



September 28, 2015

Andrea Bushala, LSW & Type 73, *The Theraplay Institute*

Objectives

- Understand the rationale and elements of Sunshine Circles playgroups
- Able to plan and lead a Sunshine Circles playgroup
- Aware of resources available to support Sunshine Circles playgroups



Introductions

- Name
- Background
- Your classroom
- How you play



Agenda

- Rationale, structure & rules
- How to positively structure; How to become a playful leader
- Experience Sunshine Circles group activities
- Group progression over time
- Responding to resistance; additional concerns for schools
- Debrief



What are Sunshine Circles?

- 99% interactive play groups
- Adult directed and structured
- Teach healthy values, cooperation and social skills
- Improve group functioning and individual learning
- Build positive relationships and classroom communities



Sunshine Circles in Education

- Adapted from Theraplay, an adult-directed play therapy developed specifically for use in Head Start classrooms.
- An instructional strategy to support improved self-regulation, interactions and self esteem.
- Part of a comprehensive social-emotional curriculum

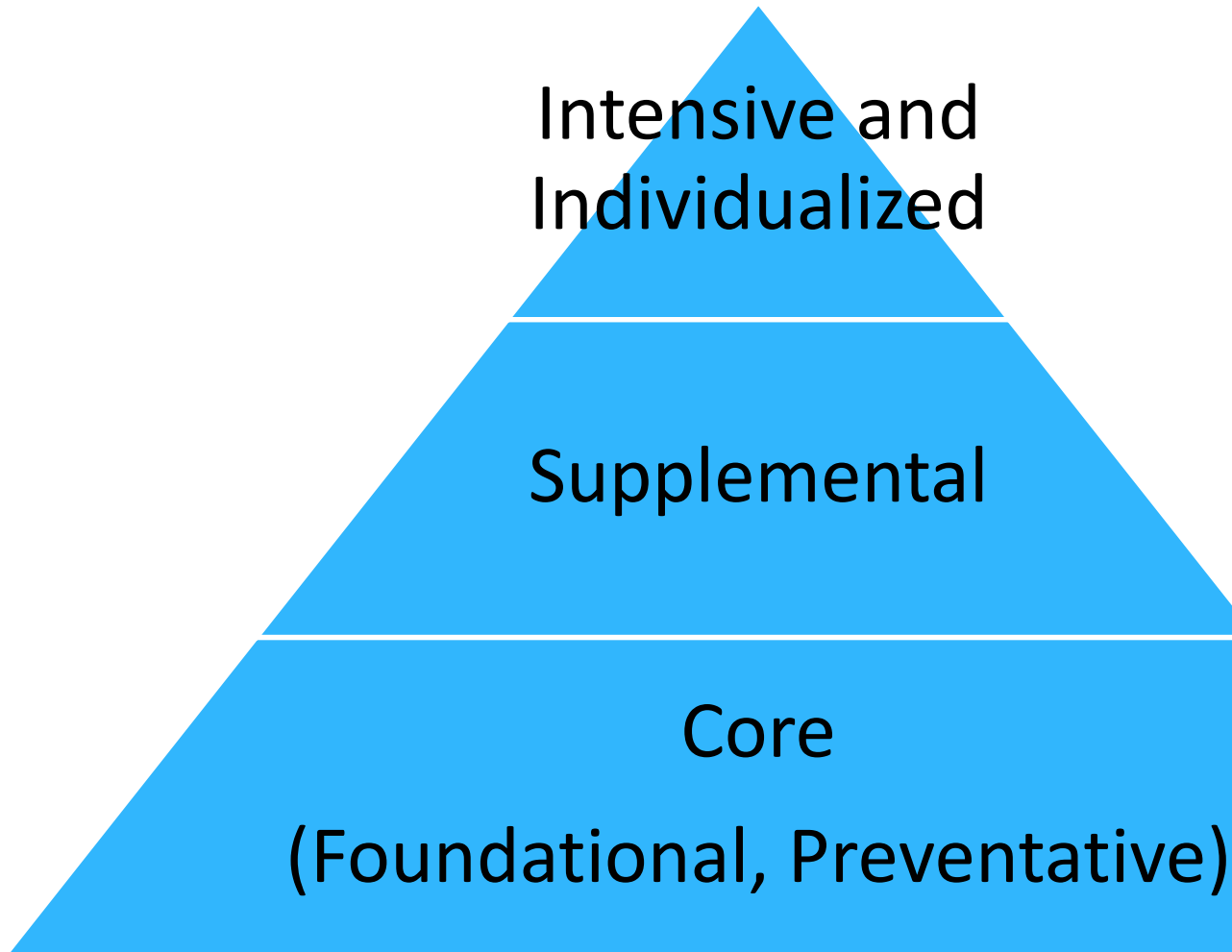


Sunshine Circles in Education

- An instructional strategy to support the development of play skills.
- An instructional strategy to support full inclusion of children with disabilities and children at-risk for disabilities



Tiered Instruction



Tiered Instruction

Individualized
Intervention

Social/Emotional
teaching
strategies

Build relationships and
classroom community



How do we know what to teach?

• **Head Start Standards** (45 CFR

1304.3(a)(5):

- (iv) Ensures that the program environment helps children develop **emotional security and facility in social relationships**;
- (v) Enhances each child's **understanding of self** as an individual and as a member of a group;
- (vi) Provides each child with opportunities for success to help **develop feelings of competence, self-esteem, and positive attitudes toward learning**;



How do we know what to teach?

- **State Learning Standards: Illinois**

- **STATE GOAL 31:**

Develop an awareness of personal identity and positive self-concept.

- **STATE GOAL 32:**

Demonstrate a respect and a responsibility for self and others.

What if children don't successfully acquire the social-emotional skills required to be in positive relationships?



Children who grow into adolescence with challenging behaviors are likely to drop out of school, be arrested, abuse drugs and alcohol, have marginalized adult lives, and die young (Lipsey & Derzon, 1998; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995).

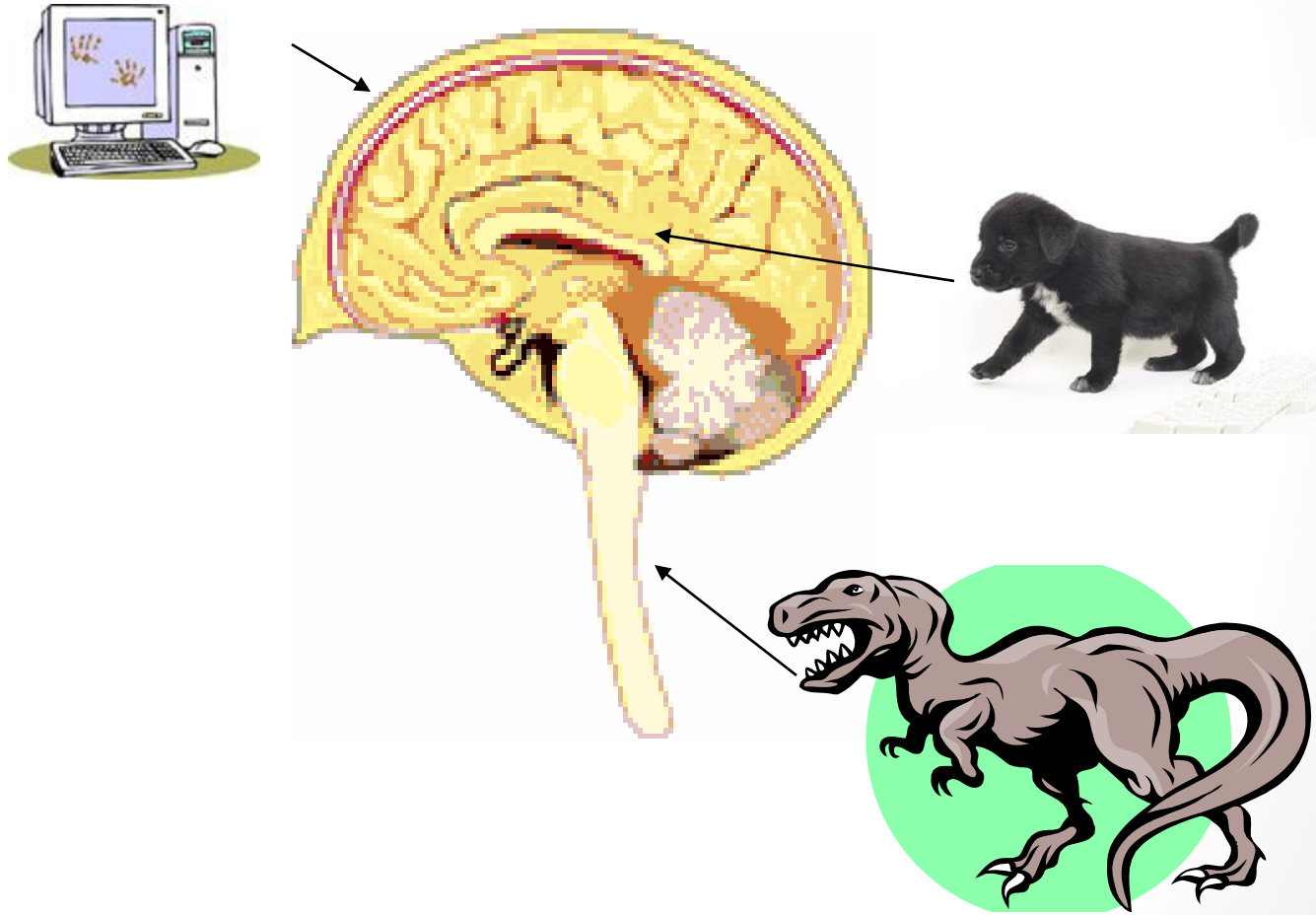


Sunshine Circles and Brain Development

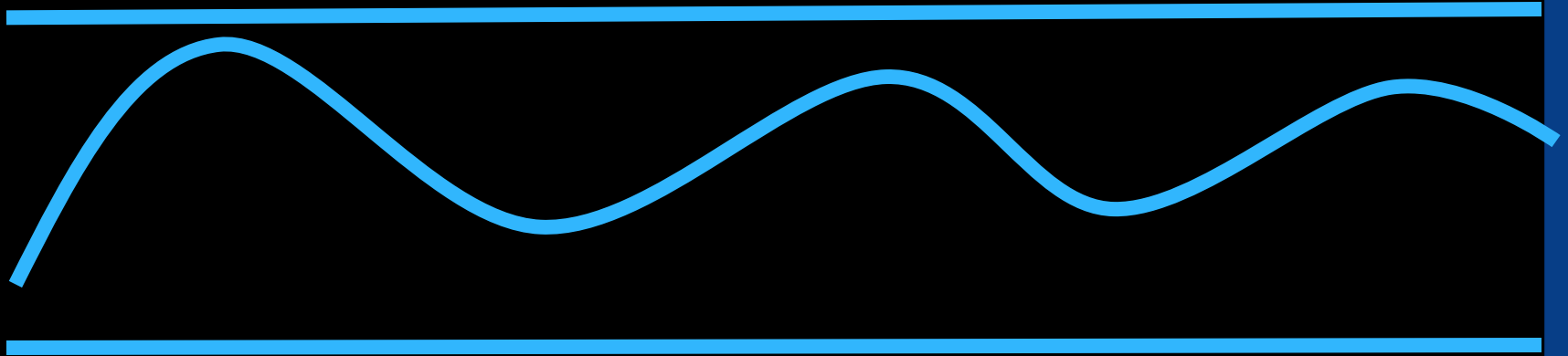
- Underpinned by theoretical foundations of Theraplay: neuro-sequential development; development of attachment and affect.
- Sunshine Circles playgroups create experiences that are the mechanism of brain development. These experiences result in improved self-regulation and learning.



Brain Development



Maintaining Steady Level of Arousal



Planning Framework

- Structure
- Engagement
- Nurture
- Challenge



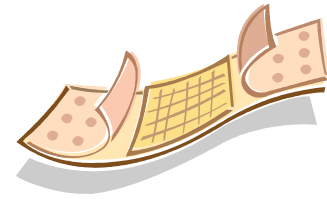
Child Outcomes with Sunshine Circles

- Positive awareness of self
- Improved emotional and behavioral regulation
- Improved relationship with teachers / caregivers
- Improved peer interactions and relationships
- Improved social communication



Circle Rules

1. No Hurts!



2. Stick Together!



3. HAVE FUN!



Description of Group

- The group is seated together in a circle.
- The leader and co-leaders are seated among the children and participate equally in the fun. (They are not just observers or directors.)
- Activities involve combinations structure, engagement, challenge, touch, eye contact, and FUN!!!
- Conventional classroom rules for behavior are suspended so that children's needs can emerge.

Structure of the Session

- Song
- Welcome/Check-ups
- Middle Activities
 - Address group issues (cooperating: comfort with touch; trust; asserting; helping others; managing excitement; taking turns; facing challenge; respecting differences)
- Treat
- Song



Rituals of Sunshine Circles

- Welcoming
 - Acknowledges each child
 - Communicates caring
 - Each child gets moment in the spotlight
 - Children get attention without having to ask or act up for it
- Sharing and ending
 - Children learn to give and receive
 - Feeding is the most basic form of nurturing
 - Song or chant provides closure



Creating the Sunshine Atmosphere

- The role of the leader is a playful one – so SMILE, EMOTE, and HAVE FUN!
- What you DO is more important than what you SAY.
- Accept all behaviors except for hurting oneself or others. Negative as well as positive feelings are accepted.



Creating the Sunshine Atmosphere

- Choose activities that are cooperative, not competitive.
- Create activities out of problem behaviors – promote acceptance.
- Use Circle rules to manage behaviors positively and respectfully.



Creating the Sunshine Atmosphere

- The leader doesn't use the word "no."
- The leader is up-beat and engaging
- The leader doesn't invoke punishments or consequences.



Sunshine Circle Experience

- Welcome Song
- Review Rules
- Pass a squeeze
- Feather blow
- Check-ups
- Cotton ball soothe
- Food share
- Goodbye song



Discussion

- Did you feel safe and cared for?
- Did you feel included? Accepted?
- Did you have fun?
 - How did having fun feel to you?
- How did the touching part of the activities feel?
- If you were uncomfortable, did the leader notice?
- What can this experience do for troubled children?



Benefits of Sunshine Circles

- Emphasis is on cooperation.
 - Children feel safe – can work cooperatively.
 - Mutual caring is valued.
- Build harmonious, resilient classroom communities.
 - Children better able to tolerate frustration and/or ask for help.
 - Create warm, positive relationships.
- Build social communication skills.



Benefits of Sunshine Circles

- More peer teaching; classroom run more smoothly.
- Bring fun and exuberance into children's lives.
- Provides additional support for children with various special needs, identified or not.



Becoming a Playful Leader

- “Buy out” of task oriented philosophy. Make this a treat for all of you!
- “Get into it” with your group.
- “Give to” your group rather than asking them to perform for you.
- Be “laid back” about whether the game is played correctly.



Becoming a Playful Leader

- Do not control or suppress behaviors.
- Accept all behaviors that occur except hurting; use them positively, if possible. (If an activity does not go as planned, make something of the way it went.)
- Think cooperative, not competitive.

Starting Your Group

- Short, sweet, and successful!
- First sessions:
 - Choose group name, teach welcome song
 - Check-ups
 - Quick, fun activity
 - Treat
 - Closing song



Starting Your Group

- Gradually add middle activities that are well structured, then add more stimulation, then add challenging activities.
- Plan sessions to have some active and some calming activities. Always have calm activities at the end.



Decisions

- Group size
 - Smaller with more challenging children
 - Have helpers
- Location
 - Rugs, mats
- Time
 - Full group time is 30 minutes
 - Shorter in early groups or with more troubled children



Decisions

- Food
 - Have teacher feed?
 - Have a sharing bowl?
 - Individually wrapped items?
 - Pass sanitizer?
- Check-ups
 - Lotion, cotton ball, powder?
 - When / how allow children to do check-ups for each other?



Learning Objectives

Choose Activities Based on Learning Objectives for the Group:

- Plan objectives based on stage of the group
 - Early stages: learning group norms, learning about each member of the community
 - Later stages: learning to take more responsibility, learning more complex games
- Plan objectives based on needs of the children
 - Foundational learning skills: imitation, joint attention
 - Emotional skills: regulating excitement levels
 - Social skills: taking turns, caring for others



Progression Over Time

- Honeymoon
 - Kids are surprised and adjusting to the experience of closeness, touch, fun and caring
 - Time to learn group norms
 - Getting-to-know-you activities
 - Pass-it-along
 - Ball/balloon activities (ball toss, roll around on blanket, toss on blanket)
 - Cotton ball blow
 - Learning peoples' names, characteristics, favorite things
 - Use props to engage



Progression Over Time

- Termination – end of year
 - Can repeat favorite activities
 - Read books with themes of playfulness or caring
- Do ending activities
 - Specials lists
 - Pictures
 - Group Hand Prints



Caution!!

- Best laid plans ... Stay Flexible!
- Guide so that even challenging children can be successful or generously take over for an impulsive or shy child.
- Remember that if you aren't having fun, then no one is and you've broken the rules!
- Teachers: put aside your "teacher" role.



Helpful Hints

- Be wary of same format – don't be too predictable (circles, lines, smaller groups)
- Quit an activity if it isn't working
- Repeat favorite activities, but modify or add to them to keep children engaged
- Be sure to prepare for the end of your group



Unique Methods of Positive Structuring (responding to resistance)

- Physical touch
- Challenge: “Bet you can’t _____!”
- Paradox: “Don’t you dare sit down!”
- Prediction: “I bet you’re going to _____.”
- Consider honoring the request

Make sure every child can do the activity successfully

Resources

- **Trainings in Sunshine Circles for school and child development centers available from:**

The Theraplay® Institute:

1840 Oak Ave., Suite 320

Evanston, IL 60201

Phone: 847-256-7334 x101

Fax: 847-256-7370

email: info@theraplay.org

- www.theraplay.org
- Play with Them: Theraplay® Groups in the Classroom,
Rubin and Tregay, Charles C. Thomas, 1989.

