

## Case Study – Riverbridge Primary School

**Project Title:**

Promoting expression of feelings and opinions

**Healthy Schools Theme:**

Emotional Health and Wellbeing

**School Context:**

Our school is based in the borough of Spelthorne and is set across two sites. Reception and Year 1 are together on one site and Years 2-6 are on another site. We are a large three form entry school and have over 630 pupils at our school. 30% of our children have English as an additional language, 16% of our pupils are eligible for free school meals.

**Identified Priority:**

We identified two main priorities for our project. We identified the need to introduce weekly circle times. We also identified the need for our pupils to be able to feel safe to express their feelings and opinions at school. We decided on these priorities as we saw a need for pupils to express their emotions and opinions as they currently didn't have many options to express themselves in different ways. Talking to their teacher or friends were the main options to express themselves but we knew that this did not suit all the children in the school. We needed to find some new ways to help children safely express their thoughts and opinions. We had been researching the use of circle times and were looking to introduce these into classrooms on a regular basis as another way to give children chances to express themselves. We wanted to create a culture at school that showed it was ok to share your thoughts and we wanted to encourage positive mental health. We thought about the benefits of positive mental health and decided that focussing on this will benefit their ability to make friendships, cope with challenges, learn in the classroom and create a positive experience at school which would hopefully transfer to their home lives too. Questionnaires carried out by the school council showed a low level of opportunities for children to safely express their feelings and emotions, with only 50% of them saying they felt safe to express their feelings and opinions.

**Outcomes:**

For weekly circle time sessions to take place across the school.

For staff to feel confident in delivering circle time sessions.

For an increased number of children reporting that they feel safe to express their feelings and opinions.

For an increased number of children reporting that they are becoming more confident in expressing and managing their feelings and opinions.

For a bank of circle time plans and resources to be available for each year group.

## **Activities / Interventions:**

### **For weekly circle time sessions to take place across the school.**

For this to happen we needed to make sure that all staff understood what circle time was and how we deliver an effective circle time session. A staff meeting was arranged which launched the idea of weekly circle times and the structure of a circle time. Information was shared with the teaching staff and resources were also shared. Circle time plans were shared and an email was sent with further information on further planning, resources and ideas. Circle time was also discussed during school council meetings to ask the children if they knew what circle time was, what it was for, and when it happened in their classes. This questionnaire was carried out at the beginning of the project and at the end of the project.

### **For staff to feel confident in delivering circle time sessions.**

This linked to the previous outcome and so the activities were similar to the previous activities. Staff meetings were held to ensure the teachers knew what was involved in a circle time. During a teach meet I delivered a session on how puppets can be used during circle times to help engage the children and get them to open up to something like a puppet. Planning examples were shared and a circle time book by Jenny Mosley was shared with the staff for them to use as a resource if they needed any ideas or further clarification.

### **For an increased number of children reporting that they feel safe to express their feelings and opinions.**

During school council sessions we carried out a questionnaire asking the children how they can express their feelings and opinions at school, whether they felt confident and safe to share their feelings and thoughts in school, who could they share their thoughts with at school and what could we do to help them feel safe to share their feelings and opinions. We also carried this questionnaire to the rest of the children via the class councils ran by the school council members in their classes. From the questionnaire and discussions with the class councils and school council, we found that children would like a way to share their feelings in a non-verbal way that was private as well as a chance to share their feelings with their peers in a way such as circle time.

### **For an increased number of children reporting that they are becoming more confident in expressing and managing their feelings and opinions.**

A questionnaire was organised to find the children's' opinions on how confident they were in expressing and managing their feelings and opinions. School councillors sharing discussions with their class councils gave all children a voice which was recorded in school council books and shared every fortnight during school council sessions. Circle times being introduced into classes also gave the children regular chances to express their feelings and opinions. The worry box was another way for children to express their feelings in a more private way. Assemblies were organised with themes around managing feelings and behaviours. PSHE topics were planned and outlined for the whole school and ensured opportunities for lessons around expressing and managing feelings and opinions.

### **For a bank of circle time plans and resources to be available for each year group.**

Lesson plans to be saved on the staff share area so they can be accessed by all the teachers. A collection of resources was shared with the school and teachers were made aware of where they can borrow different resources from such as puppets for the circle times. Reading material was also shared and staff were made aware of different reading materials they can access relating to their year groups.

## **Impact:**

### **For weekly circle time sessions to take place across the school.**

Circle times took place weekly after the introduction of them. Planning showed that circle times were happening in classes and children were being given the opportunity to join in regular class discussions. The questionnaire that was carried out by the school council showed that 60% of children knew what circle time was but only 30% of classes used circle time regularly. By the end of the case study 100% of classes used

circle time regularly and knew what circle time was. Teachers reported that they were using it as a tool to help solve other issues such as playground and friendship issues outside of any PSHE lessons.

**For staff to feel confident in delivering circle time sessions.**

After a half term of introducing circle times and sharing ideas, planning and resources all the teachers were delivering circle times in their classes. Teachers were encouraged to contact me if they needed any further support with delivering circle time sessions. After the staff training I had no staff contact me for any further support with delivering circle time sessions. I did share lots of resources for circle time which helped the staff in delivering the circle time sessions. These resources ranged from puppets, circle time planning to visual prompts. Staff reported that they enjoyed the circle time sessions as it allowed for the children to talk in a controlled, respectful and safe environment.

**For an increased number of children reporting that they feel safe to express their feelings and opinions.**

Children reported that they all had a worry box in their classroom. The children could all talk about what a worry box is for and what happens if you put something in the box. Children reported that they liked the worry box as it was a way to express their feelings and opinions in a private way so their peers did not hear or see what they wanted to discuss. The school council shared the use of a worry box to their classes and explained that the teacher would check the box and find an appropriate time to talk to anyone who had put something in the box. As well as the worry box, the circle times provided another way for children to express their feelings and opinions. 100% of children in the school council in July were able to say ways in school to express their feelings and opinions compared to 60% in September. 90% of them said that they felt safe to express their feelings and opinions in July compared to 50% in September.

**For an increased number of children reporting that they are becoming more confident in expressing and managing their feelings and opinions.**

Children during the school council meetings reported that they know what to do to manage their feelings and opinions. Children were finding that there weren't always opportunities for them to discuss their issues from the playground and other issues before the weekly circle time sessions. After the introduction of these, class councils reported that they were using the circle times to express their feelings and opinions. They liked that the circle times had rules and that they were safe places to discuss important personal issues. 90% of pupils agreed that they were more confident in expressing and managing their feelings and opinions in July compared with the beginning of the school year. 10% of pupils said that they would like more chances to discuss issues and their feelings with other people such as buddies, home school link workers and ELSA.

**For a bank of circle time plans and resources to be available for each year group.**

There is a bank of circle time plans and resources that are available for the school. An email was shared with teaching staff which stated that resources for circle time can be found in the shared area of the network. A list of websites and further resources was also shared with staff.

**Next Steps:**

Continue to develop the use of circle times and ensure they are delivered on a regular basis.

Ensure circle times are used when problems or issues arise as a way to solve the problem and allow children's voices to be heard in a safe environment.

Recap circle times and how to deliver them effectively for the next academic year and to new teachers.

Introduce class buddies and ensure children who feel they need it have access to other support such as HSLW and ELSA sessions.

**Senior Leader Quote:**

As a school we are committed to ensuring our children's mental health is a priority. We want all of our children to have good emotional health and wellbeing.

The school council plays an important part in representing the views of the children in our school and we encourage all classes to hold regular class councils in order to give all the children a voice.

Circle times are a great way to build positive relationships between staff and children and provide a safe environment for children to express their feelings and opinions in a controlled way. The worry boxes are a great idea for children who do not want to share their thoughts in front of their peers.

We are keen to keep improving opportunities for all of our children to develop their mental health and will continue to work on this area.