



CROOKED CIRCLE

"You must trust and believe in people, or life becomes impossible."

—Anton Chekov

OVERVIEW

While holding hands in a circle, students work together to maintain balance as alternate players lean forward and backward.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- At the beginning of the school year to help build a trusting classroom climate and to cultivate positive student relationships
- Anytime throughout the school year
- As an active break during a school day when students are restless or after a concentrated task

TIME REQUIRED

- 5–10 minutes

LEVEL

- Pre-K/Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary
- Middle School

MATERIALS

- Enough open space for a circle that can include all students

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Work as a team, communicating non-verbally
- Follow instructions and practice balance
- Cultivate trust of their classmates

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to think of a friend or colleague whom you trust deeply. Did you trust this person when you first met them? What helped you gain this level of trust? Was it this person's words, actions, or something else?

INSTRUCTIONS

SETUP

- Have students form a circle and number off by 1's and 2's, remaining in the circle.
- Designate a signal to start.
- Explain that the game is a challenge and discuss the concept of trust. You might ask students:
 - *What does it mean to trust someone?*
 - *How do we show others that we trust them?*
 - *How do we show that we can be trusted?*
- Emphasize the importance of holding hands firmly but not painfully.

HOW TO PLAY

- The players remain in a circle and hold hands, and when you give the signal, the 1's lean forward and the 2's lean backward.

- The challenge is to keep holding hands while maintaining balance.
- Once the group has managed to balance, bring them back to the center and change roles.
- If the group has switched roles successfully, challenge them to do it with their eyes closed.
- Discuss how trust played a role in the game.

VARIATIONS

- Play in a straight line with the ends standing straight.
- Put bean bags on each student's head and challenge the team to not drop the bean bags as they lean forward or backward.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- What worked in this game? What was challenging? Were students able to be successful in this game?
- Moving forward, do students seem more connected and trusting of one another during regular class time and at recess?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

According to research, [trust](#) involves several factors, including reliability (knowing a person will come through for you), competence (a person has the skills to complete a project on time), honesty (accepting responsibility for one's actions), and openness (sharing of personal information); however, studies have found that the most important factor contributing to trust is positive intentions.

In other words, if we sense that a person wishes us well and wants the best for us, then we will continue to trust that person, even if they are not always perfectly reliable or competent.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Trust is the foundation of healthy relationships, and [feeling accepted](#) and appreciated by one's peers is critical to a student's well-being and [success in school](#). Playing games that cultivate trust helps to create a classroom climate where all students feel that they belong and are valued by one another.

SOURCE

Playworks' new [SEL Game Guide](#) contains more than 150 games that you can use to reinforce social and emotional skills. Inside, you will find brain breaks, recess favorites, variations on classic games, and facilitation tips that make playtime fun, safe, and inclusive for all kids. Visit www.playworks.org to learn more about Playworks and how play can help kids stay active and learn valuable life skills.