



## CIRCLES OF CARING COMMUNITY: “FAMILY TREE” ACTIVITY SHOWING SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN IN ALL FAMILIES

**SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL:** 1 – 2

**LENGTH OF TIME:** Discussion session of 30 to 35 minutes plus project session of 30 – 35 minutes

### GOAL

- To help students think about the many ways families are formed.
- To look at the many ways family members care for each other.

### OBJECTIVES

- Students will list all the things families do to support and care for each other.
- Students will create an authentic definition of their family or caring community.
- Students will learn that families have some similarities and some differences.
- Students will make a graphic representation of their family or community of caring.

### ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups. (Also K.1 and 2.1)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1.5: Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts and feelings. (Also K.5 and 2.5)

### EDUCATORS’ NOTES

It is natural for young children to notice differences. This activity allows children to define their families or caring communities for themselves and explain it to their peers, if they choose to, in an environment supported by a caring educator. The lesson also offers an opportunity to build classroom community by giving students a chance to share and learn about the uniqueness of each other’s families. One of the learning objectives of this lesson is to teach children to accept and embrace differences and similarities amongst their families.

Children naturally notice human differences in skin tone, eye color, hair, etc. Talking openly and honestly about how families and humans are different in these ways is very important. Teachers need to openly discuss differences while interrupting bias and stereotypes.

For some children, the traditional family tree format can be unsettling, thus, this lesson is framed around the concept of caring adults in your students’ lives. Family tree activities and graphic depictions of families should be empowering activities for all children, not activities that create comfort and pride for some and confusion, shame or isolation for others.



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This project centers the concept that all families are unique and different. Your students may have families with two moms or two dads; stepparents; a transgender parent; adoptive parents; or foster parents, it is useful to find out the language they use to refer to their families to help respectfully answer questions that may arise. If, for example, you have only one student in your school with same-gender parents, then be mindful not to put that student in the position of teaching other children about their family. That is the job of the educator, not the student.

### **MATERIALS NEEDED**

- Lined paper and unlined paper (up to 11" x 17" if available)
- Chart paper or a whiteboard, markers, pencils

### **SESSION ONE: FAMILY DISCUSSION**

Spend some time talking with your students about all kinds of families. It is important to emphasize that families can be made up of many different configurations of adults and children, but what is most significant are the ways they take care of each other, work and play together. For some children, important caregivers and support are what they think of as family.

- Tell students they are each going to draw an image—make a spiral—to show their family and/or the people who make up a caring community for them.
  - Explain that this is an opportunity for each student to show who the most important people are in their life and that it will be different for every student.
  - Ask students to think about caring people in their life who love and take care of them.
- Ask your students about the many ways adults show caring for children.
  - Make a list on chart paper.
  - The list might include feeding, clothing, loving, setting rules for safety, reading bedtime stories or helping them when they are hurt. Many kinds of nurturing, caring behaviors could be on the list.
- Ask your students to name all the adults who might be in a family:
  - Make a list on chart paper.
  - The list could include: grandparents, foster parents, moms, dads, stepdads, stepmoms, godparents, aunts, uncles, great-grandparents, great uncles, great aunts, cousins, step-siblings, half-siblings, birth parents, foster siblings, neighbors or friends who are chosen family.
  - Remember to let students identify for themselves who is in their family. They may also include a pet or a neighbor, for example.

### **SESSION TWO: CIRCLE OF CARING COMMUNITY PROJECT**

Begin by instructing students to think about their extended families and write down who they believe belongs in their extended family and the caring community around them. Students can include all the people who truly contribute to their well-being. In classes with very diverse family situations, this can be a liberating activity. Students should write this list on a sheet of lined paper.

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- Give each student a large piece of unlined paper (at least 11" x 17").
    - Instruct students to write their own names in the middle of the unlined paper.
    - Spiraling out from their name, they should write the names of people they feel closest to or who support and care for them the most. They should continue writing the names of people in their "caring community."
  - After all the spirals are complete, ask for volunteers to share their spirals.
    - Encourage students to listen respectfully to their peers as they explain how they depicted their caring community and who is important to them.

### **EXTENSIONS**

- Students can make a story web instead of a spiral to show their "Caring Community."
- Have students write a poem about an important caring adult in their lives.
- Use writing prompts to have students write about families.
- Display the students' Circles of Caring in your classroom or school hallway.

### **ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION**

- Each student can choose whether to present their family and/or caring community to the class. Students should be able to describe some of the ways members of their family work and play together. Students should be able to name one or more ways people in their family or community show caring.
- Students should be able to respectfully name differences between their caring community and those of their classmates.

### **SUGGESTED BOOKS**

*Families, Families, Families!* Suzanne and Max Lang.

*Home at Last.* Vera B. Williams and Chris Raschka.

*Last Stop on Market Street.* Matt de la Peña.

*Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match/Marisol McDonald No Combina.* Monica Brown.

*One Family.* George Shannon.

*Tar Beach.* Faith Ringgold.

*This Is the Rope: A Story from the Great Migration.* Jacqueline Woodson.

*Thunder Boy Junior.* Sherman Alexie.

*We Belong Together: A Book About Adoption and Families.* Todd Parr.

### **DIVERSE AND UP-TO-DATE RESOURCES FROM WELCOMING SCHOOLS**

[Children's Books to Embrace Family Diversity](#)

[Lesson Plans to Embrace Family Diversity](#)

[Embracing Family Diversity School Resources](#)

[Family Diversity Vocabulary](#)

[Professional Development Training](#)

Credit: Adapted from a lesson plan developed by Emmy Howe, [nationalseedproject.org](http://nationalseedproject.org). Artwork: Todd Parr.