

Welcome Back 1: Introducing Community Chats

IN THIS CHAT, the students begin to build a caring classroom community. They learn a procedure for coming to the circle in a safe and orderly way, play a game together, reflect on how they acted in friendly ways during the game, and learn how to return to their seats.

25 minutes

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COMMUNITY CHAT

Welcome Back 1: Introducing Community Chats

PURPOSE

- Learn and practice Community Chat procedures
- Follow the teacher's directions
- Respond to the attention signal
- Reflect on behavior during an activity

ABOUT THIS CHAT

Community Chats are important whole-class meetings in which the students build relationships, learn prosocial skills, and talk about problems affecting their class. Community Chats are central to cultivating students' social, emotional, and ethical development.

Community Chats are held in a circle. A circle is the ideal arrangement because it puts everyone on equal footing and the students can address one another directly. Marking the places where each student should sit will help the students know how to form the circle and how close to sit next to each other.

If you are social distancing, you may need to move or remove other classroom furniture to make the space for a circle large enough for students to spread out. You may also wish to mark pathways from the students' seats to the rug to help ensure students stay distanced as they travel back and forth to the rug.

1 Introduce Community Chats and Gather in a Circle (5–7 minutes)

Tell the students that sometimes they will gather in a circle on the rug to talk about important things together. Explain that you will guide the students, one table at a time, to move from their desks to the rug, and that you would like the rest of the class to watch so everyone learns how to move responsibly to the rug.

Teacher Note

Consider using a visual signal, such as a hand in the air, to gain the students' attention. Teach the students how to respond to the signal, for example, to finish talking, place their own hands in the air, and turn their attention to you. As you use this signal, reinforce its effectiveness by waiting until all the students have responded to it before moving on.

WELCOME BACK 1: INTRODUCING COMMUNITY CHATS

Point to the students at one of the tables and give the following directions, pausing after each step to allow the students at that table to complete the step before giving the next direction.

1. Stand and push in your chair.
2. Walk carefully to the rug.
3. Sit cross-legged in one of the marked spots to form a circle.

Teacher Note

Using the word *students* rather than specific students' names when giving feedback to the class minimizes competition and creates a sense of safety in the class.

Repeat this procedure with the students at the remaining tables. Be ready to guide students who need help following your directions. Point out (without naming students) some ways the students are behaving responsibly at each step of the procedure.

You might say:

"I notice that students are pushing their chairs in gently. I also notice students walking slowly and carefully so they don't bump into one another. That's very responsible."

If the students rush or do not move to the circle in an orderly way, calmly have them return to their seats. Then repeat the directions, and have them practice moving to the circle again.

2 Teach the "Mirror, Mirror" Activity (5 minutes)

Teacher Note

If the students are doing this activity without social distancing, explain that they will need to be careful not to bump or hit classmates as they mirror your movements.

Explain that students will play a silent game called "Mirror, Mirror." Ask the students to stand, watch you carefully, and mirror your movements. Model waving your left hand, and have the students mirror your action (waving their right hands). Model a few more gestures.

3 Lead the "Mirror, Mirror" Activity (5 minutes)

Lead the "Mirror, Mirror" activity using some of the gestures that follow. Move slowly so the students can keep up with you.

- Make a funny face.
- Wave one arm, and then the other.
- Wiggle one foot, and then the other.
- Smile and wave at someone in the circle.
- Place both hands on your head.
- Bend at the waist.
- Wiggle your whole body.
- March in place.
- Smile and bow toward someone.

At the end of the activity, ask the students to sit back on their designated spots.

4 Reflect on “Mirror, Mirror” (5 minutes)

Point out that you noticed during the activity that the students followed the rules and were friendly to other people.

Ask:

Q *How did you act in friendly ways when we played “Mirror, Mirror”?*

Students might say:

- “I smiled at people.”
- “I waved at some friends.”



Facilitation Tip

When asking a question, pause for 5–10 seconds before calling on anyone to respond. This gives all students time to think quietly to themselves before starting to talk.

5 Guide the Students by Table Back to Their Seats (5 minutes)

Explain that the students will return to their tables and that you will guide them back one table at a time. Ask the class to watch as their classmates move so everyone learns how to return to their seats in a responsible way.

Ask the students who sit at one of the tables to raise their hands and be ready to follow directions.

Walk them through the following directions, pausing after each step to allow the students to complete the step before giving the next direction:

1. Carefully stand.
2. Walk back to your seat without bumping into others.
3. Pull out your chair and sit down.
4. Wait quietly until all your classmates have returned to their seats.

Repeat this procedure with the students at the remaining tables. If they rush or do not move in an orderly way, calmly have them return to the circle. Then repeat the directions and have the students practice returning to their seats again.

Explain that you would like the students to move back to their seats after Community Chat in the same way every time.

You might say:

“Students who sit at the Green Table, please raise your hands. Now listen to my directions and follow them while the rest of the class watches.”

AFTER THIS CHAT

In the coming days, look for opportunities to point out the ways students are being friendly and caring and exhibiting other prosocial behaviors. Helping the students understand what these values look like in practice will aid in establishing a caring classroom community.