

You Can... Use circle time to develop imaging skills

There are many reasons to encourage children to 'see pictures in their heads' in circle time, and they tend to be quiet, restful activities – ideal for developing a range of listening skills.

Thinking points

- Mental imaging is an established technique for stress-management, so highly relevant to the PSE function of circle time. Many children today lead fairly frantic, chaotic lives, so it can be helpful to them to have safe or calm places to retreat to if necessary in their heads. Once they have acquired the technique, some teachers might be able to integrate it into strategies for anger management or conflict resolution.
- These activities require a quiet environment, so if only part of the class is in the circle, you will have to find somewhere to take them away from noise – or use a time when the other half are perhaps playing outdoors.

Tips, ideas and activities

- Use circle time for asking children to use their imaginations. Make sure they are sitting comfortably on chairs, then ask them to close their eyes and imagine that it is the end of the school day: *You're feeling very tired and you just want to get home and have a nice rest. Think about a special place in your house where you'll go for a rest.* Give them a few moments to decide, then say: *In your head, imagine yourself going through the door into your house and going to your special place. Can you see it? Settle down in your special place and feel all cosy. Think about what you can see around you... what you can hear... what you can smell... what you can feel against your skin?* Finally, ask children to open their eyes and go round the circle, saying a couple of sentences about their special place. You model it first (*My special place at home is my sofa. It's red with big, soft cushions. I like to snuggle there with my dog.*)
- On another occasion, find a piece of restful music (such as Grieg's *Morning* or Saint-Saens' *The Swan*). Ask the children to think of lovely, quiet places they would like to visit when they

are angry or frightened – a beach, a woodland, a beautiful room – somewhere safe, calm and restful. Go round the circle asking for suggestions. Then ask children to think of a special place for themselves, close their eyes and, when the music starts, imagine themselves in their calm place. Play the music for as long as appropriate for their level of listening stamina – don't let them get restless. Try to create a magical, restful feeling. In another circle time, let the children revisit their calm place. You could then use the music on occasions when you want to calm the class, or create a quiet atmosphere.

- There are many visualisation activities you can adapt from *Circle Time Activities for Relaxation and Imagination* by Tony Pryce (Lucky Duck Publishing).

