



Learning for Peace: How Peacemaker Circles Are Transforming Our School Community

By Amy Beech & Haley Boulton | St Paul's CE Primary School, Stoke-on-Trent

In a small Church of England primary school nestled in one of the more deprived areas of Stoke-on-Trent, something powerful is happening. Each Friday at 2:30pm, classrooms across St Paul's fall quiet—not in discipline, but in anticipation. Chairs are moved into circles and for 30 minutes, the focus shifts entirely to connection,

reflection, and peace.

We are Amy Beech (Behaviour Lead and PSHE Lead) and Haley Boulton (Christian Distinctiveness Lead), and this is how Peacemakers' *Learning for Peace* programme has transformed our school.

Why We Needed Peacemakers

St Paul's is a diverse, one-and-a-half form entry primary with around 250 pupils, many of whom face significant challenges: high levels of pupil premium eligibility, a large proportion of EAL learners, and community unrest outside the school gates.

While conflict wasn't a dominant issue within school, we recognised that many of our children were bringing tensions from home and community life into their daily experiences. We wanted to give them tools—not just to manage conflict, but to become *agents of peace*. Peacemakers offered just that: a chance to equip our children with empathy, emotional literacy, and the confidence to speak, listen, and resolve.

How Peace Circles Work at St Paul's

Every Friday, the school "collapses" into Circle Time. All teaching and support staff join their classes in sessions built around dialogue, activities, and emotional check-ins. The simplicity is part of its power: a circle of chairs or carpet spaces, a talking object passed with care, and a safe space where all voices matter.

In EYFS, even our three-year-olds take part with adapted, bite-sized sessions. In Year 6, pupils now lead games and discussions themselves. The structure is simple, but the impact is profound.

Stories That Stay with Us

There are dozens of moments we could share—but one stands out. A girl in Year 5 with additional needs, often withdrawn and quiet, now consistently shows up with enthusiasm for Circle Time. She chooses to participate. She feels safe. She speaks. Watching her settle onto a beanbag each week and share her thoughts voluntarily has been nothing short of transformative.

In Year 1, it's the joy and anticipation—"Is it Learning for Peace today?" they ask every Friday morning. And on the playground later, we overhear them using strategies from the sessions to resolve disagreements. These are not isolated moments—they're signs of long-term change taking root.

Challenges and Learning Curves

It wasn't all smooth sailing. Some children were reluctant at first. A few staff felt unsure—particularly around diverging from the session guides. But with time, confidence grew. We emphasised that the *Learning for Peace* resource is a springboard, not a script. Now, staff adapt sessions to their classes' needs and feel empowered to lead them authentically.

Logistics were another hurdle—especially moving furniture in small classrooms. But with creative thinking and teamwork, we found ways to make it work. Having an extra adult in sessions, especially for classes with high additional needs, has also been key.

Impact Beyond the Circle

Circle Time doesn't stop when the session ends. Children refer back to the ideas discussed, applying them to real-life situations. We hear older pupils say things like, "It's okay—you're good at different things," or "You made me laugh today," echoing the affirmations shared in our weekly *Magic Carpet* activity.

The mixer games—like "The Sun Shines on You"—have also become favourites, especially in upper Key Stage 2. They subtly encourage pupils to interact beyond friendship groups and break down social barriers. And they're fun.

Perhaps most significantly, we've seen a rise in self-confidence and peer support, especially among quieter or more vulnerable pupils. For a child on the edge of a friendship group to sit in the middle of a circle and hear kind words from peers—it's more than affirming. It's identity-shaping.

Staff Experience and Whole-School Culture

We knew for Peacemakers to succeed, the whole staff had to feel it—not just implement it. That’s why our training involved *doing* a circle, not just learning about one.

Experiencing the Magic Carpet ourselves helped us understand the vulnerability our pupils might feel. Since then, support staff have been fully included, often co-leading sessions. This has created a shared sense of ownership and respect.

Feedback from staff has been overwhelmingly positive. Many say it’s the most peaceful and purposeful way to end the week. Others have started incorporating PSHE teaching into the circle structure. One teacher said they now notice children referencing Peacemakers’ ideas in unexpected moments—proof that the learning is embedding deeply.

What We’ve Learned—and What We’d Say to Other Schools

Peace Circles are not a tick-box activity. It’s a culture shift. It requires time, commitment, and a willingness to adapt. But the rewards—stronger relationships, safer classrooms, and more emotionally literate children—are well worth it.

If your school is considering Peacemakers, our advice is simple: **Just try it.** Visit a school running it. Experience a circle. Give your staff space to experiment and make it their own. The programme offers incredible resources, with accessible guidance and downloadable materials that don’t add hours to planning time.

Yes, timetables are tight. But when you prioritise peace, the time can be found—and the outcomes ripple far beyond the circle.

Looking Ahead

We see *Learning for Peace* as a long-term investment. The full impact may not be visible for years—but we’re laying foundations. Foundations for communities where children grow into adults who listen, reflect, and lead with empathy. That’s a future worth building.

As a school, we’re proud to be part of that journey. And we’re only just getting started.