

Circles for Learning Supports Emotional Regulation

"Theo sat with the shape sorter toy on the floor and lent over to pick one of the wooden pieces up. He tried it in the hole, but it didn't fit. One of the young people modelled how to put the shape in the correct hole and then gave the shape back to Theo. Theo tried again but it wouldn't go in, he banged it in another hole but still it didn't fit. His face changed and he tried another hole but again it wouldn't fit and then with a loud wail he threw the shape across the room. Mum explained that with 3 older brothers he was often helped as they stepped in and did the task for him. The class teacher wondered how that must have felt for Theo and what he might take away or learn from that. One of the children put up their hand and said, 'It makes his life easier.' Another said, 'It might make him think he's not as good as they are.' The class teacher nodded and then used the phrase I think they could be stealing his learning."



Circles for learning had been introduced in an SEMH school for children in Y7. One of the key areas their teacher wanted to focus on was learning and managing the emotions around learning. She spoke with Mum first and they set up the situation with the shape sorter. This small moment became the focal point for the follow up work with the children where the teacher explored what it felt like when the children couldn't do something and ways that she or others could help. She expanded vocabulary around anger, frustration and uncertainty. She then introduced the word resilience and explored with the children how Theo's mum could help him become more resilient and have a go at things for longer. The children were able to understand that she couldn't do this without her other son's being involved. Following on from one of the class teachers coaching sessions with the Circles for Learning Coach she decided to work with her young people to think about their own resilience. She introduced the window of tolerance and children explored how their window changed in size depending on what they were doing or how they felt. If they had had a tricky morning at home, it was narrow – if they were doing their favourite subject, it was wider. This then led to her writing Learning Plans with the children about their learning and how they wanted to improve.

The children were then able to think about themselves and created a learning passport showing what areas of learning were good, which ones were tricky and what teachers could do to help. This led to the young people being more able and willing to supporting each other and even started reminding each other of the strategies that could help.

"Circles for Learning brought emotions into the classroom in a way where the young people could see them and reflect on them safely."