
Round and Round It Goes

A Simple Circle Game for Children Under Three

~ Kathryn Meyer

Circle time takes on a whole different shape with the toddler age group...literally and figuratively. Our “circles” look more like blobs or clusters and our “time” extends throughout the day. We sing through transitions, we sing and share verses as we three adults work with twelve children, dressing in all of our glorious outdoor gear and then undressing again. We sing to connect, we sing to calm. Our day is one big transition...or as I like to think of it, one big circle time.

In my Chipmunks class, I wait a good three months into the school year before I attempt to form something that looks like a traditional circle time. When I do, it's on our circular rug and only then do I sing, “Let's form a circle like the circle 'round the sun, let's form a circle to include everyone.” At this mid-point in the year, the children are ready to find their place in the circle. They are ready to take a pause from the social outbreath and they are ready to hear what's in store for today's gathering time. They are ready to participate as they can.

We have a simple circle game that the children anticipate with great delight. Aside from the joy of rolling the ball back to the teacher, it offers the children an opportunity to practice waiting, sharing, patience with one another, and self-regulation.

The first three lines are sung to the tune of “This is the way we wash our clothes,” while the teacher rolls the ball in front of her/himself:

*Round and round and round it goes,
round it goes, round it goes,
round and round and round it goes...*

Last line spoken:

Where it stops, no one knows.

At this point, the teacher rolls the ball to a child in the circle. Once the ball is rolled, the teacher holds out her own hands as a gesture of receiving the ball back.

Teacher repeats the song/verse and then rolls the ball to another child. The game continues in this manner, changing from singing to a spoken verse to move the circle game along at a faster pace as the children's attention begins to wane.

When all the children have had their turn or the game has run its course, the teacher hands one child the ball to hold and this leads into the following verse (adapted from “Finger-Plays” by Emilie Poulssen):

*Here's a ball for [Name], big and soft and round.
Here is [Name]'s hammer, see how she can pound.
Here are [Name]'s dollies, standing in a row,
Here is [Name]'s music, clapping, clapping so.
Here's a big umbrella, to keep our [Name] dry.
Here is [Name]'s cradle, to rock him by and by.*

Form ball with cupped hands
Fist lightly pounds into open palm
Ten fingers held up, wiggling
Clap hands together
Form umbrella overhead
Form rocking cradle with arms clasping elbows

We go around the circle, making sure each child's name is called upon at least once in the game. I have found that the children delight in this simple interactive rhyme that invites them to participate, which they eagerly do. The ball then gets tucked away for another day. ♦

Kathryn Meyer is the class teacher for the Chipmunks (18 months to three years old) at Mountaintop Waldorf Children's Garden in Saugerties, NY, where she has been teaching for ten years. She credits Celia Riahi and her friend and mentor Wendy Weinrich for the inspiration for so much of what she does in her work with this tender age.