

How Circles for Learning helped develop empathy and tolerance.

'When baby Tammy came in with her Mum she sat beaming at the children. She was very used to being in the class now and wanted to interact. She climbed down from Mums lap and crawled towards the children with a wooden stick in her hand. Just before she reached them, she sat down and held out the wooden stick. One of the children reached out and took it from her saying thank you. Tammy watched and then held out her hand. The class teacher asked the children what they thought Tammy wanted. "She wants her stick back." Replied one. The child who had the wooden stick held it out and Tammy took it. Before crawling back to Mum clutching it in her hand. As he sat down, she put it into her mouth and then immediately started to cry. Big tears rolled down her face, and she reached for mum. Mum picked her up and then seeing the concerned faces of the children immediately explained that Tammy was teething and her gums were really tender, chewing the stick had hurt her mouth. The children had all been really shocked by Tammy's tears and some visibly worried. The class teacher looked at the children and said "Wow I found hearing her cry really hard, and I wonder if some of you did too? I wonder why Tammy's crying had such a big effect on us?" Hands shot up and one of the children answered saying "If we feel bad when a baby cries, we'll do something to help them."



This small moment of the visit really stayed with the children who wanted to talk about how they had felt after Tammy left. The class teacher decided to explore sadness with the children as part of her follow up. One activity was to draw a picture of a time when they were sad and then in a heart at the bottom write something that had helped them feel a bit better. Those who wanted could then share their pictures and talk about them. One child who had recently arrived in the class had moved from London and was living with his Mum in a women's refuge. His behaviour since arriving at school had been quite challenging and he had found making new friends hard. He drew a picture of his old house in London. He then chose to share this with the other children. He was able to talk about missing his old house, friends and school. The class listened to his story quietly and when he finished one of the boys told him he was brave. When the teacher asked why he thought that he said it was because not only had the boy shared his story but had also moved and lost so much. Both the sharing and the feedback helped the new boy and the other children to tolerate the sadness which resulted in a new relationship growing underpinned by tolerance and understanding. This theme about big and challenging emotions and the challenges they bring reappeared several times in different ways for this class over the next few months.

"The Circles for Learning work give me a time and space to explore emotions and how they make us feel which then led to the class becoming more empathetic and tolerant of each other."