

Opening, closing and taking care

Use warm-up activities and check-ins to begin sessions with children and closing activities and circles to end them. This will help you create a nurturing, safe space for children and strengthen relationships between the children and adults. Although you can choose to change these activities from session to session, repetition can also create a sense of continuity and safety.

How are you feeling? Warm up activity

Try putting together a few images displaying different emotions. They can be funny (nine cats with funny expressions) or seasonal (spring bunnies or winter snowmen) or things like rainbows, clouds or sunshine. Invite everyone in turn to choose the image they relate to most and tell the group why they feel like that on that day.

This is a gentle way to encourage children to share how they are feeling and why. They might mention if anything has happened since you last saw them to give them these feelings.

If you are meeting the children in person, you can use printed images on cards.

Other warm-up and get-to-know-you activities

- **The question game** – In a circle one person throws a ball to another and simply asks a question when they catch it! (What's your favourite colour? What did you have for breakfast? What are your hopes for...?) When they have answered, they throw the ball to another person, ask a question and so on.
- **Find someone who** – Throw out a challenge: Find someone who has the same colour of socks as you... who has the same type of pet as you... who was born in the same month... Everyone moves around the room to find 'the person who...'
- **Singing and clapping games** – There are many games online or you could ask the group to suggest their favourites and teach the others.

Closing circles

Remember to set aside some time so that sessions with children feel that they have come to a safe and positive conclusion. Here are a few suggestions of closing activities.

- **Lead a shake out** – Shake out all the tension from your arms, legs, fingers and toes. Make it fun by doing each limb to a count together of 5, then 4, then 3, then 2, then 1.

- **Share appreciation** – In a circle, ask each child or adult in turn to say something they have appreciated about the person next to them in the session. For example, they were friendly, they listened. It's fine for the facilitator to prompt a little if needed or give an example: It made me pleased when... I was happy when... I liked that you...
- **Make like a dragon** – Crouch down to the ground and then rise up slowly in unison, stretching your arms out and up to the sky. As you rise start with a low growl and when you reach your full height roar!
- **Send some airmail** – Give everyone paper and coloured pencils, and ask them to draw, write or doodle a message about how they feel about the day. Show everyone how to fold the paper into an aeroplane and then fly the messages around the group.

Taking care

Sensitive or upsetting issues can arise during activities and discussions. Be prepared for how you will respond and look after everyone involved (including adults who might be upset hearing children's views or reminded of their own experiences).

Some things to consider in advance:

- Make sure all children know their participation is voluntary and they have the right not to participate if they so wish (and to change their mind).
- Think about how you will help everyone feel safe and supported enough to express their views and to let you know if there is something they aren't sure about.
- Check all children understand the questions or topic being explored.
- Let children know it's okay to express ideas in a general rather than personal way. For example, they might say 'children feel scared when this happens at home' rather than 'I feel scared when this happens in my house'.
- Think about options for responding to someone who is upset or needs support – they may wish to have some quiet time away from the session, but they might also feel safe to stay.
- Be conscious of the wishes of children involved and the group dynamics as they happen.
- Make sure there is a trusted adult available for anyone who needs support during or after a session.
- Ensure you know the appropriate child protection procedures including who you should report any concerns to about the safety of a child or children.
- If you are working with partner organisations, make sure everyone is clear about policies and procedures.
- Be clear about the limits of confidentiality and talk about this so that everyone properly understands.
- Ensure you have sufficient knowledge and understanding in child protection and safeguarding in your team.
- Make sure that adults involved have had the appropriate disclosure checks done.¹

If you have prepared for such possibilities by thinking ahead, you are much more likely to be able to support children should they require it.

¹ This is the process to check that there is nothing in a person's history which might deem them unsuitable for certain types of work, like working with children or protected adults. Disclosure Scotland is the Scottish Government Agency which processes all disclosure applications from individuals and employers.