



On My Way

A Career Readiness Curriculum Guide
for Schools and Youth Programs

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Session 6

First Day Lessons

SEL FOCUS: SELF-MANAGEMENT/RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

WORK READINESS FOCUS: COMMUNICATION & INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Story: “Rush Hour at Macy’s” by Sharif Berkeley

Story Summary: Sharif’s new job isn’t what he expected. During his first day, he faces impatient customers, an uncooperative cash register, and self-doubt. However, by remaining calm and accepting help from a colleague, he gets through a stressful shift without giving up. Sharif ultimately proves to himself, his supervisor, and his customers that he can be successful on the job.

Learning Objectives

Youth will increase their work readiness skills by:

- Understanding that learning on the job means accepting help from supervisors and coworkers
- Increasing their ability to recognize the importance of managing their emotions under stressful situations
- Practicing asking for help as a tool of persistence in the face of challenges

Youth will build their SEL and literacy by:

- Making meaning of text through group read-aloud and discussion
- Increasing their ability to communicate clearly and listen actively
- Increasing their ability to seek and offer help when needed

Materials

- Group agreements and agenda, posted
- On My Way* anthologies, one for each group member
- Chart paper and markers

Preparation

- Read the story ahead of time.
- Prepare the session agenda.
- Create an open space in the room for the Concentric Circles activity.
- Write up steps for Concentric Circles activity (**in bold**) on chart paper (optional).
- Prepare role play directions (**in bold**) on the chart paper.
- Make copies of Asking for Help on the First Day handout, one for each group member (pp. 80-81).

GETTING STARTED

Welcome everyone and have them sit in a circle. Review the agenda (posted):

Agenda: First Day Lessons

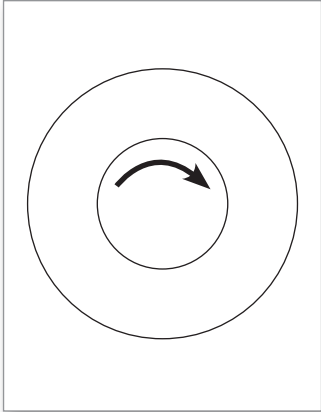
- Review Group Agreements
- Opening Activity: Concentric Circles
- Read and Discuss: "Rush Hour at Macy's" by Sharif Berkeley
- Explore the Ideas Activity: Role Play
- Closing Circle

OPENING ACTIVITY — CONCENTRIC CIRCLES

(8 minutes)

This pre-reading activity will activate background knowledge to boost reading comprehension and set the emotional tone for the story.

1. After reviewing the agenda, tell the group that they will be doing an activity in which they can practice professional greetings and listening skills.



2. While the group is still seated, read aloud the activity procedure that you wrote on chart paper:
 - You will form two standing circles, one inside the other.
 - Each person will be facing a partner.
 - I will read questions aloud and everyone will have a chance to respond while their partner listens.
3. Divide group members into two equal groups. One way to do this is to have group members count off 1-2. (If you don't have two equal groups, you can join one.)
4. Have the 1s stand and move into the open space you cleared and form a circle facing *outward*.
5. Have the 2s stand and form a second circle around the first one, facing *inward*.
6. Then explain to the group that the person they're facing will be their first partner.

7. Review the specific steps of the activity with the group (you may wish to write these steps on chart paper for group members' reference):
 - **You will take turns responding to a question that I ask.**
 - **When one person speaks, the other listens.**
 - **When I say "Switch," the speaker and the listener will switch roles.**
 - **When time is up, I will ask one circle to rotate and everyone will have a new partner.**
8. Have partners greet each other by shaking hands and saying "Hello".
9. Ask the group:
 - "What do you do to stay calm when you get stressed out at work or school?"
10. After both partners have answered the question, ask the inside circle to move two spaces to the right while the outside circle stands still. With new pairs formed, have group members greet their new partner.
11. Time permitting, repeat the process using these other prompts:
 - "Do you find it easy to ask for help? Explain why or why not."
 - "Why do you think it's sometimes hard for people to accept help, even when they need it?"
12. Have everyone return to their seats and thank group members for sharing.

READ AND DISCUSS THE STORY (30 minutes)

By practicing active reading strategies while reading aloud and discussing as a group, group members build comprehension and support fluency.

1. **Introduce the story:** Explain to the group that you are going to read a story by a young man who faces several challenges on his first day of work that almost defeat him.
2. **Set expectations for reading the story:** Sitting in a circle, group members take turns reading aloud. They should be given the option of passing when it's their turn.



Tell the group to turn to p. 39 in their anthologies. (See the leader's version in this guide for stories with discussion questions included.)

3. **Read and discuss the story together:** As group leader, you should pause the reading when you arrive at an open-ended question within the text (**in bold**). Ask the group this question and facilitate a short discussion before returning to the text.



Rush Hour at Macy's

By Sharif Berkeley

Imagine you're working at a cash register in a department store. Several people are waiting on line with their purchases. Suddenly there's a malfunction with the register and it won't let any transactions go through. The people on line get restless and start to complain.

You break into a nervous sweat, then you try the transaction again. It still won't go through. Now the line is even longer than before and you still haven't finished with your first customer. You hear people say, "Come on already," and, "He is so slow," but of course they don't understand that it's your first day at work and the faulty computer isn't making it any better.

That's exactly what happened to me on my first day at Macy's.

I had wanted to work at Macy's for the longest time. When I finally got hired, I thought it was going to be a wonderful experience. If I had known that the first day was going to be so hectic, I would have paid more attention in the 15-hour training course.

My employer had placed me in electronics at first because I'm an expert in that field, but there was so much confusion between the employees and the management that I had to be placed in the housewares department.

That put a damper on my enthusiasm because I knew nothing about pots, pans, and all that house stuff. To top it off, I was stationed right next to the clearance area, where people were running around grabbing things up like they were possessed by shopping demons. It was like being thrown into a lion's cage after being marinated in A.1. Steak Sauce.

It was a little past 5 o'clock, and I was unfortunately caught up in the shopping rush hour. I thought I would remember all the instructions from the training course, but when I got nervous, I forgot a lot of things.

My first customer approached with several items from the clearance area. I

scanned the first two items, no problem. But the next three had no price on them. I scanned the UPC symbols, and all three came up as one cent each. This couldn't be right; nothing in Macy's sells for one cent. I asked the other cashiers how much the items really were and they didn't know.

I looked back at my register and saw two more people waiting on line. I called my manager and he said that the items were 97 cents each. When I came back there were five people waiting on my line. I thought that everything was all right because now I could move on to the next customer with no problem, but I thought too soon.

My first customer gave me a check! And—just my luck—my check reader wasn't working. By this time, the other customers waiting on line were irritable and discussing my performance among themselves.

I started to panic. I knew that if the check reader wasn't working, I had to enter the sets of numbers on the check manually, but I forgot how! I tried, but I entered the numbers in the wrong sequence three times. I was sweating and I felt like the people waiting on line were grim reapers, ready to kill me on the spot if I didn't hurry up.

**READ-ALoud
QUESTION**

["How do you think Sharif is feeling? How do you know when you feel that way? "]

Finally, another cashier took pity on me and came over to assist me. The people had been standing on line so long that the manager decided to give them coffee mugs just to calm them down. The cashier standing beside me told them that it was my first day and that I was nervous.

To my amazement, the customers all had a change of face. A lot of them understood the position that I was in and some even said to my manager, "If it's his first day, someone should have been helping him out the whole time."

A few of them came up to me and told me not to feel bad, and that they knew what it was like to be new on the job. After that, my wounds of disappointment were covered by a Band-Aid of confidence. I didn't think people had that much compassion. Through the rest of the day, I gradually got the hang of things,

thanks to my coworkers, who are still there for me whenever I need help or a price check.

That first day was one I would never forget: the feeling of all eyes on me, people telling me to hurry up, the beads of sweat on my forehead, and the nerve-racking anxiety. I felt like I was on stage in front of a crowd for the first time. It all made me wish that I had paid more attention in the training session.

It's been a long while since my first day and now I've got the hang of everything. I go through customers like water. Not a day goes by without me having huge sales. Some of the same customers I saw on my first day come back to shop, and they say hi and notice that I've improved. I even have customers who like to come to my line because I treat them better than some of the other cashiers do.

["Why do you think Sharif changed? What did he learn about asking for help on the job?"]

READ-ALoud
QUESTION

6

The first day on any job can be hectic, whether you're dealing with customers or your boss constantly looking over your shoulder. My advice is to be persistent and don't doubt yourself. Even though some people may look down on you because you're new, don't give them any excuse to believe what they think of you. Do your job to the best of your ability.

I'm glad I stuck with it because now I find the job rewarding. The feeling of being good at my job—plus my helpful coworkers, friendly customers, and the fat check I get on Fridays—makes it all worthwhile.

["Think about your first day of high school or your first day at a new job. How did you feel? What's changed for you since that first day?"]

READ-ALoud
QUESTION

Sharif was 18 when he wrote this story. He later graduated from high school and college and worked in computer sales and management information systems.



EXPLORE THE IDEAS ACTIVITY — ROLE PLAY

(15 minutes)

During this post-reading activity group members will make connections, build understanding, and rehearse positive behaviors.

1. Introduce the next activity by explaining to the group:
 - “Now that we’ve read the story, we’re going to perform role plays where we rehearse ways to offer and accept help in the workplace.”
2. Have group members find partners and then refocus them for directions.
3. Explain that there are two roles in both scenarios:
 - Stressed-out worker who needs help
 - Helpful colleague or supervisor who wants to help
4. Pass out the Asking for Help on the First Day handout (pp. 80-81).
5. Tell group members to talk through the roles and scenarios with their partners using what they learned from the story. Explain that each role has a dramatic need. A dramatic need is what the character wants. They should show what the dramatic need is for their characters when they act out their role plays.
6. Have partners decide who is going to play which role.
7. After one quick run-through, bring everyone back to the whole group. Explain that improv is not scripted and actors don’t prepare. Actors jump right into the role play and bring it to life by responding to each other, based on the dramatic need of their character.
8. Ask partners to perform their role play for the group. If they get stuck, ask audience members for suggestions the actors can try.

9. After each role play, ask everyone:
 - “What did you see stressed-out *workers* do that helped to manage the challenge? Why?”
 - “What did you see helpful *colleagues* do that helped to manage the challenge? Why?”
 - “Do you have any new ideas or suggestions for the characters?”

10. Thank group members for performing, supporting, and sharing.

CLOSING CIRCLE (7 minutes)

In Closing Circle, group members make personal connections to the story and share their take-aways with each other.

Guide group members in a go-round share of responses to these prompts:

1. “What stood out for you in Sharif’s story, ‘Rush Hour at Macy’s,’ and our activities today?”

2. Finish this sentence: “One challenge I have with asking for help is...”

LEADER REFLECTION

After leading this session, reflect on the prompts below through writing, discussion with a colleague, or just by sitting and thinking:

- Research has indicated that stress—whether it is related to school, work, or personal life—is one of the main concerns of young people today. What are the stressors your group members face? How are they impacted by stress? What strategies do you see them use to persist through this stress?

- How do you handle stress on the job? Sharif learns to ask for help. Who is your support team to help you with the stress of working with youth?



First Day Lessons

"Rush Hour at Macy's" by Sharif Berkeley

Asking for Help on the First Day

- 1. Challenging Situation:** Excited about her new job at the public library, Lateesha arrives at the branch early to get ready for her shift. She looks at the posted work schedule and discovers her hours aren't right, even though she notified her supervisor when she was available to work. She is scheduled to work when she has night school, and when she has basketball practice. It's her first day on the job and she doesn't want to cause any problems, but there is no way she can work this schedule. It's time for her to start her shift but she has gone from feeling positive to feeling stressed-out and upset.

Stressed Worker: Lateesha, who needs a work schedule that works for her

Helpful Colleague or Supervisor: Helpful colleague or supervisor who wants to help Lateesha figure out her schedule

- 2. Challenging Situation:** Christopher loves little kids and has experience working with them. His new job at the recreation center has him supervising 15 elementary school kids. He has never been in charge of a group this big. It's time to hand out their snacks, which should be easy. But the kids are yelling, running around, grabbing snacks, and arguing about which flavor they want. Christopher is already overwhelmed when he realizes he doesn't have enough snacks for everyone. He must have made a mistake counting them. He knows he can't leave the group unsupervised, but there is going to be a rebellion if he can't get more snacks. Hearing all the noise, a coworker walks into the room.

Stressed Worker: Christopher, who needs help feeding hungry kids

Helpful Colleague or Supervisor: Coworker, who wants to help Christopher with the snack situation



3. **Challenging Situation:** Krystal is starting her first day working at a local electronics store. She considers herself an expert with television and other home entertainment electronics, but her manager places her in kitchen appliances. She feels nervous and a bit overwhelmed. She recognizes refrigerators, ovens, and dishwashers but is confused with all the different features of each appliance. She studies the salesperson manual, but before she can finish and feel confident in her knowledge, a customer asks her the difference between two refrigerators. Krystal walks over to the appliances in question, and they look identical to her. She examines the tags and stickers on the refrigerators but they do not help. The customer is visibly irritated.

Stressed Worker: Krystal, who can't answer a customer's question

Helpful Colleague or Supervisor: A fellow salesperson in the department who sees Krystal is struggling

4. **Challenging Situation:** On his first day at his internship at an insurance agency, Raj is assigned a desk and computer, and he couldn't be happier. He's worked hard to get this internship and sees it as an opportunity to gain valuable experience and college credit at the same time. His supervisor gives him an assignment: enter client data into the agency's database. He's given a stack of insurance policies and logged into the database software, and his supervisor abruptly leaves. Raj stares at the screen. He's never seen this software before, nor has he worked in a database before. He moves his mouse around but is afraid to press any of the buttons on the screen just in case he erases everything. Looking around, everyone is glued to their computer screens.

Stressed Worker: Raj, who has been asked to enter data into a program he's never used before

Helpful Colleague or Supervisor: Raj's supervisor, who notices that Raj isn't entering data