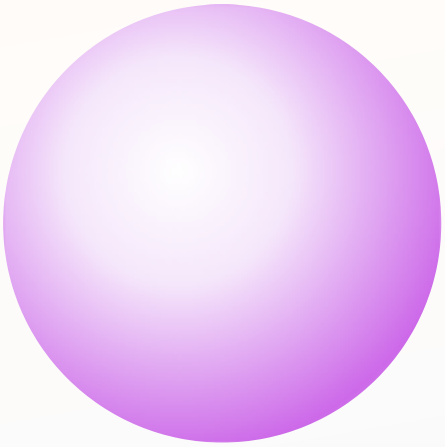
EARLYCHILDHOODEDUNET

Joining In at Group Time

A Notice, Wonder, Adapt Planner for Early Childhood Educators



For when a child often leaves, avoids or seems to struggle at group or mat time, and you're not sure whether to change anything, or what.

1 Notice · 2 Check · 3 Wonder · 4 Adapt and review

For educators of children about 2 to 5 years · Free sample · A4 and US Letter

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START HERE

How This Planner Works

Group time asks a lot of young children at once: sitting close to others, listening, waiting and joining in on cue. When a child often leaves or struggles, it's easy to jump to "they won't" or "they can't". This planner slows that down. It helps you look at the **activity** before the child, decide whether anything needs to change, and test one small change.

1 Notice

Write what you saw, not what you think it means.

2 Check

Does anything need to change? Sometimes the answer is no.

3 Wonder

Look at group time through nine lenses. Pick your two best guesses.

4 Adapt and review

Try one small change for 3 to 5 sessions, then decide what next.

How to use it

- Print the **one-page planner** (page 3). That's the tool you'll reuse.
- Pages 4 to 8 guide each step. Read them once, then use them as needed.
- Pages 9 to 11 show three worked examples.
- It takes about 10 minutes to fill in, plus a few days of trying.
- Use a first name or initials, and store it as your service's privacy policy requires.

What this planner is not

- It doesn't diagnose or label a child.
- It isn't a behaviour support plan, and it doesn't replace advice from the child's family, health professionals or inclusion support.
- It isn't for situations where anyone is unsafe. Follow your service's procedures first.
- One observation never proves why a child did something. It gives you a better guess to test.



Joining in doesn't have to mean sitting in the circle. Watching, listening from the edge or singing along from across the room can all be ways of taking part.

THE TOOL · COPY AS OFTEN AS YOU NEED

One-Page Planner

Child: _____ **Date:** _____ **Educator:** _____

1 Notice: what I saw

When? For how long? What happened just before? What did the child do and seem drawn to? What did the child say or show about it? What happened next?

2 Check: does anything need to change?

- ☐ Everyone was safe
- ☐ The child seemed calm or content
- ☐ They were connected in some way
- ☐ They seemed distressed
- ☐ They're missing something that matters to them
- ☐ The group couldn't continue

☐ **No change for now.** Keep inviting. Look again on: _____ ☐ **Wonder and try something** (go to step 3)

3 Wonder: which lenses might matter? Tick any.

- ☐ Timing
- ☐ Length
- ☐ Space and closeness
- ☐ Sound, light and busyness
- ☐ Body and movement
- ☐ Language load
- ☐ Interest and meaning
- ☐ Predictability
- ☐ Role and connection

My two best guesses:

4 Adapt: one small change we'll try

Who: _____ **Start:** _____ **Look again after session:** _____

Review after 3 to 5 sessions

What did we notice? What else changed this week?

☐ Keep it ☐ Tweak it ☐ Try a different change ☐ Talk with the family or get more support

Step 2: Does Anything Need to Change?

Not every child who stays out of the circle needs fixing. Children take part in group life in many ways, and watching others play has been recognised as a common kind of play for nearly a century. This step helps you decide whether to act, or to keep inviting and watch a little longer.

Taking part can look like

watching from nearby · listening from the edge · joining the songs only · moving or rocking while listening · holding a favourite object · joining for one part · being the helper · replaying it later in play

It may be fine for now if

- everyone is safe
- the child seems calm or content
- they're connected in some way: watching, listening, smiling, singing along

Then: keep inviting warmly, make it easy to come closer, and look again in a week or two.

Wonder and try something if

- the child seems distressed or overwhelmed
- they're missing something that matters to them, such as time with friends or a favourite story
- the group can't continue

Then: go to step 3.

Get more support if

- distress is intense, frequent or getting worse
- it's happening across the day, not just at group time
- anyone is unsafe

Then: talk with your leader and the family, and follow your service's processes. In Australia that may include your Inclusion Agency.



"No change for now" is a real decision, not giving up. Write down when you'll look again.

WORKED EXAMPLE · WHEN NO CHANGE IS NEEDED

Example 3: Watching From the Home Corner

Example made up for illustration. Not a real child or case study.

Situation	Mina, 2 and a half, started three weeks ago. Her family speaks another language at home.
Observed	Each day Mina stood in the home corner holding a doll and watched group time. She mouthed along to the hello song and smiled at the puppets. When invited, she shook her head.
Known and unknown	**Known:** she's watching closely and seems calm and interested. **Unknown:** how much English she understands yet, and what helps her feel settled.
Check	Safe, content and connected through watching and mouthing the song. Not distressed. Decision: **no change for now.** Watching is how Mina is taking part at the moment.
Wonderings	Not needed yet, though language load and predictability are worth keeping in mind.
What we did and why	Kept inviting with a smile and a gesture. Put a cushion at the edge of the mat, facing the home corner. Asked her family for a hello word to add to the song. These make coming closer easy without asking her to.
After two weeks	On several days Mina sat on the edge cushion for the songs and joined the hand actions. She still went back to the home corner for the story.
What we can reasonably learn	Being allowed to watch didn't stop her from moving closer.
Still uncertain	She may simply be settling with time. We can't say the cushion or the hello word made the difference.
Next step	Keep things as they are. Share the progress with her family and look again in a month.