



# Home Link

Dear Family:

This year our class is using the *Open Circle Curriculum*, a comprehensive social and emotional learning program that supports elementary school children in developing the skills needed to be good learners and to form healthy, positive relationships with people throughout their lives.

Twice each week during the whole school year, the class will meet in a circle for 15 to 30 minutes. Lesson topics will include listening well, including one another, cooperating, when to tell a responsible adult and when to handle situations yourself, teasing, recognizing differences among people, getting calm, problem solving, positive self-talk, and more. The goals of the lessons are to create a cooperative classroom environment and to give children the skills they need to solve interpersonal problems and to build positive relationships.

Sometimes your child will have a homework assignment from Open Circle that might require your participation. You can help your child develop the skills we are working on in Open Circle by discussing and practicing them at home. You might ask your child to tell you what we talked about in the last Open Circle Meeting.

You will receive *Open Circle Home Links* periodically to keep you informed. They will include new vocabulary words and suggestions for some children's books that relate to Open Circle lesson topics. You might want to check one or two of these books out of the library to read with your child. For more information about Open Circle, please visit our website at [www.open-circle.org](http://www.open-circle.org).

The *Open Circle Curriculum* was developed by Open Circle at the Wellesley Centers for Women, Wellesley College, and is available for all elementary grades. At each grade level, the program addresses the same core concepts and skills in ways that are specifically designed to be developmentally appropriate for students at that age. All teachers who use Open Circle have received special training to implement the *Curriculum* in their classrooms.

If you have any questions about Open Circle, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours truly,



# Home Link

Dear Family:

During our first Open Circle Meetings, the class worked together to make a plan to get their chairs into a circle quietly, safely, and cooperatively. We form a circle so that everyone can see everyone else and be heard. We always leave one space open in case a new person or a visitor would like to join the circle. Everyone is welcome, and no one is ever left out. The Open Circle symbolizes the idea of an inclusive classroom community.

Students worked on getting to know each other's names in one Open Circle. In order to be able to work well together, they need to know each other's names and how to pronounce them correctly. Talk to your child about how he/she got his/her name, why it was chosen, and if it has any particular meaning or connection to other family members.

In another Open Circle, we discussed classroom goals and developed some classroom rules based on those goals. We learned that a **goal** is something a person tries to get, something to work toward, or how you want things to end up. Just like individual people, whole classrooms can have goals too. Ask your child to share with you some of our classroom goals. You might want to talk to your child about your own personal goals and your goals for your family.

We also made some rules that will help to keep our classroom safe, make it a place where students feel cared about, and make it a place where we can do our best learning. In addition, we added some important rules that are **nonnegotiable**. This means "no choice." Students may ask to have these rules explained, and they may ask questions about them, but they cannot be changed. We also talked about situations where rules might need to be changed or new ones added. Ask your child to share with you some of the classroom rules that we developed and agreed to. Ask for an example of a nonnegotiable rule in our classroom. You might have a discussion with your child about the rules in your home — for mealtimes, bedtimes, and chores. Do you have any nonnegotiable rules at home? What are the consequences for breaking the rules at home? How are these rules different from the rules you had at home when you were your child's age?

Yours truly,

## LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Here are some books that relate to the topics we discussed in Open Circle. You might want to check out one or two at the library and read with your child:

Aliki. *Painted Words; Spoken Memories: Marianne's Story*. Greenwillow Books, 1998.

Through drawings and newly acquired English language skills, Marianne is able to communicate her experiences and feelings to her new classmates.

Herrera, Juan Felipe. *The Upside Down Boy*. Children's Book Press, 2000.

When a young boy enters a new school, he feels like his life has been turned upside down. Everything about the experience is strange because Juanito speaks Spanish and everyone in his new school speaks English.

Myers, Walter Dean. *Looking Like Me*. Egmont, 2009.

A lively, rhythmic poem in which a boy answers the question: "I looked in the mirror and what did I see?"

Smother, Ethel Footman. *The Hard-Times Jar*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.

Emma, the daughter of migrant workers, works hard toward her goal of owning a single book. When Emma starts school, she is thrilled to find a whole library full of books. Her enthusiasm leads to trouble, when she breaks the classroom rules about bringing library books home.



# Home Link

Dear Family:

In recent Open Circle Meetings, we talked about **being calm** and **getting calm** when we feel upset. We described situations in which we feel very calm. When we are calm, specific changes happen in our bodies. Our hearts beat more slowly, and our blood pressure is lower. Our muscles are relaxed, and our breathing is slower and deeper. We also talked about what happens to our bodies when we're not calm, such as when we are watching a scary movie. Sometimes at school and in other places, we need to get calm, such as before a test, during a performance, or in a tense game. We learned two calm breathing exercises that can help us to get calm. One is basic calm breathing:

- Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose, filling your belly with air like a balloon.
- Breathe out slowly through your nose.

Here is a second calm breathing exercise:

- Breathe in slowly and deeply through your nose.
- As you breathe out, count down on each out-breath, starting with 10 and going down to 1.

It's important to recognize the feelings and changes in our bodies that signal that we are getting upset or not listening or behaving well. Sometimes taking even a few calm breaths can help us to get back in control.

At home, ask your child to teach you the two calm breathing exercises. Practice them together. Share with your child times when you have felt stressed out or not listening or behaving well and could have used a calm breathing exercise. Ask your child to talk about times he/she might have needed to use one of the exercises to help get calm. Make a habit of using calm breathing yourself and encourage your child to use one of the techniques whenever he/she needs to calm down. When we are breathing calmly, we are better able to think clearly, focus on what we're doing, and learn.

Yours truly,

## **LITERATURE CONNECTIONS**

You might want to check out the following literature from the library to read with your child:

Dakos, Kalli. *Put Your Eyes Up Here and Other School Poems*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2003.

Poems such as “Ode to My Stress Ball” and “Worried about Being Worried” describe students’ attempts to deal appropriately with strong feelings they experience in school.

Williams, Mary. *Cool Cats, Calm Kids: Relaxation and Stress Management for Young People*. Impact Publishers, 1996.

A collection of exercises and essays that focus on stress reduction and relaxation.



# Home Link

Dear Family:

In Open Circle, we have been getting to know each other better. In order for students to work together cooperatively and become friends, it is important for them to learn what they have **in common** with each other and how they differ. We played the “Stand Up” game to find out what we have in common, such as who plays a musical instrument, likes to play sports, speaks more than one language, or has gone to this school since kindergarten. We talked about the advantages of having a variety of friends and how people do not need to be exactly alike in order to be friends. Ask your child to tell you what he/she learned about what the students in the class have in common and what he/she has in common with other students. You might encourage your child to try to get to know someone in the class he/she does not know very well during recess or lunchtime and find out what they have in common.

We also talked in an Open Circle Meeting about the skills of **listening well** and we practiced listening to one another. We generated a list of what listening well in school looks like. When we are listening well in school, we are sitting still, sitting up, looking at the person who is speaking, paying attention, asking questions, making comments, and giving feedback to the speaker.

It is important to everyone in the class — students, teachers, and visitors — to be listened to when they speak. Ask your child to practice listening skills while you speak. Then practice listening skills while your child speaks. Listening is a very important lifelong skill to learn and practice, for children as well as adults. You might want to encourage all members of your family to listen well to one another. Be sure to compliment listening at home when you observe it.

Yours truly,

## LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Here are some books that relate to the topics we discussed in Open Circle. You might want to check out one or two at the library and read with your child:

Choi, Sook Nyul. *Halmoni and the Picnic*. Houghton Mifflin, 1993.

Yunmi is worried that her friends won't like the Korean food her grandmother brings to the class picnic.

Miller, William. *The Piano*. Lee & Low Books, 2000.

A young girl and an elderly woman share the love of music. Their common interest helps them become unlikely friends.

Polacco, Patricia. *Mrs. Katz and Tush*. Bantam Books, 1992.

Larnel and his mother enrich the life of Mrs. Katz by caring about her and listening to her stories.



# Home Link

Dear Family:

In a recent Open Circle, we talked about **nonverbal signals**. A nonverbal signal is a way of communicating without using words. We tried out some nonverbal signals that we already use, such as the signals for time out, speak up, and be quiet. We talked about why it might be helpful to have some nonverbal signals in the classroom that everyone agrees to and is clear about instead of using words. The class chose several nonverbal signals to use this year in the classroom. We also chose a nonverbal signal to use if the class gets too noisy or is not listening or behaving well and talked about what each person might do to take responsibility for making the signal work. Ask your child to demonstrate the signals the class agreed to use this year. Ask your child to demonstrate some other nonverbal signals and have you guess what they mean. You and your child might want to notice and discuss nonverbal signals that you see depicted in newspapers, in magazines, or on television.

At another Open Circle Meeting, we talked about giving and receiving **compliments**. A compliment is a statement that is true and describes something good about a person. Compliments can also be given to a group of students for something they have done well as a class. We discussed the kinds of things we might compliment someone about: what the person does well, how the person treats others, what the person does to be helpful, a special trait the person has that makes others feel good, or what the person does that shows special effort. These ways of complimenting can also be used to describe a group of students or a classroom. Compliments make people feel special and appreciated, and they can help to improve the classroom atmosphere. Each student had a turn to give a compliment to and receive a compliment from another student, or gave a compliment to the class as a whole. We learned three things to remember about giving a compliment:

- It must be true.
- It must be specific.
- It must be positive.

We also learned how to respond to compliments in school. We should:

- Look at the person and smile.
- Say, "Thank you!"

At home, be sure to compliment your child often for doing something well, being thoughtful, or being helpful. If your child gives you a compliment, remember to look at him/her, smile, and say, "Thank you!"

Yours truly,

## LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Here is a book that relates to the topics we discussed in Open Circle. You might want to check it out at the library and read with your child:

Thayer, Ernest. *Casey at the Bat: A Ballad of the Republic Sung in the Year 1888*. Simon and Schuster, 2003.

In this illustrated version of a classic baseball poem, tension builds towards one dramatic moment at the end of the game. The illustrations show examples of how players, umpires, and fans use nonverbal signals during the most memorable inning.



# Home Link

Dear Family:

In a recent Open Circle Meeting, we talked about **additional calming-down activities**. We learned some new strategies to help us calm down when we need to. We discussed counting backward, giving ourselves a time out, focusing on something else, relaxing with a calm breathing rate, and focusing while counting backward. Students were also able to share their own strategies with their classmates. Ask your child what strategy helps them calm down and share your own strategies with your child. Knowing how to calm down when we need to is a valuable lifelong skill.

In another Open Circle Meeting, we had a lesson practicing **self-talk**. Self-talk is a way of encouraging ourselves. Positive self-talk can help us to do something or reach a goal. However, negative self-talk can discourage us from even trying. For example, a child might be having a difficult time with math homework and say to himself, "I'm no good at math.

I just can't learn it." That is negative self-talk, which can be discouraging and might prevent him from trying to do the assignment. However, if he practices positive self-talk, he might say, "I am going to spend a little extra time tonight doing my math homework and reviewing the chapter." We can use positive self-talk in school to help us do our best on a test, in a game, or in a performance; learn something new; or reach a goal.

At home, ask your child to explain to you what self-talk is and give you an example. Encourage your child to use positive self-talk when he/she seems discouraged about learning or trying something.

Yours truly,

## LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Here is a book that relates to the topics we discussed in Open Circle. You might want to check it out at the library and read with your child:

Smith, Charles R. *Rimshots: Basketball Pix, Rolls, and Rhythms*. Puffin Books, 2000.

This collection of poems and short essays reflects the emotional, as well as physical, aspects of playing basketball. In the poem, "Excuses, Excuses," Smith describes negative self-talk that athletes use when they aren't performing well on the court.



# Home Link

Dear Family:

**Including one another** was the topic of one of our Open Circle lessons recently. We talked about how it feels to be left out and how it feels to be part of a group that excludes someone. We also discussed why people exclude others and talked about situations when it might be necessary to not let someone be included. As children get older, they have stronger opinions about who they want to be their friends and how they behave toward each other. Yet it is important in a caring classroom community to find ways to include each other so that we can learn to live and work together. Perhaps you could share with your child a time when you were left out and how it made you feel.

Ask your child if he/she or any of his/her friends have ever felt hurt or angry by being excluded. Encourage your child to try to find ways to include classmates who are being left out on the playground and in after-school activities.

In another Open Circle, we talked about **cooperating**, or working together to get something done. We discussed why it is important to cooperate, and we brainstormed some skills needed for cooperation, such as sharing, taking turns, listening, letting someone organize the activity, and making sure that everyone gets to take part. We also talked about what works against cooperation. Ask your child to name some times during the school day when he/she has cooperated to get something done. Ask him/her to think of some times at home when he/she has cooperated with family members to get something done. Discuss what was helpful and what worked against cooperation at home. Encourage your child to cooperate with their friends in activities and groups outside of school.

Yours truly,

## LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Here are some books that relate to the topics we discussed in Open Circle. You might want to check out one or two at the library and read with your child:

Coy, John. *Strong to the Hoop*. Lee & Low Books, 1999.

When he first gets to the playground with his older brother, James is left out of the pickup basketball game because he is only 10. When an older player gets injured, James gets the call to play.

Estes, Eleanor. *The Hundred Dresses*. Harcourt, Inc. 1972.

The most popular girl in school teases Wanda Petronski because she wears the same shabby dress every day.

George, Kristine O'Connell. *Swimming Upstream: Middle School Poems*. Clarion Books, 2002.

This collection of poems reflects the worries and joys of being a middle school student.

Muth, Jon J. *The Three Questions*. Scholastic Press, 2002.

A young boy asks three questions about how to be a good person. The answers include being compassionate and cooperative at every opportunity.



# Home Link

Dear Family:

**Speaking up** was the topic of a recent Open Circle lesson. In order to be able to express our ideas and opinions, it's important to be able to speak up — not only in the classroom but also in other places and at times when no adults are nearby. We learned four important skills that help people to hear and understand what we say:

- Look at the group.
- Speak slowly.
- Speak clearly.
- Speak loudly enough.

We also discussed how to help a speaker feel comfortable and encouraged and how to be a confident, convincing speaker.

At home, ask your child to use speaking-up skills to tell you about his/her day at school. Ask your child to use listening skills while you tell him/her about your day. Encourage your child to always use both speaking-up and listening skills at home, in school, and in other places.

Yours truly,

## LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Here are some books that relate to the topics we discussed in Open Circle. You might want to check out one or two at the library and read with your child:

Gerstein, Mordicai. *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers*. Roaring Brook Press, 2003.

The story of Philippe Petit, a French street performer who walked on a tightrope between the two towers of the World Trade Center.

Golenbock, Peter. *Teammates*. Harcourt, Inc., 1990.

Pee Wee Reese, a member of the 1940's Brooklyn Dodgers, takes a public stand in support of his teammate, Jackie Robinson.

Grimes, Nikki. *Talkin' About Bessie: The Story of Aviator Elizabeth Coleman*. Orchard Books, 2002.

Various family members and acquaintances of Elizabeth Coleman talk about her many accomplishments, including becoming the first African-American pilot.

McCully, Emily Arnold. *The Bobbin Girl*. Dial Books for Young Readers, 1996.

Judith, a young worker in a Lowell, Massachusetts, textile mill, uses her courage and her public-speaking skills to organize the first workers' strike at the mill.

Parks, Rosa, and Gregory J. Reed. *Dear Mrs. Parks: A Dialogue with Today's Youth*. Lee & Low Books, 1996.

A collection of correspondence between children and Rosa Parks.



# Home Link

Dear Family:

Our recent Open Circle lessons have focused on helping students to understand the situations in school that require the immediate intervention of a teacher or another responsible adult. We learned to identify **Double D behaviors**. These are behaviors that are **dangerous** (someone might get hurt) or **destructive** (something might get broken, damaged, or destroyed; or mean teasing or bullying). It is always important for a student to tell a teacher or other adult when they observe a Double D behavior in school. For example, Double D behaviors might include running across the street at recess to get a ball, climbing a tree on the playground, standing on a folding chair to reach a book in the classroom, throwing a baseball toward a window, writing in a textbook, being part of a group of kids picking on another child day after day at recess.

We also talked about some ways students can deal with situations themselves when someone is annoying them and it is not a Double D situation. For example, another student might cut into line or make noises while others are working. Two steps for dealing with **annoying behavior** are:

- Describe the behavior that is annoying you and explain why it bothers you.
- Say what you want the other person to do instead.

Students were assured that they can always come to an adult for help if they cannot deal with a situation on their own.

At home, try to identify behaviors or situations in terms of Double D's. Ask your child, "Is that a Double D behavior?" If it is, compliment him/her on telling an adult. If it is not a Double D behavior, help your child to follow the two steps listed above. You also might want to help your child identify responsible adults whom he/she could tell about a Double D behavior at places other than school and home.

Yours truly,

## LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Here are some books that relate to the topics we discussed in Open Circle. You might want to check out one or two at the library and read with your child:

Bunting, Eve. *Summer Wheels*. Voyager Books, 1996.

A kind neighbor, known as the "Bicycle Man," fixes bicycles and loans them to children in the community. When one boy takes advantage of the loan agreement, the other children want him to be punished.

Dakos, Kalli. "Peter the Pain." *Mrs. Cole on an Onion Roll*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1995.

One of several poems about the challenges of being an elementary school student.

Polacco, Patricia. *Thank You, Mr. Falker*. Philomel Books, 1998.

Trisha suffers when children make fun of her inability to read. When the teasing reaches the point of being destructive, Trisha's teacher intervenes.



# Home Link

Dear Family:

Dealing with **teasing** was the topic of a recent Open Circle lesson. We talked about what teasing is and the kind of teasing that goes on at school. We discussed how it feels to be teased and how you can tell whether teasing is okay with someone or is hurtful to them. Sometimes teasing can be a Double D (*dangerous or destructive*) behavior, such as when it involves hurtful ridicule or name-calling, when it happens over and over, or when people gang up on someone to tease. In these cases, students should ask an adult to intervene to help.

At home, have a conversation with your child about teasing. Tell him/her about times you have been teased. Was it okay with you, or did it make you feel badly? Ask your child if he/she has been teased. How did it make him/her feel? Ask if your child has ever heard teasing that was hurtful to someone. Discuss some ways to handle teasing. Encourage your child to be sensitive to the feelings of other children.

Yours truly,

## LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Here are some books that relate to the topics we discussed in Open Circle. You might want to check out one or two at the library and read with your child:

Mochizuki, Ken. *Baseball Saved Us*. Lee & Low Books, 1995.

“Shorty” is the object of teasing because of his size and ethnicity.

Myers, Christopher. *Wings*. Scholastic Inc., 2000.

Only one person stands up for the “strange” boy when he is teased by others.

Polacco, Patricia. *Thank You, Mr. Falker*. Philomel Books, 1998.

Trisha’s classmates tease her because she is unable to read as well as other students her age.



# Home Link

Dear Family:

In Open Circle, we have been talking about what it means to be a bystander. A bystander is a person who observes a situation taking place. Students explored their own experiences of how it feels to be a bystander. They considered situations where they were having a problem and other students were bystanders. We talked about what bystanders can do to make a situation better or make it worse.

Share with your child your own experiences of being a bystander and how it felt. Ask your child whether she/he has ever been a bystander, what she/he did, and why. How did it feel? Talk with your child about when it might be easy to help someone who is having a problem. When might it be hard? What are some of the qualities bystanders need to have?

Yours truly,

## **LITERATURE CONNECTIONS**

Here is a book that relates to the topics we discussed in Open Circle. You might want to check it out at the library and read it with your child:

Moss, Peggy. *Say Something*. Tilbury House Publishers, 2004.

A student observes her classmates engaging in a variety of negative behaviors towards other students. She does not say anything until she becomes the target of teasing, and no one helps her. Then she realizes how important it is for a bystander to speak up, or take action to help the person who is the target.



# Home Link

Dear Family:

In a recent Open Circle Meeting, we talked about the issue of **bullying**. Together we talked about what bullying is and children learned that bullying is defined as: when one or more people repeatedly harm someone with words or actions. We also talked about how bullying is different than an argument or a fight, and explored some of the reasons why students may choose to bully and how it might feel to be bullied. We ended our conversation with a reminder that bullying is a Double D behavior and that if a child witnesses or is the target of a bullying incident, she/he needs to tell a responsible adult right away.

We also explored reasons why students think bystanders often don't help. Because bystanders can play such a critical role in diffusing a bullying situation, children brainstormed some ways that bystanders could safely intervene. In our discussion, I emphasized that stepping in can be difficult, but never should a student intervene in a situation where she/he is going to be put in danger or risk of physical harm.

At home, have a conversation with your child about bullying. Share your own experiences. Have you had any experiences yourself with being a target, a bully, or a bystander? How did it feel? What did you do? Did you ever go to an adult for help? What did she/he do? Talk with your child about whether she/he has had any experiences with bullying. Ask your child why they think bullying happens. Ask your child how she/he feels about going to an adult for help? How might it help? What might be hard about going to an adult for help?

Yours truly,

## LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Here are some books that relate to the topics we discussed in Open Circle. You might want to check out one or two at the library and read with your child:

Myers, Christopher. *Wings*. Scholastic, Inc., 2000.

Only one person stands up for the "strange" boy when he is teased by others.

Perez, L. King. *First Day in Grapes*. Lee & Low Books, 2002.

When Chico enters a new school, he worries that some students will make fun of him because he speaks a different language. With his mother's help, and the support

of his new teacher, Chico feels empowered to stand up for himself when certain schoolmates tease him repeatedly.

Golenbock, Peter. *Teammates*. Harcourt, Inc., 1990.

Pee Wee Reese, a member of the 1940's Brooklyn Dodgers, takes action to support his teammate, Jackie Robinson.



# Home Link

Dear Family:

In Open Circle recently, we talked about how to recognize **discrimination**. Discrimination occurs when we do not treat others fairly just because they belong to a particular group. In school, discrimination could include saying things that are disrespectful or mean, teasing or making jokes about a person, calling someone bad names, avoiding someone, leaving them out, ignoring them, refusing to help them, or hurting them physically — only because they belong to a particular group, look different, or speak differently. In our classroom, discrimination will not be tolerated. We are all part of the same classroom community. Everyone should be included and treated with respect.

At home, share with your child any discrimination that you or any of your family members or friends have experienced. How did it make you feel? Ask your child if he/she has ever been discriminated against. Has he/she observed other people discriminating against someone? Encourage your child to never discriminate against other people and to speak up to stop discrimination when it occurs.

Yours truly,

## LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Here are some books that relate to the topics we discussed in Open Circle. You might want to check out one or two at the library and read with your child:

Mochizuki, Ken. *Baseball Saved Us*. Lee & Low Books, 1995.

A Japanese-American family is sent to an internment camp during World War II, returns home, and finds a way to overcome their neighbors' prejudice.

Wiles, Deborah. *Freedom Summer*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2001.

Even after the passage of the Civil Rights bill, prejudice and fear prevent two young boys from enjoying a swim in the town pool. Rather than implementing the new laws of integration, as ordered by the courts, the town leaders direct workers to fill in the pool with concrete.



# Home Link

Dear Family:

In a recent Open Circle, we talked about **understanding feelings**. Some feelings are comfortable, such as calm or happy. Other feelings can be uncomfortable, such as anger, fear, or sadness. We learned that all feelings are okay, but not all behavior generated by feelings is okay. Sometimes we might want to act on our feelings, but we need to think about whether or not it's okay to do what we feel like doing. It's important to know how to manage our feelings.

At home, talk to your child about some ways he/she can deal with feeling angry, frustrated, or upset. Share with your child some times when you felt angry or upset. What did you do to manage your feelings? What else could you have done? Encourage your child to always think ahead before acting on feelings and determine whether or not his/her actions will be helpful or harmful to himself/herself or others.

**Body language** was the topic of another recent Open Circle lesson. Body language is a way of sending messages using our faces, bodies, or hands instead of using words. People's facial expressions, gestures, and other body language provide clues about how that person is feeling. We practiced using and understanding body language. Noticing other people's body language can help us to understand how people are feeling even if they are not telling us with words.

Encourage your child to be aware of the body language of friends, parents, and teachers so that he/she can better understand how they are feeling.

Yours truly,

## LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Here are some books that relate to the topics we discussed in Open Circle. You might want to check out one or two at the library and read with your child:

Frame, Jeron Ashford. *Yesterday I Had the Blues*. Tricycle Press, 2003.

Each member of a family has a different feeling, and the author describes the characters' moods using colors. Brother has the "blues," father has the "grays," and mother has the "reds."

George, Kristine O'Connell. *Swimming Upstream: Middle School Poems*. Clarion, 2002.

A collection of poems describe a range of feelings associated with being a middle school student.

Polacco, Patricia. *Thank You, Mr. Falker*. Philomel Books, 1998.

Children tease Trisha because she has trouble learning to read. Trisha's body language reveals how she feels about being teased.



# Home Link

Dear Family:

In a recent Open Circle we talked about **expressing anger appropriately**. Feeling angry is something that happens to everyone. Sometimes it can be a very strong feeling and difficult to control. There is nothing wrong with feeling angry, but doing something inappropriate or hurtful with anger is not okay. The first step in dealing with anger is to know when you are angry and why. We discussed several ways to handle anger, such as using words to express your feelings directly to the person who made you angry, telling a friend that you're angry, or exercising or relaxing to get rid of the feeling. Learning what to do with angry feelings changes as we grow up. The older people get, the more they are expected to be in control of their angry feelings and to express them in ways that are appropriate. Anger can be positive by helping us to focus on a problem and by creating energy to work against an injustice or something that we feel is wrong.

At home, have a conversation with your child about handling angry feelings. Share with him/her some situations that have made you angry. What do you do to express your own angry feelings? Ask your child to share with you some things that make him/her angry. What works best for him/her to get in control of anger? Talk about ways to express anger that are not appropriate and ways that are appropriate. Encourage your child to always stop and think before acting on angry feelings and to use words rather than action.

Yours truly,

## LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

You might want to check out the following literature from the library to read with your child:

Coy, John. *Strong to the Hoop*. Lee & Low Books, 1999.

Nate and his younger brother, James, join a playground basketball game. James tries to stay calm as Marcus, whose "muscles push out of his shirt," taunts James and bumps him around.



# Home Link

Dear Family:

In Open Circle this week, we began a multi-lesson unit on **problem solving**. In the coming weeks, we will be learning to use a six-step process for solving problems that occur during the school day. We began by talking about what a problem is. A **problem** is any situation that causes someone to be upset or confused. We made a list of problems that students in our grade might have, such as problems on the way to school, on the playground, in the cafeteria, with friends, with peer pressure, with rules, with schoolwork, or with students in other grades.

The six problem-solving steps are:

1. Calm down.
2. Identify the problem.
3. Decide on a positive goal.
4. Think of several solutions.
5. Evaluate the solutions.
6. Make a plan and try it.

In the following weeks, we will practice each of the six specific steps in Open Circle. Then we will put them all together and use them to work on problems that come up in class.

The problem-solving steps are printed on the next page. Please post them on your refrigerator or someplace in your home where you can see them often as a reminder to both you and your child to use the problem-solving process to solve problems that come up outside of school. Problem solving is an important skill that your child can use throughout life, not only in school but also later on in the workplace and the community.

Yours truly,

# Problem-Solving Steps

1. Calm down.
2. Identify the problem.
3. Decide on a positive goal.
4. Think of several solutions.
5. Evaluate the solutions.
6. Make a plan and try it.

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# Home Link

Dear Family:

In Open Circle, we are continuing to learn and practice the six problem-solving steps: Calm down. Identify the problem. Decide on a positive goal. Think of several solutions. Evaluate the solutions. Make a plan and try it.

Recently, we talked about the first step: **Calm down**. Before we can begin to solve a problem, we need to get calm. We discussed several ways of calming down, such as doing some calm breathing, going to another place, or counting to 10.

We also worked on the second problem-solving step: **Identify the problem**. It's important to be clear about exactly what the problem is before anyone begins to solve it. It's also important to identify to yourself and others how you feel about the problem. One way to do this is to say, "I feel \_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_." For example, "I feel angry because someone cut in front of me in line." Or, "I feel upset because my friend did not save me a seat in the cafeteria."

Included with this *Open Circle Home Link* and the next several *Home Links* is a list of books that deal with problem solving which were selected for your child's grade level. You might want to check out of the library a few of the books for your child to read or for you to read together. Have a discussion with your child about how the characters in the book solve their problems. Do they follow some of the problem-solving steps that we use in Open Circle? Have your child suggest other ways that the character might have solved the problem. Continue to use problem solving regularly at home.

Yours truly,

## LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Bunting, Eve. *A Day's Work*. Clarion Books, 1994.

A migrant worker and his grandson must unravel a problem that results from not telling the truth.

Bunting, Eve. *Summer Wheels*. Voyager Books, 1996.

A generous man repairs bicycles and then loans them out to children. When one boy breaks the rules of the loan agreement and angers the other bicycle users, the Bicycle Man must decide how best to teach the boy a lesson.

Cleary, Beverly. *Dear Mr. Henshaw*. Morrow Junior Books, 1983.

In letters to his favorite author, 10-year-old Leigh reveals his problems in coping with his parents' divorce, being new at the school, and other adjustment issues.

Coy, John. *Strong to the Hoop*. Lee & Low Books, 1999.

James tries to stay calm as Marcus bumps him around on the playground during a pickup basketball game.



# Home Link

Dear Family:

Our lessons in Open Circle continue to focus on each of the six steps of problem solving: Calm down. Identify the problem. Decide on a positive goal. Think of several solutions. Evaluate the solutions. Make a plan and try it.

Recently, we learned and practiced the third step of problem solving: **Decide on a positive goal**. This means that we decide what the best ending would be, what we would like to see happen, or how we would like the problem to end up. In order to be positive, the goal must be safe and fair. We discovered that in problem solving, there might be more than one goal for the solution and that different people can have different goals for the same problem.

In another Open Circle lesson, we practiced the fourth step of problem solving: **Think of several solutions**. Thinking of many ideas is called **brainstorming**, and there are two rules for brainstorming at school:

- Think of many ideas.
- Don't judge or criticize ideas.

A strong negative reaction could stop people from generating ideas. Similarly, a strong positive reaction could halt the brainstorming too. Brainstorming is useful because one person's idea often stimulates another person to consider and think of new ideas. We also learned a technique called **piggybacking**, which is taking someone's idea and expanding it.

At home, use the problem-solving steps with your child as often as you can. Check out of the library a few more of the books listed here on problem solving and give them to your child to read or read them with your child. Have a discussion with your child about how the characters are problem solving. Are they deciding on a positive goal and thinking of many solutions?

Yours truly,

## LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Davol, Marguerite W. *The Paper Dragon*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 1997.

A brave artist tries to rid the town of a fearsome dragon. His solution to the problem involves combining artistic abilities and wisdom.

Estes, Eleanor. *The Hundred Dresses*. Harcourt, Inc., 1974.

When Wanda falsely claims that she has 100 dresses at home, the most popular girl in school teases her.

McCully, Emily Arnold. *Mirette on the High Wire*. Puffin Books, 1997.

Mirette helps a circus performer solve a problem related to his reluctance to walk the tightrope due to his lack of self-confidence.



# Home Link

Dear Family:

In Open Circle, we are continuing to work on each of the six steps of problem solving: Calm down. Identify the problem. Decide on a positive goal. Think of several solutions. Evaluate the solutions. Make a plan and try it.

In the past few Open Circles, our lessons have focused on the last two steps. After we think of many possible solutions to a problem, it's important to **evaluate the solutions**. We must ask about each possible solution, "What would happen if I tried this? What would the consequences be? Would this solution be most likely to get me to a positive goal?" We learned that there can be both positive and negative consequences to just about anything we decide to try.

We also worked on the last step of problem solving: **Make a plan and try it**. After choosing a solution most likely to get us to the best ending, we should make a plan by deciding the steps it will take to implement our solution. We should also think about the best time to try the plan, what we need to do to be ready, what words we will use, and what we want our body language to communicate. Then it's time to try it. If the solution doesn't work, we should choose another solution, make a plan, and try it. In problem solving, it's important not to give up and to learn from our experiences.

At home, continue to use the six problem-solving steps as often as possible. Use them to solve your own everyday problems as well as problems that involve your child. Go to the library and check out some of the following books that relate to problem solving. When your child has read one of the books or when you have read one together, have a discussion about the steps the characters use or could have used to solve their problems. Did they evaluate many possible solutions? Did they solve their problem the first time they tried? What consequences did their solution have?

Yours truly,

## LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Schur, Maxine Rose. *The Peddler's Gift*. Dial Books for Young Readers, 1999.

A young boy feels guilty about stealing a dreidel from a peddler and doesn't know how to return the dreidel without getting into more trouble.

Smothers, Ethel Footman. *The Hard-Times Jar*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.

Emma faces multiple problems caused by her difficulty in adjusting to a new school.

Soto, Gary. *Too Many Tamales*. Puffin Books, 1996.

Maria secretly puts on her mother's ring and then loses it while she makes tamales for a traditional holiday meal. What will she tell her mother? How will she find the ring?

Wiles, Deborah. *Freedom Summer*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2001.

When townspeople act out of fear and prejudice, they ruin a boy's chance to enjoy the simple pleasure of swimming in the town pool.



# Home Link

Dear Family:

In Open Circle, we concluded our unit on the six steps of problem solving: Calm down. Identify the problem. Decide on a positive goal. Think of several solutions. Evaluate the solutions. Make a plan and try it.

One of our final two lessons on problem solving was used to introduce two tools designed to help students practice the problem-solving steps. The first tool is a problem worksheet that guides students through the problem-solving steps. We will use this tool as a class, in small groups, or individually. The second tool is a problem box that I have placed in the classroom. As problems arise, students can use problem cards to record problems and place them in the box. I will be reviewing the problem cards and selecting some of the topics for discussion during Open Circle Meetings.

In our last lesson on problem solving, we talked about **overcoming obstacles**. An obstacle is something that is in the way of you getting what you want or need or something that might keep you from reaching a goal. Sometimes we might have a good solution to a problem but encounter an obstacle when we try our plan to solve the problem. It's important to figure out how to get around obstacles rather than quitting or giving up.

At home, try to use the six-step problem-solving process with your child often so that it becomes automatic and a habit. Be a role model for your child by using the steps to solve problems you encounter at home, at work, or in the neighborhood. Compliment your child whenever he/she uses the six steps to solve problems.

Yours truly,

## LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Walsh, Jill Paton. *Gaffer Samson's Luck*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984.

James has to cope with spiteful classmates whose social strata can't be crossed.

Woodson, Jacqueline. *The Other Side*. G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2001.

A friendship develops between two girls despite fear and prejudice among the adults who make the rules and build the fences.

Yashima, Taro. *Crow Boy*. Puffin Books, 1974.

Students tease Chibi at school because he is so different from other children.  
A sensitive new teacher helps Chibi regain some dignity and self-respect.



# Home Link

Dear Family:

In our final Open Circle Meeting of the year, we took time to reflect on this school year and our experiences in Open Circle. We shared some things we've learned this year, some things we value about our friends, some ways we have changed, people who have helped us, and things we'll always remember about this school year. We also talked about the skills we have learned in Open Circle and how they have helped us in the classroom, at recess, and in other places.

Ask your child what he/she has liked best about coming together in Open Circle this year. Ask what he/she has learned in Open Circle that has helped the most. During the summer and beyond, continue to use the vocabulary and skills your child has learned in Open Circle. Keep the problem-solving steps close by and continue to practice them with your student. Thank you for the support you have given to Open Circle this year by reinforcing at home what your child has learned at school.

Yours truly,