

Peaceful Practices: Class Meetings



Age Range:	Preschool and up
Rationale (Why):	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Class meetings can build empathy, openness and thoughtfulness as children listen to each other's ideas.• Class meetings build community.• Class meetings can help children problem solve and resolve conflicts together.• The process of class meetings can help with cognitive and social emotional development.
Resources:	<p>Books:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Matthew and Tilly</i>, Rebecca C. Jones• <i>Friends</i>, Helme Heine• <i>Roxaboxen</i>, Alice McLerran• <i>The Knight and the Dragon</i>, Tomi de Paola <p>Other: A good game to get children settled before a class meeting is a soft touch game that helps children recognize each other. While sitting in a circle, call out one child, "Kera, Kera, look at everyone. Go and touch Josue and then you're done." Josue is next, and then all the other children get a turn, emphasizing a gentle touch.</p>
Environment set-up, inside and outside:	Usually, any place the children can all gather, either inside or out.
Materials needed:	Accommodation or modifications: Make sure everyone can see, hear each other and be comfortable.

How, Process, Directions

Opening: Introduce the topic	<p>Call everyone together — ring a bell, sing a song, play some music.</p> <p>Meeting opening suggestions: "I noticed that...", "I need ideas about...", "What do you think about...?", "What shall we do about...?"</p> <p>Acknowledgments: Encourages everyone to do and see positive actions and voice their appreciation for another's thoughtfulness, assistance, caring action. "Billy helped me pick up the crayons I dropped." – they are specific</p> <p>Problem solving: Behaviors, activities to do – often interpersonal</p> <p>Closing: Adult acknowledge children; sing a song to move to next activity</p> <p>Willowby, Wallowby</p> <p>Willowby, Willowby we, an elephant sat on me; Willowby, Wallowby wom, an elephant sat on Tom.</p>
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As each child's name is sung, they can leave the circle.

Explorations: Children's Work

Teacher's role:

- Make all children feel welcome.
- Acknowledge all voices and languages in the discussion; translate as needed.
- Sometimes, a child has a problem or question to bring up. Listen to the child and, if necessary, help the child express themselves.
- Be aware of children's attention span. Keep the meetings developmentally appropriate; notice if children are losing interest

Wondering Questions — adapt for specific experiences

Examples of open-ended questions: I wonder...

- ...what we can do about [fill in the blank]?
- ...what is new today?
- ...what do you think about [fill in the blank]?

Extended opportunities

- Have an idea box available in the room. Children can either draw a picture of their idea or ask an adult to write down their idea. These ideas can be part of the class meeting.
- Send a message to parents about something that happened or was discussed at the class meeting.
- Record content of the meeting to refer back to and to share with families.

Closing reflection

See above "Willowby, Wallowby" for closing.

When bringing a problem to the group a child will often see how their action impacts others, for good or bad. One time a teacher brought a problem of pushing to the group and how someone was pushed as children were going out to the play yard. The group talked about how they would feel. The child who pushed (no names mentioned) came up with the solution that everyone agreed on!

Notes to share with other teachers and families

Class meetings are usually held during circle time. The following are important ideas to guide circle time with children:

- Listening and talking to children with respect so they know that their voices are heard.
- Recognizing that the teacher's voice is not the most important one. Talk times should be teachers talking with children, not at them. Talking about school rules and schedules should be limited.
- Listening first before responding and being patient with a child's language.
- Repeating what children say to be sure others are understanding.
- Avoiding talking down to children. They are learning the language they must be able to understand. Complex vocabulary and adult grammar are part of the challenge.
- Extending the topic if appropriate but not taking over. There is a lot to be learned about conversation, back and forth, keeping it simple, and helping promote the ability to listen on all sides. Use open ended questions to extend conversations.

Developing these skills during circle time is important, but they are needed throughout the day, one on one and with small groups.

Class meetings can become a regular occurrence to help children hear each other and express their ideas. Often class meetings can transfer into family meetings in the home as families see the value of hearing all voices to make a decision or solve a problem or acknowledge a good deed.