

Strategies for Group Time

When planning group time consider the following questions:

- Do the children need to be sitting on the carpet?
- Do we always have to read a story?
- What are the children learning from this?
- Does it have to be a whole group activity? Would small groups be better?
- Is it fun/ interesting to the children?
- Is your group time an appropriate length of time for development levels of all children?
- Can children join in & play an active part?
- Do any of the children have language/ understanding difficulties or English as an Additional Language?
- Do any of the children have difficulty maintaining attention or keeping still?
- Do any of the children have physical/ motor difficulties which affect ability to sit?
- Do any of the children have social difficulties?
- Do any of the children have difficulty with eyesight/ hearing (undiagnosed)?
- Do the children know what you are expecting from them?
- Consider the stories you are reading- is the language appropriate? Is the story too long? What is the story about? Are the children interested? Do you need to read every word? Are the pictures interesting/clear?

REMEMBER TO HAVE FUN, IF YOU DON'T ENJOY IT THE CHILDREN PROBABLY WON'T EITHER.

Helpful Hints

- ❖ Use Visual aids i.e.
 - Prop boxes/ bags for songs/ stories/ discussions.
 - Clear pictures
 - Visual timetables & clear instructions.
 - Acting out stories physically.
 - Group time rules pictures i.e., listening ears.
- ❖ Supplement visual aids with clear verbal information and other communications methods i.e.
 - Simple sounds
 - Simple plain language
 - Signing
 - Symbols
- ❖ If using stories favour stories with repetitive refrains in which children can anticipate & join in, children enjoy and learn from repetition so do not be afraid to read stories lots of times.
- ❖ Make sure the children can see the adult leading, if using books/ pictures make sure the lights/ sun is not reflecting from the book or shining into the children's eyes.
- ❖ Use children's current interests and ideas when planning your session.
- ❖ Make sure there is enough space for all children to sit comfortably and to fidget a little without bumping into others.
- ❖ Gradually build up the length of time you expect the children to follow adult-led activities.
- ❖ Reduce distractions in the environment.

Visual Strategies for Group Time

Carpet square, mat, or cushion

Supports children to know where to sit and the space that they have rather than sitting in an abstract space. It also gives a good visual prompt when a child moves, and it is not time to reduce the use of additional language. When presenting a child with a space to sit it can be a good idea to offer a choice e.g., “red mat or green mat choose” supporting with clear over exaggerated gestures.

Song choosing board or basket: This can support children to make choices, understanding and attention. Create a choosing board of pictures of songs or a basket of objects symbolising the songs that could be sung, consider limiting choice if a selection causes difficulty or even a choice of two. If you wish to only sing a song once remove the item/ put it in the finished box when sang.

Group time routine to support children’s understanding of what is going to happen in group time and aid attention:

- Finished basket: Place items for group time in a box/ basket as you use them place them in a finished basket when they have all gone and group time has finished. E.g., Book, a few song props, bubbles to finish. (A box or bag can be used)
- Mini visual routine: a symbol identifying each element of group time as you finish each item remove that symbol, clearly identifying to the child what is going to happen and how much longer they need to sit.
- Use children’s photos to display the order they will have a turn at an activity/ choosing

Group time rules It is useful to identify some simple positively phrased visual rules for group times, that you can refer to before a session starts and then as the session goes on you can point to with simple verbal instructions if children need reminding.

Story Visuals It can be very useful to have visually appealing props to focus children’s attention on the story. Choose items that highlight key points of the story or that will enable the story to be acted out by a scene. Visuals can also include key pictures or a board that maps out the key points of a story. You can also use props/ visuals for songs.

Individual symbol prompts Some children may benefit from symbols/ pictures that can be discreetly shown to them to support them to understand the behavioural expectations e.g., sitting. A first Then board may be a useful supplemental strategy for group times for some individuals. Ideas for visual prompts to support group times



Useful References and Links

[National Autistic Society \(autism.org.uk\)](http://autism.org.uk)