



a program of the Wellesley Centers for Women

REINFORCING
OPEN CIRCLE
SCHOOLWIDE

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There are countless ways to transfer the use of Open Circle skills and concepts from the classroom throughout the rest of your school. Try out a few of these ideas for reinforcing classroom lessons and building a caring whole-school community.

Leadership Team

- Create a team to participate in the Sustainability Program to help Open Circle become a vital part of your school culture. Team members learn key concepts and practical strategies to help Open Circle and social and emotional learning flourish over time.
- Include Open Circle and social and emotional learning in your school improvement plan.

Parent Groups

- Train school mental health professionals in Open Circle's Parent Program Leader training so they can facilitate five-session parent groups on concepts that support Open Circle.
- Organize an Open Circle children's literature event during a morning coffee or evening PTO meeting. Have school librarian or other staff member book-talk some titles that connect to social and emotional learning topics.
- Share Open Circle materials and information with parents at Back-To-School nights and orientations.

School Assemblies

- Have children share skits, songs or original writing that celebrates school-wide Open Circle skills, concepts and goals.
- Use Open Circle vocabulary/non-verbal signals during assemblies.
- Invite speakers who model the skills taught in the *Open Circle Curriculum*.

School Announcements

- During morning announcements, read a poem, quote, or fable that connects to an Open Circle skill or concept.
- Ask groups of students to make weekly announcements regarding their accomplishments, special events in their lives, or compliments shared by classmates.

Playground

- Establish Peaceful Playground Area with special games and quiet activities.
- Train students as Open Circle monitors to help peers through the steps of the problem solving process or the process for dealing with annoying behavior.
- Gather a recess leadership committee of students, teachers and playground support staff to develop guidelines for recess behavior and responsibilities expected of adults and children (e.g. Open Circle playgrounds are inclusive and students use the problem solving steps when situations arise).

One principal shares:

"Open Circle affords a school a comprehensive social competency intervention that has made a tremendous difference in our school community. It empowers children to mediate conflict on their own, increases teacher instructional time by minimizing classroom disruption, has empowered children who are often the victims of their own silence and has drastically changed our school climate to a pronounced community of learners that respect and celebrate individual differences."

Open Circle Schedule

- Schedule a consistent time twice a week for all classrooms to hold Open Circle Meetings.
- Invite all adults in the school community - custodians, lunch workers, bus drivers, specialists, administrators - to join Open Circle Meetings during this time.

Staff Meetings and Adult Community

- Establish Open Circle norms for all meetings.
- Encourage differing opinions among colleagues, and strategies for sharing differing opinions with civility.
- Include Open Circle as an agenda item at every meeting. Invite staff to discuss their successes and challenges of their Open Circle implementation.
- Use Open Circle facilitation and communication skills during the meeting. For example, try arranging chairs in a circle, using large group response methods or the Pair/Share model.
- Use Open Circle community-builders and energizers during the meeting to build a strong adult community among school staff.
- Present ideas, activities, and concepts as ways for to build adult community in the classroom and with each other (e.g. review Crucial C's and Group Theory, or plan school community activities).
- Recognize and compliment school staff in front of students and colleagues.
- Place Open Circle on the agenda during grade level meetings and share ideas for incorporating Open Circle into academics and integrating it into the school day.

In the Classroom

- Help students connect Open Circle skills when doing group work in math, social studies, reading, or science.
- Review the speaking up and school listening lessons as students prepare to give presentations in class.
- During reading or language arts lessons, ask students to connect Open Circle concepts with literature.
- Use Open Circle vocabulary during reading circles and guided reading.
- Encourage students to use calming down techniques before tests, presentations, or transitions.
- Model calm-breathing, positive self-talk and problem-solving steps for students in all subject areas.
- Encourage visits by principal and other school staff to Open Circle Meetings to sit in empty chair.
- Conduct combined meetings with Open Circle buddies from upper and lower grades.
- Have area in classroom displaying the problem solving steps.
- Laminate steps for problem solving and place in section of classroom for students to visit if they are having a problem.
- Brainstorm different solutions to problems. List on chart and hang on wall for reference.

Teachers share:

"Students are familiar with each other now. There is no separation. The whole school knows each other."

"We as educators need to understand that teaching subject matter is not our only responsibility. We must prepare our charges not only for intellectual challenges, but to be socially responsible and functional as well."

Communication

- Use school website, Open Circle press release templates, PTO newsletters, and principal letters to raise awareness about the school's social and emotional learning initiatives.
- Add a link from the school's website to Open Circle's website (www.open-circle.org).
- Collect and share news, magazine articles, and journal articles related to social and emotional learning.
- Sign up for the free Open Circle e-newsletter at www.open-circle.org/newsletter.html. Encourage all members of the school community to sign up.

Public Areas of School

- Create and display Open Circle posters made by children.
- Ask each class to contribute to an Open Circle bulletin board throughout the school year.
- Post Open Circle vocabulary in the central office, principal's office and nurse's office.
- Use Open Circle vocabulary and non-verbal signals throughout the school.
- Keep a basket of Open Circle-themed books in the school office.
- Hang banners in school that say "This is an Open Circle school!"
- Place hand prints around the school with quotes related to Open Circle skills and concepts.
- Make an Open Circle tree with compliments or skills and concepts written on the leaves.

School Library

- Select an "Open Circle Theme of the Month" and display related books. Create an Open Circle shelf for books related to social and emotional learning as a teacher resource area or books that circulate among students.
- Include Open Circle books in read-aloud program.
- Invite a guest reader like the principal, counselor, specialists, custodian, or parent to share an Open Circle book.
- Ask parent council to purchase Open Circle-themed books.
- Mark Open Circle-themed books with Open Circle stickers for easy recognition.
- Distribute Open Circle's Literature Connections lists to teachers and parents, or create and share your own resource list of Open Circle-related children's literature selections.

Cafeteria

- Display Open Circle vocabulary posters or banners around the cafeteria.
- Use Open Circle non-verbal communication methods during lunch time.
- Gather a cafeteria leadership committee of students, teachers and cafeteria support staff to develop guidelines for cafeteria behavior and responsibilities expected of adults and children.
- Create a "Have lunch with the Principal" program to promote connection.
- Celebrate Mix-it-Up Day, during which students share lunch with children they do not normally sit beside.

One principal share:

"I decided with some other administrators that we wanted to have a specialist pair up with each class [for Open Circle Meetings]. We made the announcement, but one specialist needed some extra convincing. About three months later, he came to me and said, 'I love Open Circle, it's the best thing in the world. I want to do it.' He now fully embraces it. Open Circle really has been entwined in the culture [of our school]."