

Community Gathering (Grades 6-8)

The Community Gathering time is an opportunity to build authentic relationships and a sense of community that students need to feel safe and supported in their schools.

Given the short amount of time that we have with our students in middle school, we must be even more intentional in building a strong learning community. Community gatherings will enhance students’ ability to be reflective, self-managed, and empathetic problem-solvers/

Sample Community Gathering lesson plans have been included. Please consider these as resources on your SEL journey.

PACKET CONTENTS

**The Community Gathering Structure**

*This section briefly details the format and components of Community Gatherings.*

**Community Gathering Sample Lesson Plans**

*These lesson plans are designed to build a strong classroom community. They incorporate the themes of Power Up and are designed to be taught sequentially.*

The Community Gathering Structure

WHY THE CONSISTENT STRUCTURE?

The structure is essential to building community and implementing curriculum that explicitly teaches social and emotional skills. Through this process students can learn to become reflective individuals, manage emotions, build relationships, resolve conflict, feel empathy, and make responsible decisions.

Research shows that proper implementation of SEL curriculum in a structured format will lead to short-term and long-term gains, such as:

Improved academic test scores

Improved school attendance

Improved perception of self and others

Decrease in negative classroom behaviors

Decrease in high risk behaviors

COMMUNITY GATHERING STRUCTURE: *CIRCLE OF POWER AND RESPECT (CPR)*

Daily News Before the Meeting

Circling Up

Greeting

Sharing

Activity

Reflection on Daily News

DAILY NEWS BEFORE THE MEETING

Students encounter the daily news as they enter the room. They are to read the news and write a response to the prompt at the front of the room before the meeting begins. *Their responses to the Daily News will be shared at the end of the meeting.*

The Daily News sets a friendly tone and provides information about the day

It stimulates interest and thinking about the meeting topic

For success, interacting with the Daily News must be modeled, practiced, and reinforced

Responding to and interacting with the Daily News must happen every day

Consistency breeds habit, structure feels safe

CIRCLING UP

The meeting begins with “circling up.” Students should sit in a circle, preferably in chairs without desks in front of them. This allows everyone to be included and promotes listening and participation. The teacher should also have a place in the circle sitting with students.

If possible, have the circle already created before class begins

If students will be moving chairs, model and practice in the beginning of the year with forming a circle safely

Begin with assigned seats to prevent cliques and exclusivity

Announce your intention and the objective of the circle

GREETING

Daily greetings give students practice with social skills in friendly formats while supporting multiple SEL core competencies. Greetings in a circle enhance a sense of community. Every student is greeted every day - this practice builds inclusivity and safety.

SHARING

Sharing is a time for students to make connections through sharing personal stories. Students may start by feeling awkward or afraid, but as the routine is set, and the sense of community is built, students will feel safe enough to share. One student shares and calls on two other students to ask follow-up questions. Purpose:

To build relationships

Create connections between home and school

Develop the skills of conversation, inquiry and public speaking

Help students see the world from multiple points of view and develop empathy

ACTIVITY

Everyone loves to, *needs to*, play. By imbedding appropriate, structured opportunities to have fun in the school day, we provide opportunities that are enjoyable and educational. After the game-playing activity, students can learn valuable life skills by processing the experience. Purpose:

To build relationships

Develop academic and social skills

To have fun!

REFLECTION ON DAILY NEWS

Before the meeting began, the students read and responded to the Daily News independently. Now the Daily News is read aloud. Afterwards, the group discusses the responses (analyzes trends, graphs responses, discuss the ethical issues raised or how to handle a difficult situation). Purpose:

Inform the students about the day

Practice social and emotional skills

Shows respect for students’ responses and makes Daily News meaningful

***SOURCES:***

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. *The Advisory Book: Building a Community of Learners Grades 5-9*, Crawford (2012); *Responsive Classrooms* (2015) *Origins Developmental Design* (2015), Atlanta Public Schools (2018).

MIDDLE SCHOOL WEEK 1, DAY 1

OBJECTIVES:

Model and practice moving in and out of the circle

Establish a non-verbal signal for getting students’ attention

SETTING UP THE MEETING:

Establish an auditory signal for students coming into a circle (chimes, bell, triangle or dimming lights are effective strategies)

Introduce the purpose and structure of the Community Gathering

Introduce the Community Gathering: The teacher will explain to students that each day will begin with a meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to get to know one another, share ideas, and have fun.

Use *interactive modeling* to show students how to *safely and efficiently* get into a circle.

The teacher models desired student behavior as students observe (teachers stands, walks to the circle area, and sits quietly).

The teacher asks students to describe what they noticed about the modeling until the students have described in detail how the teacher came to the circle.

Then the students practice the procedure for coming to the circle while the teacher observes.

The teacher provides feedback in a supportive and positive tone, acknowledging what was done well (not naming specific students, but instead naming specific actions), and asking for suggestions from the class as to how they could do it even better tomorrow.

MATERIALS:

Have a poster of Community Gathering structure (daily news, greeting, share, activity) for students to refer to.

Optional: Community Gathering journal for each student (composition books or spiraled notebook)

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| MIDDLE SCHOOL WEEK 1, DAY 1 | |
| DAILY NEWS: | Welcome Super Students!  I’m so glad you’re here. Today we start our school-year adventure together. We will begin our day with a Community Gathering where we will learn our classmates’ names and play a fun game. By what name do you like to be called (write it below)? |
| GREETING: | **Around-the-circle introduction and group welcome:** Teacher: “My name is ” Class: “Good morning, .” The greeting continues around the circle as each student says their name.  *\*Note: The teacher should refer to the structure poster and name and review each part of the structure during each component.* |
| SHARE: | **Popcorn Share:** Tell students you will be asking them to share about different subjects. Students can voluntarily "pop" out answers or comments (share does not move around circle and no one is required to share). Each student's response is brief. Possible topics:  Interests/hobbies  Highlight from the end of the school year  Highlight from the summer  *\*Note: This share can be repeated throughout the week with different topics as students get to know each other.* |
| ACTIVITY | **Ball Toss Game:**  *Materials: A small soft ball or stuffed animal that can be tossed and caught easily.*  *Plan for Success: Model and practice a safe throw before playing the game. The objective is to go quickly and not have students pause as they search. Make sure students clearly say the name before tossing the ball.*  One person starts by tossing the ball to someone after saying their name. The ball continues to get |

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|  | tossed around the circle, each time naming the student to whom it is tossed. During the initial toss, if a student has received the ball, they must put their hands behind their back to help signal who is remaining so everyone can receive the ball. The students must remember who they tossed the ball to and who they received it from. After everyone has been called, the first round is complete. Now the challenge is to continue the passing, duplicating the pattern of the first round. You can add more balls and have several going at one time if the students are up for it.  After closing the game, reflect with students: What did we like about having a Community Gathering? How did it feel to greet your classmates and play a game? What was your favorite part of the Community Gathering? Why? |

MIDDLE SCHOOL WEEK 1, DAY 2

OBJECTIVES:

Establish hopes and goals for the Community Gathering

Create shared agreements for the Community Gathering (This activity may take 2 days)

NOTE: Remember to refer back to the structure poster before and after each component of the Community Gathering. This will help students learn and remember the structure quickly. Prompt the students’ thinking - Ask: What component comes next? What components of the Community Gathering have we done already?

MATERIALS:

Chart paper or active board with a Y chart

Chart paper to post the finalized Community Gathering Essential Agreements

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| MIDDLE SCHOOL WEEK 1, DAY 2 | |
| DAILY NEWS: | Good morning friends! Yesterday we had our first Community Gathering. What does community mean to you? Draw a picture of or write about the perfect classroom community. What would it feel like, sound like and look like?  looks  feels sounds |
| GREETING: | **Think-Pair-Share:**  Ask students to quietly think of one thing that makes them special. For younger students, you may have to offer suggestions. Give them think time and ask them to put their hand on the top of their heads when they are ready to share. Tell students to turn and face the person sitting next to them. Ask them to introduce themselves to their partner by name and share what makes them special.  For example, “Hi Lindsay! My name is Clara. What makes me special is I have three older sisters.” “Hi Clara! My name is Lindsay. What makes me special is I’m from California.”  After students have paired and shared, ask for a few individuals to share with the whole group what makes their partner special. |
| SHARE: | *There are two options for today’s share to pick from. The second requires the book, “It’s Okay To Be Different,” by Todd Parr.*  **Option 1: Around-the-circle Share:** |

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| ACTIVITY: | Tell students that they just shared something that makes them unique, and now they will have the chance to learn more about their classmates favorite things. They each will have a turn to share. Remind students to listen carefully because they’ll be playing “Who Remembers?” after everyone has shared, which will challenge them to remember everything their classmates have shared. Give think time. Tell students to give a thumbs-up when ready. Be the first sharer. Use a complete sentence and keep your comments brief. Continue around the circle. After everyone has shared, play “Who Remembers?” Ask recall questions such as: “Who remembers whose favorite food was pizza?”  Possible topics: Favorite food, color, game, hobby  *Closing Activity:* Ask students - What can we do as a classroom community to make sure that even though we’re all different, we all feel included? |
| **Setting Essential Agreements:** Ask a few students to share their definition of community. Discuss that a community is a group of people who are different and unique in their own way but work together because they share common goals, interests, hopes, and attitudes.  Ask students what communities they might already be a part of (church, sports, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts school).  Introduce the idea as classroom as a community. Discuss how the Community Gatherings are going to help build this community. Have students think about what they need the classroom community to look like, feel like and sound like to feel safe, respected, and listened to.  Use the Y chart to brainstorm as a whole group what the community should look, feel, and sound. Fill it out as they share**.**  Next, have students discuss what 4-5 classroom agreements the classroom community needs to make in order for this happen. This can be done in whole group or in small groups. If students work in small groups, each group should share and then compile the list as a whole class into one list with 4-5 agreements. Post them in the classroom to refer back.  *Note: The process of setting Essential Agreements could take 2 days to complete. The agreements the class sets should be used in place of classroom rules. Additionally, Essential Agreements should be reviewed whenever a new student joins the class during the summer program, so they have a voice in the classroom rules as well.* |

MIDDLE WEEK 1, DAY 3

OBJECTIVES:

Review Community Gathering structure

Review auditory or nonverbal signal for attention to come to Community Gathering

Review the Essential Agreements

Find commonalities

NOTE: Explain to students that you will use an auditory or nonverbal signal to get students to come to the circle, demonstrating what the signal is. Now have students practice. Notice the positive qualities students exhibit in coming to the circle (safely and efficiently). If any students do not respond to the auditory signal, quietly go to them and ask privately if they can remember what the signal means. Do they remember what to do? Ask the student to show the teacher how they can safely and efficiently go to the circle. Think about assigning seats in the circle and switching the assignments throughout the year. Students should have an opportunity to mingle with everyone in the class during the Community Gathering.

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| MIDDLE SCHOOL WEEK 1, DAY 3 | |
| DAILY NEWS: | Greetings Students,  Today we are going to find out what we have in common with our other community members. Think of your favorite . What do you like about it? (Students can draw or write about it until you call them to the meeting). |
| GREETING: | **Ball Toss Greeting:**  *Materials: A small soft ball or stuffed animal that can be tossed and caught easily.*  *Plan for Success: Model and practice a safe throw before playing the game. The objective is to go quickly and not have students pause as they search. Make sure students clearly say the name before tossing the ball.*  One person starts by tossing the ball to someone after saying their name. The ball continues to get tossed around the circle, each time naming the student to whom it is tossed. During the initial toss, if a student has received the ball, they must put their hands behind their back to help signal who is remaining so everyone can receive the ball. The students must remember who they tossed the ball to and who they received it from. After everyone has been called, the first round is complete. Now the challenge is to continue the passing, duplicating the pattern of the first round. You can add more balls and have several going at one time if the students are up for it. |
| SHARE: | **Around-the-circle Share:** Tell students you are going to give them a topic and thirty seconds of think time. Ask them: What is one thing you’ve loved so far about Power Up! What is one thing you are looking forward to during our time together this summer? Ask them to put their hands on their heads when they are ready to share. Ask around five people to share with the rest of the group. |
| ACTIVITY: | **The Cold Wind Blows:** Move chairs into a circle. The number of chairs in the circle should be one less than the number of players. One player stands in the Middle School of the circle and says, "When the cold wind blows, it blows for anyone who ," filling in the blank with a category such as, “has a dog.” Everyone who fits that category, including the person in the middle, quickly finds a new place to sit. The one player who doesn't find a seat now stands in the center of the circle and continues the game by saying, "When the cold wind blows, it blows for anyone who ," naming a new category. The activity continues for several rounds. You can limit categories to ones that relate to interests, hobbies, and family, or to a curriculum topic rather than allowing players to focus only on clothing or appearance.  This lively activity is a great way for children to learn about each other and what they have in common with classmates. You could brainstorm a list of categories before beginning the activity.  *Plan for Success:* Before beginning game, model and practice what safe movement across the circle during the game looks like.  *Suggested Reflection Questions After Game:*  Who can name 3 people they have something in common with? What did you have in common?  If we kept playing the game would we eventually have something in common with everyone in the room? Why is it important to look for things that you might have in common with others?  Who can name all the parts of the morning meeting? How did we do in following our Essential Agreements so far this week? What could we have done better? |

MIDDLE SCHOOL WEEK 1, DAY 4

OBJECTIVES:

Review Community Essential Agreements

NOTE: Anticipate when students will need to remember the routine or signals you have developed. Use reinforcing language, notice specific positive behaviors and privately conference with students who need support by asking what they feel that they need to do to be more successful with remembering the expectations.

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| MIDDLE SCHOOL WEEK 1, DAY 4 | |
| DAILY NEWS: | Greeting Community Members!  We’ve almost completed our first week of school! Today, we are going to review how we’re unique and how we have agreed to work together. Think of an adjective (describing word) that starts with the first letter of your name and describes you. For example, Awesome Annie! |
| GREETING: | **Adjective Greeting:**  To start the greeting, each student chooses an adjective that begins with the same sound as his/her first name and then introduces him/herself to the group by saying, “Hello, my name is (adjective) (first name).” For example, “Hello, my name is Jazzy Janet!”  *Note: To differentiate for students’ learning levels, you may want to share a list of*  *adjectives, keeping in mind the first letters of your students’ names. Guide students toward positive words.* |
| SHARE: | Review the Essential Agreements with students*.* Ask students to give a thumbs up for easy or thumbs down for difficult for whether that agreement has been easy or difficult, pausing after each to check their responses. Choose the one that has been the most  difficult for students and tell them in today’s activity, they will brainstorm suggestions on what the class can do to work on this Essential Agreement. |
| ACTIVITY: | **Turn and Talk:**  Tell students to turn to their elbow partner. Ask the partner with the longer hair to raise their hand. Tell the students that the partner with the longer hair will talk first, and their partner will listen. They will then switch roles. Tell the partners to take a moment to think about what makes following that agreement so hard. Now tell the partner with longer hair to share, setting a timer for thirty seconds.  Now switch roles. After each partner has shared, tell them they will work together to come up with ideas for making following the Essential Agreement less challenging. Allow them to discuss ideas together for one minute.  As a whole group, have partners share out ideas and pick the best 1-2 strategies as a class.  *Follow Through: Remember, consistency is the key to classroom management. Make sure to routinely reference the Essential Agreements and strategies they picked to work better as a team.* |

MIDDLE SCHOOL WEEK 1, DAY 5

OBJECTIVES:

Review classroom space

Recognize successes and restore relationships

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| MIDDLE SCHOOL WEEK 1, DAY 5 | |
| DAILY NEWS: | Happy Friday students! We’ve made it through our first week together. Every Friday, we will close the week by recognizing our classmates who have done great things, and apologize to each other for any hurtful actions or words. Think of something great you saw a classmate do or say this week. Is there anything you feel sorry about? |
| GREETING: | **Electricity Greeting:**  Everyone holds hands in a circle. The first player passes a squeeze to his neighbor. The neighbor then passes the squeeze to her neighbor. The squeeze continues around the circle until everyone has been greeted. The goal is to make the squeeze go quickly around the circle.  *Plan for Success: Before beginning, discuss what a squeeze should feel like. An alternative might be to pass a high five, handshake or fist bump.* |
| SHARE: | **Shout Outs and Apologies:**  Give students an opportunity to recognize another student who has followed the Essential Agreements well this week or helped them in some way. Allow students to offer shout outs to these students randomly.  After shout outs are completed, review with students what an apology is. Discuss that sometimes, we make bad choices but it doesn’t make us bad people. Saying “I’m sorry” to someone who may have been hurt by our actions or words can help both people feel better. Ask students if anyone would like to apologize to one of their classmates?  Example: “Jazmine, I’m sorry I stepped on your foot in line.” “Thanks, Jeremy, I accepted your apology.” |
| ACTIVITY: | **Hot and Cold:**  Before you begin the game, tell students that they have learned a lot about their new classroom this week. Today, they will play a game involving finding things in these newly discovered space.  Select an object to hide. Choose one student to be the “seeker” and send her out of the room. Hide the object in a place that is difficult enough to provide a challenge but not so difficult that the search becomes frustrating. The group can help you choose a good hiding place. Invite the seeker back into the room. The seeker begins looking for the object and the group guides the church by saying “Hot!” whenever the seeker gets close to the object and “Cold!” whenever the seeker moves away.  **Closing Activity:**  As a closing of your Community Gathering, ask students to whisper a wish into his or her hand. Once everyone has whispered, count to three and release them together. This is a fun way to finish the week. |