



## Becoming a Preschool Community Member (Civics)

---

**A**n early childhood program is a wonderful setting for learning how to get along with others and for understanding and respecting differences between people. It is also an important setting for learning about oneself as a responsible member of the group. In an early childhood education setting, young children are enlisted into responsible citizenship for the first time outside of the family, encouraged to think of themselves as sharing responsibility for keeping the room orderly, cooperating with teachers and peers, knowing what to do during group routines (e.g., circle time), cleaning up after group activities, participating in group decisions, supporting and complying with the rules of the learning community, and acting as citizens of the preschool.

---

This early experience in elementary civics is challenging for young children because it requires that children balance their own desires and goals with those of others. For this reason, many of the skills of preschool community membership take time to develop as young children gradually acquire the social understanding, self-regulatory capabilities, and motivation to compromise, bargain, negotiate, take turns, and act in other ways that respect the needs and interests of their partners.

Many formal and informal activities of an early childhood education setting contribute to developing the skills of preschool community membership. These include group decision making that may occur during circle time (including voicing opinions, voting on a shared deci-

sion, and accepting the judgment of the majority); resolving peer conflict and finding a fair solution; understanding the viewpoints of another with whom one disagrees; respecting differences in culture, race, or ethnicity; sharing stories about acting responsibly or helpfully and the guidance that older children can provide younger children or children with less positive experiences about being a preschool community citizen. In this section, specific strategies are discussed that support development in each of the following substrands:

- 1.0 Skills for Democratic Participation
- 2.0 Responsible Conduct
- 3.0 Fairness and Respect for Other People
- 4.0 Conflict Resolution