomes the next leader!

Name That Tune!

One of the best ways to help children feel comfortable is to share what they already know. A great place to start is with familiar songs.

HOW-TO

1 Start a song session! Begin by humming a tune and ask children to guess what it is. Choose simple songs that most children know such as "The Farmer in the Dell" or "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star."

2 When children guess what the song is, sing it together! Children are often comforted by singing familiar songs. Write the name of the song on chart paper for children to read.

3 Try another tune for children to guess and sing, and add the title of the song to the chart. Children might also enjoy leading this game.

MATERIALS: chart paper, marker

SKILLS: expressive language, listening, singing



- Write the words to each song on chart paper and invite children to read and illustrate. Use these at subsequent songfests!



Search Party

Children develop a sense of belonging when they know how to navigate the room. Use this game to acquaint children with the different areas of their environment.

HOW-TO

1 Ask children, *How well do you think you know our room? Let's play a game to see!* Present the bag or box of objects and invite children to take out one object at a time. Ask them to describe the object and its use: *Where do you remember finding this object in the room? Can you find where it belongs?*

2 Choose two or three "searchers." Children can sing this song as the searchers go to the different centers looking for the place where each object is found:

Can You Tell Us?

(tune: "London Bridge")

Can you tell us where it's found?

Where it's found, where it's found.

*Can you tell us where it's found,
(child's name) and (child's name)?*

MATERIALS: pillowcase (or bag or box) filled with two classroom objects from different centers (blocks, writing, art, puzzles), or pictures cut from school-supply catalogs, showing materials from different centers

SKILLS: visual discrimination, matching, visual memory, turn taking



- If children are having trouble finding something, you might say, *You're getting warmer/colder* to help them along!
- Reverse the game by giving clues about the object in the bag, and have the children guess what it is: *This is something that is hard on one end and soft on the other. We use it in the art area. What is it? (a paintbrush)* When children guess, they go put it away in the correct center.

What Doesn't Belong?

Now that children are more familiar with their classmates and the classroom routines, they can play this fun guessing game.

HOW-TO

1 Fill the tray with objects from one area of the room, plus one object that in some way doesn't belong in the group. Cover the tray and place it on the floor in the center of the circle.

2 Explain how to play the guessing game: *Hidden under here are some objects that are all from one area of our room, except for one object that doesn't belong. When I take the cover off, raise your hand if you think you know which area of the room the objects are from.*

3 After children have guessed the name of the area the objects come from, ask, *Who can guess which object doesn't belong with these things? Why doesn't it belong?* Discuss the name of each object and how it is used, then ask where the odd object belongs.

4 Cover the tray again and refill it with objects from another area of the room.



MATERIALS: tray, small blanket or tablecloth, toys, manipulatives, tools and other objects from the various areas of the classroom (different shapes of blocks, small cars, toy people)

SKILLS: visual discrimination, memory, expressive language, inference, deduction

Tip

- Play the game whenever you are introducing a new material to a learning center. You will be introducing the material, its use, and its place in the classroom.
- Put two objects that don't belong in the group and see if children notice!
- Reverse the game. Show a tray full of classroom objects first. Then cover it and secretly take one object away. Ask: *What is missing?*