# PSFO Tip Sheet

# Interactive Group Mat Time

**Reasons for Mat Time**

* Mat Time fosters a sense of community. All children regardless of ability can experience a sense of belonging.
* Mat Time can benefit children where English is their additional language, because communication occurs not just through language but through, movement, music, puppets or props.
* Mat Time provides an opportunity for non-verbal children to participate in non-language based activities.
* All children will benefit from social problem solving e.g. children can share their thoughts and ideas about an issue that has arisen and together work out how best to solve it.
* Mat Time provides an opportunity for children to share their knowledge on a specific topic.

**Successful Mat Time**

* **Be prepared:** Have props, puppets and songs ready. Children get bored or display inappropriate behaviours if there are beaks in the routine when educators are searching for books/ songs.
* **Be intentional**: Plan Mat Time as part of your program. Choose books, songs, and topics for discussions that relate to children's interests.
* **Consistent transitions**: Repetition of a simple song, movement, guessing game, activities or icebreaker to signal the start and end of Mat Time.
* **Set up seating arrangement:** Tape a circle on the floor, create a circle of carpet squares to sit on, place names around the circle so each child knows where to go.
* **Maintain children’s attention**: Use humour, suspense, varying your voice, and involving children in the story or activity. Choose topics that interest young children.
* **Make it meaningful**: Give children objects to touch and hold to help them to spark conversation and connect the story to real life
* **Stay focused**: All educators should be involved. Co-educators can actively support children requiring some additional help to participate in the group activity rather than sweeping the floor or washing the paint brushes.
* **Create a positive experience**: Give children a feeling of confidence in their own knowledge and abilities. Mat Time will be more engaging to children if it is built around simple, brief, interesting, and engaging experiences that invite conversation and interaction rather than being nothing but a sit-still-and-listen experience.
* **Have fun**: Children are more likely to enjoy Mat Time if you are enjoying it too.

**Managing realistic expectations**

* **Interactive Mat Time**: Keep children actively involved by alternating between active and passive activities. For example:
  + Start with a movement activity or dance
  + Read a developmentally appropriate story
  + Introduce a new concept with props.
  + Follow with a passive activity – new idea or concept
  + Close with an action, song, or dance.
* **Purposeful Book Selection**: Choose developmentally appropriate books and familiarise yourself with them before reading.
* **Appropriate Time and Group Size**: Adjust based on age and needs. Consider splitting the group in halve, if necessary, especially when there are a high number of children with challenging behaviours or group dynamics create an issue.
* **Adapt to Individual Needs**: Modify the story to suit the individual children's needs.
* **Consistent Routine**: A familiar routine helps children know what to expect and boosts their confidence.
* **Seating Options:** Provide various seating choices like bean bags, cushions, or chairs.

**CONSIDER:** Some children may not be developmentally ready to engage in a group experience. Consider a Wait Box (box containing variety of toys or sensory items) or Calm Area where the child can sit and play. Always provide them with a choice; but make your expectations clear, eg “Where would you like to go… the Calm Area or Mat?”

**Some ideas to consider:**

* [**http://www.kidscreativechaos.com/2014/05/12-circle-time-activities-and-ideas-for.html**](http://www.kidscreativechaos.com/2014/05/12-circle-time-activities-and-ideas-for.html)

* <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/apr2020/circle-time-small-groups>
* <https://www.eccpct.com/Resources/Classrooms/Tips-for-Tots/Encourage-Social-Development-Through-Circle-Time/>