

## Effective Group Times for Toddlers, Twos, and Preschoolers

### **Plan ahead and provide *active* group experiences.**

Consider different abilities and strengths of the children in your classroom. Think about how each of the children might experience the activity differently. Schedule group times when children are most inclined to participate.

### **Gather materials and offer them to children.**

Keep your introduction brief and to the point. Move on if children show no interest. Remember to consider how the children will “transition into” the activity—how will you invite them in? Will they understand what they might do? Use individual baskets of materials and have them ready *before* the group time begins. For large group time, be prepared with an easy-to-join transition in. If you are using music, have it cued and ready.

### **Respect children’s choices and ideas about using the materials.**

Be at children’s level, watch what they do, listen to what they say, imitate their actions. Use the materials yourself. Offer books or objects for each child to hold. Anticipate that children will come and go from group times. Have a back-up plan.

### **Comment briefly and specifically on what you see children doing.**

Brief factual comments help children recognize that their actions can be described in words. Don’t say too much, but say enough to acknowledge the children’s experiences and perhaps extend their thinking beyond the immediate experience. Use open-ended questions to help children reflect on their experiences and explorations.

### **Interpret children’s actions and communications for other children.**

Remember to think about opportunities for “becoming *me* and becoming *we*.” Group times can be reassuring for some children who like to be able to “check in” with other children. Allow children to be leaders *and* followers. Allow children to make choices as appropriate, maintaining expectations of safety and respect.

### **Let children’s actions tell you when group time is at an end.**

Stop the activity if virtually no one is participating. Don’t forget to remind children of transitions. Think beforehand about how you will draw the group time to an end. What opportunities are there for follow up and extensions into other parts of the day? Can materials be left out? How can the children help with clean up?