

# Using the Tell Me A Story Book Guides

This workshop provides the opportunity to explore a resource designed to support the use of books with social-emotional themes in Circle Time, the Tell Me A Story Book Guides. In addition, as the final offering in this training series, it also provides the opportunity to integrate the lessons and reflections from the first two workshops.

**Goal** To explore the opportunities of Circle Time as a place to introduce and discuss social-emotional themes.

**Objectives** Participants will:

- Reflect on the challenges and benefits of sharing books with social-emotional themes
- Learn how to use the Tell Me A Story Book Guides
- Learn strategies for sharing books with social-emotional themes in Circle Time

## Method and Content

This workshop has three distinct sections, each designed to build on the other.

- Exercise One: Reflection on Sharing Books About Feelings
- Exercise Two: Using the Book Guides: When Sophie Gets Angry – Really, Really Angry...
- Exercise Three: Sharing Books With Social-Emotional Themes

## Getting Started

### What You Need:

- Time – this training should take 2 hours, not including Workshop Leader preparation. For more information on **Time Management**, see the *Introduction to the Tell Me A Story Workshops*.
- A training space large enough to accommodate the members of the training to participate in large group discussion. For workshop groups larger than 20 participants, you may want to consider including two Workshop Leaders to help manage and respond to participant needs. For more information on considerations with **Group Size**, see the *Introduction to the Tell Me A Story Workshops*.
- Seating for the training group (e.g. semi-circle for more interactive exercises)
- Prepare a training packet for each participant with the following materials:
  - Handout 1: Reflecting on Books With Social-Emotional Themes
  - Handout 2: A copy of the **Introduction to the Tell Me A Story Book Guides**, and a copy of the **Tell Me A Story Book Guide for When Sophie Gets Angry – Really, Really Angry...**
  - Handout 3: Strategies for Sharing Books With Social-Emotional Themes in Circle Time
  - A Workshop Evaluation

- A copy of the book *When Sophie Gets Angry – Really, Really Angry...*
- A pen or pencil for each participant
- Five large pieces of paper
- Colored markers for the Workshop Leader to use in Exercise One

### Workshop Leader Preparation

In this workshop, the participants are asked to stay focused on the goal of supporting an expressive environment in Circle Time. As a resource on how to discuss the expressive environment, read the short paper, *Encouraging an Expressive Environment: Supportive Communication From the Inside Out*, included in the Resources section of the Tell Me A Story Materials.

Read through all the workshop materials as well, including the *Introduction to the Tell Me A Story Book Guides* and the Book Guide for *When Sophie Gets Angry – Really, Really Angry...*. Take time to reflect on your own responses to the workshop exercise questions, focusing especially on your own experience with sharing books with children, and goals for discussing social-emotional themes in groups.

**It is also strongly recommended that you observe your workshop participants in the classrooms during Circle Time again before presenting this workshop.**

These observations will give you an opportunity to monitor progress unique to each classroom. Teaching teams should be involved in planning these observations, and reassured that they are not being rated, but are merely providing you with a chance to offer support and plan a more effective training.

#### Preparing the Workshop Space:

- Prepare the training space by positioning chairs so that the participants can begin as a large group, and then move easily into smaller groups.
- Place a training packet on each chair in the room.
- Prepare one large piece of paper, entitled “Parking Lot for Ideas.”

Parking Lot  
for Ideas

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- ▶ Prepare the last two pieces of paper for Exercise Three with the questions:

How does it feel to share books about social-emotional themes?

Are there feelings or social-emotional themes that are easier for you to talk to children about?

Are there books about feelings or social-emotional themes that you use now in Circle Time? What feelings or social-emotional themes are they about?

Are there books about feelings or social-emotional themes that you would not want to use in Circle Time?

- ▶ Display the large pieces of paper so that the whole group will be able to see each and the Workshop Leader can write on them easily.

### Introduction to the Training

Workshop Leaders are encouraged to use their own words to introduce the training. Key points to consider are:

- ▶ Share the title of the workshop and the goals.
- ▶ Introduce the concept of the expressive environment as one of today's themes. Offer an initial definition of expressive environment to the group and how it applies to the workshop being offered today. It's important to create a common understanding before proceeding with the training.

For example, you might say...

*"We often encourage kids to use their words, but in this workshop series we have been focusing on how we can do more than that, and really encourage children to talk about their feelings. This has been described as creating an "expressive environment" - an environment in which kids and adults are given the message that acknowledging and discussing feelings is important and healthy."*

- ▶ Explain the “Parking Lot for Ideas” sheet as follows: During the training, if a question, suggestion, or concern unrelated to the training exercise, but related to the topic is offered, the Workshop Leader will record it on the “Parking Lot for Ideas” sheet. Refer back to these ideas at the end of the training for further discussion as time permits.
- ▶ Review the *Training Ground Rules*, which are a short list of statements intended to promote a safe, positive environment for all participants. These can be printed on a piece of paper for all to see, but reviewing the rules and asking for group agreement is the most important step before beginning the exercise.

### Transition to Exercise One

Choosing to share stories about social-emotional themes can encourage important conversations and contribute to development. It can also support the message that the classroom is a safe and supportive place to talk about feelings.

*For example, you might say...*

**“So far we’ve talked about conversations with children, and ways to make Circle Time a place where kids are encouraged to express themselves. Today we are going to focus on how Circle Time can be a place where we discuss social-emotional topics, such as feelings and events that affect us emotionally.”**

## Exercise One: Reflection on Sharing Books About Feelings

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This workshop will give participants the opportunity to explore a resource for sharing books and encouraging discussion regarding social-emotional themes. Continuing the workshop series’ practice of self-reflection and shared reflection, the first exercise will ask teachers to consider their experiences and feelings with sharing books on social-emotional themes, including the prospect of new experiences, books and teaching methods.

- ▶ Refer the group to Handout 1. Ask participants to consider the statements and write down their responses.
- ▶ Once participants have had the chance to complete this task, ask if anyone would like to share their responses and/or what the prompts made them think about.
- ▶ Record responses on the prepared large pieces of paper.

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## Workshop Leader Strategy: Meeting Participants Where They Are

Consider the fact that workshop participants may have different feelings about the workshop's themes, including the appropriateness of discussing certain topics with a group of young children. Remember that the main goal of this workshop series is to promote an expressive environment. Therefore, as the Workshop Leader you have the opportunity to promote the same experience in this workshop by remaining flexible enough to listen to where your participants are with this subject matter. For instance, if you have a participant who reports that they would never share a book about an emotional topic, ask "Why?" before coming to your own conclusions. That participant may feel less confident about keeping her group under control in Circle Time, or is uncomfortable with the book topics being suggested in this workshop's activities.

**Everyone should approach this subject matter at his or her own level of challenge for making Circle Time a more expressive experience. Stay focused on your role as a facilitator for professional growth that has meaning for each participant.**

For example, if sharing a book about angry feelings is not realistic, then perhaps that participant would consider a book about naming a range of emotions. In order to keep this in mind, consider where your own level of comfort lies with such themes.

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# Handout 1

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## Reflecting on Books with Social-Emotional Themes

How does it make you feel to share books about social-emotional themes with children?

Are there feelings or social-emotional themes that are easier for you to talk to children about?

Are there books about feelings or social-emotional themes that you use now in Circle Time? What feelings or social-emotional themes are they about?

Are there books about feelings or social-emotional themes that you would not want to use in Circle Time? If so, which ones? Why?

**Table 1. Sample Responses and Themes to Develop**

Initial statement prompt	Examples of potential responses	Themes for Workshop Leader to develop in the discussion
<p><b>How does it feel to share books about social-emotional themes?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fine</li> <li>• Depends on the book</li> <li>• If the group wasn't too big it would be okay</li> <li>• Scared of what certain kids might say in response</li> <li>• Not comfortable – opens up too much</li> </ul>	<p>Helping children learn about emotions is an essential component of early care and education. The job of understanding emotions is part of what draws some people to working with young children; for others, this part of the work can be a challenge. However, understanding children's emotions is critical and adds purpose and meaning to our work.</p>
<p><b>Are there feelings or social-emotional themes that are easier for you to talk to children about?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nothing bothers me – it's all easy</li> <li>• I like talking about feelings</li> <li>• Talking about a kid's home life makes me nervous</li> <li>• Getting kids ready for a new baby</li> <li>• Transitions that happen in all kids' lives like moving, starting at a new school</li> </ul>	<p>It is important to be aware of what we feel the most comfortable sharing with young children. These comfortable topics provide a confident starting point for the kinds of books you might use in Circle Time.</p>
<p><b>Are there books about feelings or social-emotional themes that you use now in Circle Time? What feelings or social-emotional themes are they about?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have lots of books about feelings</li> <li>• <i>Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day</i></li> <li>• <i>Glad Monster, Sad Monster</i></li> <li>• We have a book for new kids about starting at a school</li> </ul>	<p>This provides an opportunity for participants to think about their current classroom resources. Depending on the level of access to quality early childhood books, this question may tempt participants to focus on what they do not have, rather than what they do have at this time. Encourage the group to consider this as a step in setting goals for improving practice.</p>
<p><b>Are there books about feelings or social-emotional themes that you would not want to use in Circle Time? If so, which ones? Why?</b></p>	<p>Which ones:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Something about death</li> <li>• Homelessness</li> <li>• Different kinds of families (e.g. gay, single adoptive, bi-cultural, etc.)</li> </ul> <p>Why:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because it will get the kids upset or sad</li> <li>• Because it will start a conversation that is inappropriate for the classroom</li> <li>• Because it will frighten some children and agitate others</li> <li>• Because I don't know how to talk about that topic</li> </ul>	<p>Most children are trying to make sense of things that are frightening, so the issues that come up are important to address.</p> <p>When we believe a specific topic is likely to agitate the children, then it may need to be addressed in smaller groups.</p> <p>It is important to select books we are confident about sharing. Reviewing books carefully is an important part of preparing for Circle Time.</p>

## Workshop Leader Strategy: Honoring Feelings While Staying on Topic

The small and large group discussions in Exercise One are designed to encourage self-reflection and shared reflection. This type of exercise evokes personal feelings and experiences for participants in order to consider how they affect professional practice. Facilitating large group discussion with a focus on sharing these reflections allows participants to coordinate their own perspective with others'. Yet, as the Workshop Leader, it is important to acknowledge that each person will bring their own biases into the conversation. It is your role to acknowledge, and perhaps examine, these feelings while still keeping the group focused on the value of bringing these books into Circle Time.

In facilitating this discussion, consider:

- that the negative response of some participants may have more to do with their own personal experiences than with the reactions of children. By encouraging reflection on their responses you are helping participants to examine where their feelings come from and how their feelings affect their practice.
- that participants may feel defensive about their choices concerning what they feel comfortable doing. Stress that teachers should pay special attention to which books and topics they are comfortable discussing. Challenging oneself to expand our skills does not mean ignoring the feelings that growth evokes. On the contrary, encourage participants to seek out support from mentors and supervisors in understanding their challenges and areas for potential growth.

Also consider the opportunity to share information based on the study of child development. For instance, affirm the positive opportunity provided by addressing social-emotional issues with young children. Social-emotional well-being provides the foundation for school readiness. Remind the group that as discussed in earlier workshops, social skill and emotional health foster resilience, a strength children can call on for the rest of their lives.

Remember, such discussion is part of the process of learning and growing as a professional.



## Transition to Exercise Two

Introduce the next exercise as a way to transition from the challenges of integrating these books to the opportunities these books present.

### Exercise Two: Using the Book Guides: When Sophie Gets Angry – Really, Really Angry...

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This exercise gives participants the chance to review a resource in sharing social-emotional themed books in Circle Time.

- ▶ Draw the group’s attention to the copy of the Introduction to the **Tell Me A Story Book Guides**, and the **Tell Me A Story Book Guide** for *When Sophie Gets Angry -- Really, Really Angry...*
- ▶ Display the book, *When Sophie Gets Angry – Really, Really Angry...* Ask participants if they are familiar with the book. Pass one or more copies of the book around so that participants can become familiar with it.
- ▶ Review some of the strategies shared in the last workshop, that can be found in the Introduction to the **Tell Me A Story Book Guides**, especially:
  - **Preparation**, focusing on selection of book, consideration of group size, and consideration of how the group might react within a discussion of the book’s theme.
  - **Using the Book Guides as a template**: The Book Guide provides examples of a variety of questions including some strategies to keep in mind, but the Guide provides these simply as suggestions. This resource is designed to provide teachers with examples so that they can make the experience of sharing the books their own.
  - **Revisiting stories: The Book Guides direct teachers to share a book at least three times**, approximately once per week for three weeks. Discuss the explanation for this practice. The section devoted to this in the Introduction states:
    - Pre-school age children gain mastery through repetition and revisiting the book can help them to form a deeper understanding. With this in mind, each set of questions is designed to build on the child’s understanding of the book, its social-emotional themes, and the relevance of those themes to the child.
    - **The first reading** provides a set of questions focused on helping the child to learn about the plot and characters in the story.
    - **The second reading** provides a stronger focus on the social-emotional themes of the story.
    - **The third reading** fosters a connection between the social-emotional themes and the children. This includes encouraging conversation about strategies for negotiating different emotions and social situations. You will find an activity at the end of the third reading as well.

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- ▶ Ask participants to take a few minutes to review the Book Guide for *When Sophie Gets Angry – Really, Really Angry...*
  - ▶ Direct the group’s attention to the Teacher Tip, found in the Book Guide’s First Reading section that encourages teachers to consider how they ask questions.
  - ▶ Ask the group to consider this concept of providing open-ended questions. Draw attention to the questions suggested in the Book Guide. For example:
    - How did Sophie act when she was angry? Look what she does (roars, ready to explode, cries.)*
    - Are there other things people do when they are angry?*
    - What did she do to make herself feel better?*
  - ▶ The Introduction encourages teachers to think about the objectives they have in sharing a selected book. Emphasize the focus on how the book and the discussion can encourage open expression. For instance, as stated in the Introduction:

*Your first priority in encouraging an expressive environment is to maintain an emotionally safe atmosphere for everyone. While it is crucial to remain open to children who feel the need to share a spontaneous memory or question, this curriculum does not advocate insisting children recall emotional experiences. For example, in reading *When Sophie Gets Angry – Really, Really Angry...*, teachers may be tempted to ask the children to simply remember a time when they got mad. We suggest asking the children, “What does being angry feel like?” This allows the children to consider the emotion without being asked to personalize it.*
  - ▶ Encourage the group to discuss their thoughts on this practice. Reassure them that there are many positive ways to ask children questions. This discussion and resource is here in order to promote reflection on the subject.

### Exercise Three: **Sharing Books With Social-Emotional Themes**

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Because the Tell Me A Story Book Guides are designed not only for use with the books selected, but also to provide a template for using teacher-selected books, this last exercise will focus on some of the take-away messages for teachers.

- ▶ Refer the group to Handout 2 in their packet.
- ▶ Discuss the strategies provided on Handout 2.
- ▶ Ask the group if they have any additions to this list. Record these responses on the Parking Lot for Ideas sheet.

# Handout 2

## Strategies for Sharing Books With Social-Emotional Themes in Circle Time

- ▶ Ask questions and draw attention to the way a character is feeling and the way the character expresses these feelings (e.g. “He looks sad to me,” “What do you think?” “Her face seems angry because of the way her eyebrows are bunched up.”) Some children may see the direct link between their feelings and the story and volunteer what they think. Others may need you to be more concrete and ask specific questions.
- ▶ Focus on the feelings AND what the character did about those feelings. This will help the children think not only about how they feel, but how to express it and move through it.
- ▶ Be prepared for some children to talk and for some to be silent. Not every child will want to talk about the book or their feelings, or some may need to think about the story and hear it more than once before commenting on it. Be prepared for how you might react if one child wants to talk a lot and others are quiet. If you see that one child seems more interested in the story than the rest of the group, you can suggest looking at the book together later.
- ▶ Listen and reflect: Your actions provide a powerful example for the children in Circle Time. Be aware of how you model respectful communication and expression by helping each child feel good about his or her reaction.
- ▶ Consider other activities to promote social-emotional discussion and growth. Social-emotional topics can be explored in many ways, such as dramatic play, art, dictated stories, and creative movement. By broadening their options through your curriculum, you can offer your group of children greater opportunities in social-emotional growth.

Pulling things together at the end of the training is an important step for everyone. As a workshop gets close to the end and people are feeling tired, it can be tempting to skip this part. Let people know that you will get them out of the workshop on time, but want to take a few more minutes to wrap up the time you've spent together.

### 1. Review Key Concepts

- ▶ Circle Time is a vital part of the classroom schedule and a golden opportunity to encourage discussion about social-emotional themes.
- ▶ With planning and preparation, books with social-emotional themes can provide rich experiences in the classroom.
- ▶ By providing opportunities to reflect on and discuss feelings, we are encouraging an expressive environment – an experience that can support the social-emotional growth of children.

2. **End on a positive note.** Encourage teaching teams to continue this examination of Circle Time in their classrooms and team meetings. Change takes time. Remind them that groups of children (and adults) respond best to change when it is taken one step at a time.

3. If time permits, **review some or all of the comments written on the “Parking Lot for Ideas” sheet posted on the wall.** Consider responding to one comment, then asking participants which of the others they would like discussed in the time remaining. These comments should also be considered in preparation for the next training.

4. **Express your appreciation.** Let the group know how much you appreciate their time and hard work. Thank them for sharing their ideas and for being willing to think about change together.

5. **Make yourself available.** After the training, be willing to answer questions and respond to concerns on an ongoing basis. If the Workshop Leader cannot be available, an on-site staff member should be designated in this role and announced at the end of the training.

6. **Collect Attendance and Evaluation Forms.** Ask participants to sign an attendance sheet and complete an evaluation form. Remind participants that these forms are anonymous and collected for the purpose of improving future trainings. During this time, you might also want to title and date any large group work so you can save it for future reference.

## Extending Learning and Supporting New Skills

In order to extend the workshop's content to changes in professional skill and behavior, the Workshop Leader and administrators should consider these follow-up activities:

**Provide Supportive Supervision for Individuals and Teams.** Teachers need additional opportunities to discuss integrating books and discussion into Circle Time with a supervisor or a mentor. Reviewing the current list of Circle Time responsibilities is a useful way to decide what tasks can be rearranged in order to support Circle Time more fully. Teachers may also need more discussion in order to ask questions about how to employ the strategies shared in Handout 2: Strategies for Sharing Books With Social-Emotional Themes in Circle Time

**Implement Classroom Observation & Social Service Support.** Consider making Circle Time a regular activity for observation. Take notes in order to keep track of change over time and the outcome of new strategies. Make time to follow up with discussion of these observations with the teacher teams.

**Create Action Plans.** In order to target Circle Time as an activity for improvement, teaching teams and supervisors must agree on the steps to be taken in that effort. Make sure to set a variety of short-term and long-term goals in order to acknowledge all levels of growth and success.

## Workshop Leader Reflection

The Workshop Leader should take some time to review the training experience once it is over, read through and tally the evaluation forms, and review the results. Some additional questions to consider are:

**Was I prepared?** Did I have all the materials I needed? Was the room adequate? Did I feel confident with the topic?

**Did the training go as I imagined it would?** Did the group respond the way I thought they would? Were there any surprises? Were there any elements of the training that went especially well?

**Were the participants engaged?** Did the group size seem appropriate? Who seemed comfortable enough to share their thoughts with the group? Who did not seem comfortable? Do I know why? Did I get the feeling that the participants understood the exercises and materials? Who was present and who was missing today? Is there anyone I need to follow up with immediately?

**What were some of the themes that people talked about in this training?** Was there a group of issues that the responses and discussion had in common? Are any of those issues a surprise? How can I use those issues in future trainings to make the exercises more effective?

**What would have made this training better?** In hindsight, what could I have done differently? Why? How can I use that information to make the next training even more successful?

**Did I gain new knowledge from this training?** What did I learn? In addition to new information on the training topic, did I gain any new knowledge about the training group or individuals in the training group? Did I learn something new about myself as a Workshop Leader?

# Workshop Evaluation

Title of the Workshop: Using the Tell Me A Story Book Guides

Location \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please rate how well the training met the objectives below:

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Not Good
Objective 1: To recognize the unique opportunities that Circle Time offers for communication in the preschool classroom	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Objective 2: Participants will learn how to use the <i>Tell Me A Story Book Guides</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Objective 3: Participants will learn strategies for sharing books with social-emotional themes in Circle Time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Overall rating of this workshop:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Usefulness of information presented:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Usefulness of workshop activities:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creativity of workshop activities:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trainer's knowledge of subject:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trainer's presentation style:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Is there anything you would like to learn that was not presented in this workshop?

Would you like more trainings that expand on this topic? Yes No (Please circle one)  
I would like more training on:

Additional Comments: