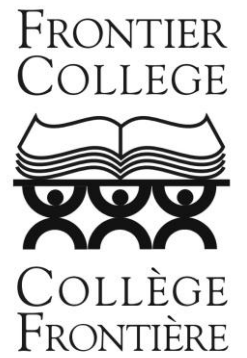
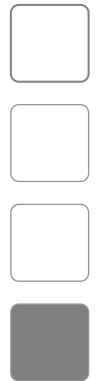


A FRONTIER COLLEGE ORGANIZER'S GUIDE



So you want to start a reading circle...

How to set up and run reading circles.



Literacy. Learning for Life.

Revised August 2009

FRONTIER
COLLEGE



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Introduction

For more than 100 years Frontier College has been collaborating with communities across Canada to ensure all Canadians have the reading and writing skills to reach their full potential. Since 1988 we have worked with reading circle leaders throughout Canada to establish community based reading circles by providing resources, training and advice.

We are very excited as this guide is a compilation of the knowledge, experience and best practice that has accumulated from this work. As you do, we care about the growth and development of children and we hope you find this information useful in establishing a reading circle for the children of your community. Ensuring that children learn to read, and to read well, enables them to find success in all areas of their lives. It builds knowledge, confidence and creativity.

This guide is to help interested individuals, groups and organizations set up and run effective reading circles. They are easy to organize, inexpensive to run and have lifelong impact on children. Thank you for your commitment to the children in your community. I know you will find this guide an invaluable resource.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Scampbell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent 'S' at the beginning.

Sherry Campbell
President
Frontier College



Frontier College

Literacy. Learning for Life.

Frontier College is Canada's original literacy organization. Founded in 1899 by a small group of university students, Frontier College began by sending student volunteers to the frontiers of Canada: logging camps, mining towns and rail gangs. They laboured alongside workers during the day and taught in the evenings and on weekends.

Today, we work with Canadians who have little or no access to other educational opportunities or who need extra learning support to reach their goals. Our volunteers serve on Canada's "new frontiers" — inner-city schools and streets, public housing sites, farms, prisons and reserves.

Low literacy skills are directly linked to poverty, poor health and high unemployment. Literacy is more than just the ability to read and write. It's the ability to understand the printed word and to put it to use. It's about strengthening culture, achieving goals, gaining knowledge and recognizing potential. It's about succeeding in today's world. Forty-two percent (42%) of adult Canadians do not have the literacy skills they require to fully function in our society. That's millions of Canadians who are not reaching their potential. Literacy is an essential skill in today's world. At Frontier College, we believe it's a fundamental right. Frontier College provides access to this right by reaching out to people across Canada, responding to their learning needs and encouraging lifelong learning. We achieve our mission for literacy through the following: volunteer mobilization, youth leadership development and community capacity building.

Our philosophy of learning

- All individuals have a right to learn and a right to literacy so they can better participate in their community.
- We go where people are rather than expecting them to come to us.
- We use a learner-centred approach whereby learners decide what they want to learn.
- We believe that every place is a learning place.
- We value a tutorial partnership where learner and tutor respect and learn from each other.
- We value the contributions learners, volunteers and partners make in the learning experience.

Table of Contents

What is a reading circle?	2
Key factors for success	3
How to start a reading circle	4
Launch your reading circle	6
Encouraging positive behaviour	8
Volunteer management	9
Training volunteers	11
Fundraising	15

Appendices

List of Appendices	17
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The appendices contain samples of forms, letters, questionnaires and training activities that you can use to set up a successful reading circle. Feel free to adapt these documents to suit the needs of the program.

What is a reading circle?

A reading circle is a place where children can read for enjoyment by themselves, with another child, or with an adult. Children and volunteers get together to enjoy books and stories for an hour or so every week. The main purpose of a reading circle is to provide a safe place where children can develop a love of reading and books.

Generally speaking, reading circles are organized for children ages 4 to 8 years of age (i.e., grades K to 3) but there are circles for preschoolers and also for students up to grade 6. Reading circles can focus on children in a specific grade or for children with a range of ages.

Reading circles can be organized in community centres, after school programs, shelters, Friendship Centres, housing common rooms, libraries – anywhere families and children gather.

Anyone can organize a reading circle; community leaders, parents, community agency staff, teachers or librarians. A reading circle is simple to run, doesn't need to cost any money and requires little training for volunteers. Common sense, imagination, commitment and enthusiasm are essential!

A reading circle is often the first literacy program in a community to be established. A number of reading circles have evolved into homework clubs or one-to-one tutoring programs to meet the complex needs of the older children in the community. For information on setting up and running homework and tutoring programs for children and youth, go to the [resources section](#) of the Frontier College website at www.frontiercollege.ca

However, many reading circles have run for several years keeping the original goal of providing a safe place for children to develop a love of reading, laying a strong foundation for children's literacy development.

A child rushes into the recreation room, puts on her name tag and picks a book off the table where library books have been attractively displayed. A volunteer approaches and asks if she would like to read together. Together they sit down and share the story. This is the beginning of another weekly reading circle. Other children come in and choose books to read by themselves. Soon clusters of readers in pairs and in groups are all around the room laughing, reading and looking at the books.

Key factors for success

- **Start small and see how it works and how you can make it grow.** Start a pilot project with 10 to 15 children, 10 weeks and 4 or 5 volunteers.
- **Keep it simple.** Create a simple structure and format, so that the program will continue to run.
- **Build a strong organizing team;** make sure that everyone feels like they have ownership of the program. Alternate roles and responsibilities on the team, so that if someone can't make it, or leaves the team, the reading circle will continue without them.
- **Choose a location and time** that works well for the children as well as the volunteers that come to the reading circle.
- **Ensure everyone has a common understanding** of the vision and purpose of the reading circle.
- **Register the children** to ensure commitment and also for safety reasons.
- **Support your volunteers;** screen, train, support and appreciate your volunteers.
- **Structure the reading circle** so the children are engaged and motivated to attend.
- **Bring in new and interesting books** to keep the interest of the children.
- **Build in variety** such as fun learning activities, guest speakers, trips, etc.
- **Involve parents** to help with commitment and to manage the behaviour of the children.
- **It's about relationships.** Make sure the children, volunteers and parents have the opportunity to develop strong supportive relationships.
- **Build community support.** Invite leaders to events and promote your programs in the community through local media. Contact the local literacy agency in your community. Let them know about your program. They can be a great resource for you.
- **Celebrate your successes.** Launch your circle, praise the children and volunteers regularly, and hold a final celebration to acknowledge everyone's commitment and hard work.

How to start a reading circle

1. Find people to help you.

Invite about 3 to 5 friends, parents, teachers, librarians or other community leaders to help you. This is your organizing team. They will be responsible for the success of the reading circle! Make sure everyone has some responsibility and is involved in the decision making for the reading circle. Hold a meeting to make your decisions. See [Appendix A](#) for suggestions on holding a successful meeting.

Responsibilities of your organizing team can include:

- Finding and booking a location for the reading circle
- Recruiting, screening and training the volunteers
- Obtaining good quality books from the library
- Promoting the reading circle
- Fundraising for prizes and materials for crafts
- Providing supervision for the reading circle

Start small and grow.
When you establish a new reading circle, begin with a pilot project. Start with a 10 week program involving 10 to 15 children with 4 or 5 volunteers. Tell everyone that you want to learn from your experiences and build on your successes.

2. Decide upon the goal for the reading circle.

What do you want to accomplish through the reading circle? Consider the age group of the children, what skills you want them to build, and how you will achieve these goals. Is there a specific group of children you would like to focus on?

3. Conduct outreach to children and families in your community.

Start with 10 to 15 children in the reading circle. If you don't have an existing connection with the children in your community, work with a school, community centre or settlement service provider. It is important to register the children for safety reasons as well as to ensure commitment. See [Appendix B](#) for a sample registration form.

4. Find a place for the reading circle.

A reading circle can be held in a school, library, community centre, or a Friendship Centre. Look for a clean room where there are mats or chairs and tables and access to a bathroom. Choose a location where the children already live, play or learn that is also convenient for

the volunteers and parents. Think about safety issues. Can the volunteers and children travel safely to and from the location?

5. Choose a time for the reading circle.

Choose a day and time when children are most likely to come to the reading circle. Stick to the same time each week. Weekday mornings are popular times for preschool children. Saturday afternoons or after school works best for older kids. Make sure that the time you pick works for the volunteers and parents too!

6. Choose books for the reading circle.

Talk to your local librarian about the reading circle and ask for advice with selecting books. A good rule of thumb is to borrow about 40 good quality children's books to use in the program or two books for each child for every time that you run the reading circle. Make sure they are in good shape so they are appealing to the children. After the circle is up and running, take note of the books that the children read, or better yet, ask the children for advice. Remember to borrow new books regularly (about every two to three weeks) from the library.

Make sure to have a wide selection of books for children to choose from. Bring stories and books that reflect the children's own culture and community and can teach them about others as well. Remember that each child is unique. Build your knowledge of children's books so that you are familiar with titles that have been popular with kids for many years, as well as those that are current bestsellers. Again, keep your eyes open for books that are culturally diverse.

Don't worry about what "grade level" or "age appropriate" books the children pick. Keep in mind that you want to focus on building a love of books, rather than reading skills. Some children will learn to read sooner than others, but every child can become a book lover.

7. Gather Support for the reading circle.

Promote the reading circle. Tell your friends and neighbours about the reading circle and post flyers in the community. Ask local businesses to provide snacks or small prizes. Kick off the first reading circle with a bang and invite a "local celebrity" (like a firefighter, politician, story-teller, a council member, a local athlete or musician) to read aloud at the launch or give out prizes.

Launch your reading circle

60 Minute Program

1. Arrive early

It is important that you arrive early to set up the room in a comfortable way. Display the books at the children's eye level.

2. Give everyone a name tag as they arrive

You may wish to serve snacks as you welcome people to the launch of the reading circle.

3. Introductions and Goal of reading circle (10 minutes)

Ask everyone to introduce themselves and then discuss together the purpose of the reading circle. Talk about how the reading circle will be run and describe the group activity for the launch. For each reading circle, it works well if each child reads a familiar book, reads a new book and does a writing activity.

4. Get reading (25 minutes)

Encourage the children to choose a book, and to read with another child, a parent, a volunteer or by themselves. Some children will choose to read aloud, and others will prefer to listen to a story or to take turns reading page by page. Make sure that everyone is reading for fun! Focus on the stories, characters and pictures.

5. Gather for a group activity (20 minutes)

At the first reading circle, you may wish to hold a contest with the children to find a catchy name for the reading circle. Or you can invite a "local celebrity" reader such as the principal, a police officer or an athlete to read a story to the group.

At the end of the first reading circle, there are many group activities you can use, such as:

- Reading a book out loud

Keep things interesting

Once you get a good core group of children and volunteers together, experiment with different ways to have fun involving books and reading. Ask the children - they know lots of ways!

- Asking the group to create as many words as possible from a longer word such as encyclopedia (e.g., cycle, dial, open, need, etc.)
- Playing a group game such as word bingo, hangman

For group activities, it works well to have two volunteers who are responsible for running these activities each week.

6. Collect name tags and give out prizes (10 minutes)

Prizes can be anything – balloons, stickers, bookmarks, coupons or books. Make sure that every child gets a prize at some point. Remind everyone about next week’s circle and anything they need to bring.

Variations on reading circles

The ways that reading circles are run varies tremendously across the country. For example:

- **Structure:** Some reading circles begin with a group activity and then have the shared reading time. At some reading circles, for the group activity the volunteers read a story aloud to the circle. At other reading circles, the high school volunteers assume responsibility for organizing the group activity.
- **Homework:** Some reading circles allow time to complete homework, study for tests or work on a school project.
- **Snacks:** Some circles have the snack at the beginning to ensure the children are not hungry during the reading circle, whereas others give out the snack at the end to avoid children “eating and running.” Other circles do not serve snacks at all but have a potluck at the beginning and final celebration of the program.
- **Prizes:** Some reading circles choose not to draw for prizes but every few weeks, they give everyone a small prize. Other reading circles award prizes based on attendance; each time a child attends the reading circle, he or she receives a sticker on his or her name tag. After five or ten stickers, the child receives a prize.

Choose the system and structure that works the best for your children, your volunteers and your community.

Encouraging positive behaviour

All children are different and behave differently. This section provides you with advice on how to encourage positive behaviour that will make the reading circle fun and productive for everyone. Set up your program to ensure that everyone – children, parents, volunteers – enjoy and learn from participating in the reading circle.

- Brainstorm as a group some rules for the reading circle with the children, parents and volunteers. Make sure that the rules are clear and reasonable.
- Ensure that parents and volunteers enforce rules and behave in a consistent and predictable manner.
- Aim for a low ratio of volunteers to children.
- Keep the children interested by having a wide variety of books and bring in new books every few weeks.
- Recognize and reward good behaviour. Praise children when they are participating well in the reading circle.
- Make sure the reward system you select is fair and allows everyone to be acknowledged.
- Be proactive when children are being disruptive at the reading circle. Remember that you are in charge. Remind them about the rules for the reading circle; i.e., the reading circle welcomes everyone but certain behaviours are not welcome.
- Involve parents to help manage the children.
- If you have established a reading circle in partnership with a community group that already has connections with the children, ensure that a staff member is present at the reading circle to assist with supervising the children.
- Get to know the children. Reading circles are most successful when there is an atmosphere of mutual respect and appreciation. It's about relationships!

Sample Rules

Smarties Reading Circle

- We will arrive on time, ready to read.
- We are here to enjoy books and stories.
- We will respect the books and the other people who are reading.

All welcome!

Volunteer management

It is important to have volunteer management policies in place especially when you are working with children. These policies describe how volunteers are recruited, screened and trained. A volunteer management policy is something that benefits the volunteers, the participants and the program. These policies can be adapted to fit the program, but you should have a policy clearly written out before you begin. Here are some things you should think about when shaping a volunteer management policy:

1. Recruitment and orientation

What kind of volunteers are you looking for and what are your expectations for them? Once you know what kind of volunteers you want, you can begin to plan where and when you can reach these people. Aim for a ratio of one volunteer to two or three children. Think about whom in your community can help you. Consider:

- parents/older siblings
- high school students
- university and college students
- community volunteers

Recruit older children as volunteers. Both the younger and the older students will improve their reading skills by participating in a reading circle.

Conduct outreach to your target group, and then set up an orientation session where you share information about the reading circle and the expectations of volunteers. Make sure to leave lots of time for questions. You may wish to develop an orientation handout for your volunteers, which includes a volunteer job description. See [Appendix C](#) for a summary of information to include in your volunteer orientation handout.

2. Screening

All volunteers involved with your reading circle, including the organizing team must be screened. The screening process should include:

- a volunteer application ([Appendix D & E](#))
- an orientation
- a one-to-one interview ([Appendix F](#))
- training
- two character reference checks ([Appendix G](#))
- a police records check*

*The process for police records checks varies depending up where you live. Your local police will be able to help you. For more information, go to www.volunteer.ca.

3. Interview

The interview is an important part of the volunteer screening process. Conducting interviews allows you to find out more about the potential volunteer's interests, skills and experiences. It also gives you a chance to make sure that the person will be a good fit with your program. It is good to have two people conducting the interview so that you can compare impressions of the potential volunteer after the interview.

4. Support

Once your program is running and your volunteers are in place, make sure you have a plan on how to support and supervise the volunteers. You can decide if you want to have routine check-ins with volunteers, or identify a person that volunteers can go to with questions or concerns as they arise. The better the supervision you give the volunteers, the more likely they will stay with the program. Use the chart in [Appendix H](#) to keep track of attendance at the reading circle. Make sure that volunteers know their contributions are meaningful, and listen to suggestions that they make to improve the program. See [Appendix I](#) for a sample questionnaire to obtain feedback from volunteers.

5. Recognition

This is a huge part of any volunteer management policy. Making sure that volunteers feel appreciated and valued is the easiest way to ensure that they will remain volunteers – and recruit their friends. The simplest things like saying “thank you” after each session can be meaningful for the volunteers. You may want to have a more formal way of showing your appreciation at the end of the program. Good ideas for recognition include: certificates, providing reference letters, and/or organizing a volunteer recognition party. Be creative and most importantly, be genuine.

Training volunteers

Let's assume that you have a group of six to eight people who want to volunteer to read with children at your reading circle. You have decided on a date and a location for the training and you are ready to go. To help you plan and deliver your workshop, refer to [Appendix J](#) for a list of recommended training practices.

For the training, you will need name tags, a sign-in list, refreshments as well as a selection of children's books from the library. Bring ample copies of the reading circle volunteer handout in [Appendix K](#). Post the agenda on a wall. Display the books on a table so participants can easily see the book covers and arrange the chairs in a circle so everyone can see one another. Welcome the volunteers as they arrive.

1. Introductions and agenda review (10 minutes)

Introduce yourself and ask each person to introduce themselves and to talk about their favourite children's book. Other ice breakers include:

- Tell us why you want to volunteer in this reading circle?
- What is your favourite memory of a book or story?
- Why do you think reading is important?

2. Program overview and Student Centred Individualized Learning (15 minutes)

Spend a few minutes talking about why you want to start a reading circle. Explain that the reading circle is an opportunity for volunteers and parents / caregivers to come together in the community to share books and stories with children. It is a powerful tool to help children develop a love of reading. Summarize the logistics of the reading circle – location, time, format, volunteer responsibilities.

Sample Agenda (2 hours)

1. Introductions / agenda review (10 minutes)
2. Program overview and Student Centred Individualized Learning (15 minutes)
3. Choosing good books (15 minutes)
4. Role play a reading circle (20 minutes)
5. Break (10 minutes)
6. Group activities (20 minutes)
7. Scenarios (20 minutes)
8. Next steps / Evaluation (10 minutes)

You may wish to discuss the “*learning to read / reading to learn*” framework outlined in Appendix L to help your volunteers understand the learning to read process.

The learning approach that Frontier College uses is called Student Centred Individualized Learning (SCIL).

Principles of SCIL

- Everyone can learn.
- Everyone learns differently.
- Everyone has different strengths, interests and learning needs.
- Learning is based on a child’s strengths rather than his or her weaknesses.

Using SCIL, reading circle volunteers are encouraged to:

- Build strong relationships with the children they read with
- Focus on the children’s strengths, goals and interests
- Build respect, trust and a sense of equality
- Create a comfortable and secure environment
- Use a common-sense approach
- Encourage children to participate voluntarily in the learning process

3. Choosing good books (15 minutes)

Invite everyone to choose a book from the table. Ask each person to tell why he or she chose the book. Lead a discussion about choosing books for children. Remember to refer to the volunteer handout in [Appendix K](#) for this discussion.

Alternatively, you can talk about the characteristics of good books by holding a book scavenger hunt. See [Appendix M](#) for scavenger clues for this training activity, such as “a book that teaches about another place or culture”.

4. Role play a reading circle (20 minutes)

Explain to the group that together you will role play a reading circle. Divide the group into two; one group will role play the children and the other group will be themselves. Encourage the volunteers to get into the role play, especially the “children.” The role play could include:

- The “children coming in and getting their name tags and stickers. You may wish to assign roles to the “children.” For example, a child who asks a lot of questions, tells the stories from the pictures, who rarely talks, or who makes errors when reading.
- Volunteers inviting the “children” to choose a book and read with them
- Reading in pairs or small groups for 10 minutes

Talk about strategies on reading aloud with children using the volunteer training handout in [Appendix K](#) as a guide to your discussion. Use these leading questions to debrief the role play.

- How did you make the story interesting?
- Who selected the book? Who held it? Who turned the pages?
- What do you do if the child:
 - tells the story using the pictures?
 - asks a lot of questions?
 - is easily distracted?
 - is very quiet?
 - makes errors when reading?
 - does not want to finish the book?
 - only wants you to read?

Show the reading circle video. You can also help your volunteers visualize how reading circles work by showing the Frontier College video “So you want to start a reading circle” which is available for purchase. Visit Frontier College New Readers Bookstore website at www.frontiercollegebooks.ca

5. Group activities (20 minutes)

Brainstorm some other activities that could be used. See [Appendix N](#) for a list of literacy-based group activities. Choose a lively activity to do with your volunteers as a training activity.

- Rap and Read – in small group, write a short rap song to share with group
- Mini-Theatre – in small groups, act out a well known children’s story
- Posters – make posters to promote your reading circle

If you are training volunteers for an established reading circle, bring crafts, stories and letters completed by the children to show to the volunteers.

6. Scenarios (20 minutes)

Pick three or four of the scenarios in [Appendix O](#) to help your volunteers anticipate and deal with challenging situations that may arise in your reading circle. Divide your volunteers into small groups and ask them to report back to the group on how they would deal with the situation described in the scenario. Allow them 5 minutes to develop their response. Give them the option of “acting out” their scenario or orally summarizing their plan of action.

When debriefing the scenarios, discuss strategies that worked and didn’t work from the perspective of both the child and the volunteer. Draw upon everyone’s experiences.

7. Next Steps and evaluation (10 minutes)

Ask for written feedback from your volunteers so you can improve your training as well as answer any questions they may still have. Then make plans for the first reading circle. A few sample evaluation questions are:

- Do you feel ready to volunteer in this reading circle?
- What did you learn today?
- What other information would be helpful?

Additional training resource: Refer to the *Frontier College Trainers Guide: Training Homework Club Volunteers* if you would like to train your volunteers on techniques to help a beginning reader learn how to read. This guide is available in the [resources section](#) of the Frontier College website at www.frontiercollege.ca

Fundraising

Although reading circles are inexpensive to run, you will still need name tags, stickers, small prizes or giveaway books and healthy snacks for the children and volunteers.

- Ask the children if they would like to run a fundraiser for the reading circle such as a read-a-thon or a bottle drive.
- Hold a book drive.
- Ask local businesses for donations-in-kind of snacks, supplies or books.
- Ask local faith or service groups to support your reading circle.

Some basic steps to fundraising:

1. **Have realistic, defined goals.** For example, raise money for buying new books to give to the children.
2. **Communicate.** Let people know what you are doing and why. Keep track of attendance and maintain notes on the success stories of the reading circle. Take photographs. Make sure you obtain parental permission on the child registration form to take photos!
3. **Get to know people in your community and involve them.** Ensure people feel good about giving. Recognize each contribution, large or small with a thank you. Letters written by the children are especially appreciated. Invite your supporters to your group celebrations.
4. **Keep accurate accounts.** Make this information available to the public. Trust is very important – especially if you want to raise more funds in the future.

Appendices

Getting Started

Appendix A – Holding successful meetings 18

Appendix B – Registration form for children 20

Volunteer Management

Appendix C – Volunteer orientation handout 21

Appendix D – Volunteer application form 22

Appendix E – Parental permission for volunteers (under 18) 24

Appendix F – Volunteer interview questions 25

Appendix G – Character reference questions 26

Appendix H – Attendance chart 27

Appendix I – Feedback questionnaire for volunteers 28

Volunteer Training

Appendix J – Recommended training practices 29

Appendix K – Volunteer training handout 30

Appendix L – Stages of reading 32

Appendix M – Book scavenger hunt 33

Appendix N – Scenarios 34

Appendix O – Group activities 36

Appendix A - Holding successful meetings

Who should be involved?

Programs often start because one person pushes for them to happen. However, a successful reading circle also requires community support. If only one person runs the reading circle and is responsible for all the details, it will be difficult to continue the program when that person leaves. It is best to work together to share responsibilities and delegate tasks.

Questions to think about before the meeting

- Who should come to the meeting?
- Where will the meeting be? Who will find a location? If possible, try to arrange the meeting to be at the same place and time that the reading circle will be held. It is a good idea to hold this meeting a couple of weeks before the program opens.
- When will the meeting be? What is the best time for the most people?
- What materials are needed? (e.g., sign-up sheets, flip-chart paper, pens, etc.) Will there be snacks? If so, who will bring them?
- How will the room be organized?
- Do participants need childcare? If so, who will arrange it? Where? If not, have toys and books handy for children to enjoy in another part of the room.

Promoting the meeting

- How will people in the community find out about the meeting? Word-of-mouth is the most effective method for setting up a small organizing team.
- Promote the idea of a reading circle to people who might be interested in helping.
- Put up lots of posters advertising a meeting to organize a reading circle. Make sure the poster includes the date, place and starting and finishing time of the meeting.
- Is it necessary to make phone calls the day before the meeting to remind people? (If so, who will make the calls?)

Planning the agenda

- Think about all of the details that need to be clear before starting a reading circle. Do a brainstorm: What? When? Where? Who? Why?
- Write down the key points. These are the items for the agenda (i.e., things to be discussed). The meeting will take less time and run more smoothly if the agenda is organized.
- Before the meeting, write the agenda items on a flip-chart or chalkboard. Make them large enough for everyone at the meeting to see.
- If more than one person is helping to run the meeting, write names beside each topic so everyone knows who will talk about which part.

Role of the chairperson

- Introduce yourself and ask everyone at the meeting to introduce her or himself (keeping the introductions short) stating for example, why they are here, the names and ages of their children.
- Review the purpose of the meeting. Briefly review the items for the agenda.
- Ask if the group has any other items to add to the agenda. If yes, write these clearly on the chalkboard or flip-chart paper. Do not begin to discuss any agenda items until the group agrees on the list. Keep the list of items to a manageable number. If the list is too long, ask the group to decide what the priorities are. Talk about these items first.
- Keep the group on topic and on track. Help the group stick to the agenda.
- Encourage discussion by asking questions. Focus the discussion when necessary.
- Participate as a member of the group.
- Recognize and respond tactfully to any problems in the group.
- Help the group make decisions.
- Review the decisions that were made.

Role of the note-taker

- Write clear notes in point form.
- Record decisions, goals, times and dates.
- Record who said they would do what, and any unresolved items.
- Copy the notes and distribute them as soon as possible to each person who was at the meeting.

At the end of the meeting, the chairperson should

- Review the decisions that were made, including dates and times. Note any unresolved items.
- Review *who* said they would do *what*.
- Set a time and place for a training workshop and/or the next meeting.
- Set a time and place for the first reading circle.

Don't worry if some details are still foggy at the end of the meeting. It is better to start a reading circle when people are keen than to hold too many meetings. Once the Reading Circle is running, occasionally hold short meetings before or after a weekly session to clarify tasks and the program format.

Appendix B – Registration form for children

Child's Name _____ School: _____

Languages: _____ Grade: _____ Gender: Male Female

Parent or Guardian's Name(s) _____

Street Address: _____

City _____ Postal Code _____

Phone (day) _____ (evening) _____

Parent email address _____

Emergency Contact Information:

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Relationship to Child _____

Describe any medical concerns &/or allergies that your child may have.

I give permission for my child to participate in the [NAME] reading circle. I understand that I am responsible for ensuring my child's safe travel to and from the reading circle.

I give permission my child to be videotaped or photographed to promote the reading circle to supporters and funders.

I can help out with:

organizing the reading circle getting prizes for the reading circle

organizing the snacks for the reading circle helping with group celebrations

reading with children at the reading circle other _____

Signature

Date

Printed Name

Appendix C – Volunteer orientation handout

Here are some topics you may wish to include in a handout for volunteers, parents and community partners to ensure everyone has a common understanding of the reading circle.

Goal and description of the reading circle

- Describe the purpose of the reading circle.
- Summarize the structure and schedule of the reading circle. List important dates.
- Describe the outreach to the community, registration process for children and recruitment and selection of volunteers, numbers of people who normally attend.

Safety Policies

- Describe how you ensure the safety of the children and volunteers. For example: volunteers meet with children only during the reading circle and only in locations where they can be seen by others.

Describe the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in the reading circle

- Children: be punctual, attend regularly, read (and have fun!), not disturb others.
- Parents: ensure safe travel of children, pick up children, be involved!
- Volunteers: qualifications and time commitment required i.e., come early and regularly, the screening process, volunteer recognition.
- Organizing team: supervising the reading circle, volunteer management, getting books, organizing group activities.
- Other community partners: library supplies space, grocery store supplies snacks.

Successes and challenges of a reading circle

- Describe the successes of a reading circle. Include anecdotal information about how the children have benefited. You may also wish to describe some of the challenges of a reading circle. For example, lack of resources, attendance, behaviour problems.
- Compile a list of the resources you wish to have for the reading circle; supplies, snacks, additional volunteers, computers, etc. The parents and volunteers may surprise you!

Appendix D - Volunteer application form

Name _____

Street Address _____

City _____ Postal Code _____

Phone (day) _____ (evening) _____

Email address _____

Languages (spoken and written) _____

I am interested in:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> reading with children at the reading circle | <input type="checkbox"/> recruiting volunteers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> joining the organizing team | <input type="checkbox"/> organizing group activities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> getting books and other prizes | <input type="checkbox"/> keeping track of attendance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> being the reading circle photographer | <input type="checkbox"/> other _____ |

1. Why are you interested in volunteering in this reading circle?

2. What experience do you have working with children? Please describe.

3. What skills/knowledge do you have to share as a volunteer in this position?

4. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Please provide three character and professional references (we will check a minimum of 2): At least one must be a professional/volunteer reference. At least one must be a character reference from a person who is not related to you.

- I give permission to the [NAME] Reading Circle to contact these people to do a reference check on me.

Name	Relationship to you	Phone #

- I give permission for my photo to be taken while volunteering to promote this reading circle to supporters and funders.

I will:

- attend the reading circle training on [DATE] at [TIME and LOCATION].
- attend the launch of the reading circle on [DATE] from [TIME] at [LOCATION].
- sign in the attendance form each time I volunteer.
- read with the children in the reading circle every [DAY OF WEEK] starting [DATE] to [DATE] at [TIME].
- inform [NAME OF VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR] if I am not able to attend a reading circle.
- keep in touch regularly with [NAME OF VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR]

Signature

Date

Appendix E – Parental permission for volunteers

(under 18 years old)

September 2009

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Please sign the form at the bottom of this page to give your son/daughter permission to volunteer at the reading circle at [LOCATION] this school year. Your child will read to younger children at this reading circle. This reading circle will start on [DATE] and run every week from [TIME] until [DATE]. Your child will earn community service hours as well as receive a certificate for his/her participation as a volunteer in this reading circle. In case of emergency, you can reach your child by calling [LOCATION PHONE NUMBER]. For your information, [LOCATION] is located at [ADDRESS].

If you have any questions about this program, please contact me at [EMAIL] or at [PHONE NUMBER].

Sincerely,

NAME

I give permission for my son/daughter to:

- volunteer at the reading circle in the [LOCATION].
- to be videotaped or photographed while volunteering to promote the reading circle to supporters and funders.

My child has allergies or medical conditions: No Yes Describe: _____

Emergency Contact Information:

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Relationship to Child _____

Signature

Date

Appendix F - Volunteer interview questions

Program information

Describe the reading circle, the community and the needs of the children and outline the volunteer responsibilities.

Volunteer commitment

1. How long will you be able to volunteer?
2. Will you be able to attend regularly?
3. Are you able to attend the training session?
4. Do have any questions about the reading circle or your responsibilities?
5. Are you interested in any of the other responsibilities for the reading circle? i.e., promotion, fundraising, volunteer recruitment, etc.
6. Do you have any questions about our screening process (police records check, character reference checks, etc.)?
7. Do you have any questions about the set up of this program?

Getting to know the volunteers

1. Why do you want to be a volunteer with this reading circle?
2. What work, volunteer or personal experiences do you have that would help you to be an effective reading circle volunteer?
3. If we were to call one of your friends and ask them what kind of a person you are, what would they say? What would they say you need to work on?
4. What challenges do you think you might encounter as a volunteer?
5. How would you help the children in the reading circle become better readers and writers?

Appendix G - Character reference questions

Before asking these questions, give the person providing the reference some information about the reading circle.

Name of volunteer: _____

Name of person providing the reference: _____

1. How long have you known this person?
2. What is your relationship to him/her?
3. Does he/she have the time, patience and reliability to volunteer with children?
 Yes No
4. What strengths does he/she have that would help in this position?
5. Is he/she reliable and punctual? Yes No
6. Has he/she ever worked one-to-one with another person in the course of your relationship? No Yes – describe:
7. Is there anything you feel we should be aware of before placing this person in our reading circle? Do you have any concerns about him/her working with children?
 No Yes – describe:
8. Please make any additional comments that you feel may be helpful.

Reference taken by: _____

Date: _____

Appendix I – Feedback questionnaire for volunteers

Use these questions to gather feedback from your volunteers on the reading circle so you can make improvements as well as demonstrate to the supporters the benefits of the circle.

Section A – How the reading circle was set up and run.

1. How useful was the initial training? What should have been included or changed in the initial training?
2. Do you have any suggestions to improve the launch of the reading circle?
3. Did you receive enough support? Please describe.
4. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Section B – Your relationship with the children

1. How many times (approximately) did you participate in the reading circle? Did you come regularly? Why or why not?
2. Describe the activities you did most often with the children.
3. What was the biggest success you had at the reading circle?
4. What was the biggest challenge you faced with the children?
5. Did the children benefit from attending the reading circle? How do you know?

Section C – About you

1. Are you a high school volunteer a community volunteer
 a university student a parent
 a staff person an older sibling
2. Did you learn or benefit from volunteering in this reading circle? Please describe.
3. Are you planning on continuing to volunteer? Please explain why or why not.

Appendix J – Recommended training practices

Workshop Planning:

In planning a workshop these are some questions that you can consider:

- What is the goal of the workshop?
- Who are the participants?
- What information will you present?
- What materials are you going to need in order to do the workshop?
- When and where will the workshop be held?
- How are you going to present the workshop?
- How is the workshop being promoted?
- How will the workshop be evaluated?

Workshop Set up:

When setting up for a workshop these are questions that you should ask:

- How will you organize the room? (i.e., tables, chairs, books)
- What supplies and materials will you need?
- When will you begin to set up?
- How will you display the agenda?
- How will you introduce yourself and start the workshop?

Role of the Facilitator:

The role of the facilitator is a key element to running an effective workshop. A good facilitator should have a prepared agenda. This agenda can be adapted according to the pace and focus of the workshop as it occurs. An important role of the facilitator is to encourage discussion by asking questions. The following are some important questions to ask when preparing to facilitate a workshop.

How will you:

- plan or determine an agenda?
- focus the discussion and keep the group on topic?
- help the group to make decisions?
- participate as a member of the group?
- encourage the group to cooperate & contribute?
- facilitate questions?
- deal with any problems? (e.g., a biased remark)

Appendix K –Volunteer training handout

Purpose of a reading circle

The main purpose of a reading circle is to provide a safe place where children can develop a love of reading and books.

- Reading helps children learn how language is used, builds vocabulary, expands imagination, and helps make sense of the world.
- Reading can also provide the tools for developing critical thinking skills.
- Reading aloud with children is one of the cheapest, simplest, and most effective ways to help them become lifelong readers

Your role as a volunteer is to provide children with a positive experience with books and reading. Give lots of praise and encouragement. You are their reading role model. Always be enthusiastic about reading and talk about books that you have enjoyed or are currently reading.

Before reading

- Let the child choose the book to read, hold it and turn the pages. Don't worry about what "grade level" or "age appropriate" books the children pick. Some children will learn to enjoy books sooner than others, but every child can become a book lover.
- Children might want to read the same story over and over again, or they may read a number of books and seldom finish the ones they start and that is OK.
- Before you start to read, look at the front cover, back cover and leaf through the pages. Predict what you think the book will focus on.

Good books for reading aloud with children

- *Alphabet books*
- *Picture books – the illustrations help tell the story.*
- *Funny books*
- *Books with rhyming words – reading and listening to rhymes helps children learn about the connections between words.*
- *Books with characters from various cultures – children need to see themselves, and other cultures in the books they read.*
- *Books with repetition – repetition makes books easier to read.*
- *Books based on a television series – children love to read books with familiar characters, such as Arthur or The Magic School Bus.*
- *Your favourite children's books – children are often interested in knowing what the volunteers read as children.*

While reading

- Read with expression and enthusiasm. Laugh, stop and change your voice with each character. Ham it up. Reading aloud is fun.
- Who reads the book? You can take turns reading, read to the child or listen to the child read.
- If a child is stuck on a word, you can help them out. Sounding out words works sometimes, but often it is best to just tell them the word to keep the story flowing. Some children find it helpful if you follow the text with your finger.
- Encourage the child to ask questions. Discuss the story and the illustrations. Talk, think, question.
- Choose another book if a child is losing interest.
- Praise children for reading and for taking risks reading aloud. It builds confidence and self-esteem and encourages them to keep reading.

After reading

- Talk about what you have read for a minute or two before going on to the next book. This allows the child to expand the ideas in the story or to summarize the story in his/her own words, or ask questions about the story.
- Look for other activities that involve reading. Act out a story. Learn a trick together from a magic book and perform it for the group.

Additional resource - For techniques on helping a beginning reader learn to read, refer to the *Frontier College Tutor's Guide: Reading and Writing with Children and Youth* in the [resource section](#) of the Frontier College website at www.frontiercollege.ca

Appendix L - Stages of reading

The *learning to read / reading to learn* framework (Chall, 1983) helps parents and volunteers understand how children learn to read. The focus of the school curriculum from Kindergarten to Grade 3 is helping children learn how to read.

Learning to read — Kindergarten to grade 3	
What children are learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the mechanics of reading • the relationships between letters and sounds (“phonics”) • how to blend sounds to form words • the relationships between word families • using context to figure out meaning
Good activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reading aloud together • playing word games • writing together
Your role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teacher • to help the children learn and strengthen basic reading and writing skills

Starting in grade 4, the focus of the curriculum changes from *learning to read* to *reading to learn*. Students are expected to read fluently and use their reading skills to learn about geography, about history — about life. If students are still struggling with learning how to read, they will find school work increasingly more frustrating.

Reading to learn — Grade 4 and up	
What children are learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how to focus on meaning • higher-level thinking strategies • how to figure out new words based on related words
Good activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • building on prior knowledge • developing predicting skills • sharing strategies for interpreting a text
Your role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facilitator • role model • share strategies for interpreting a text

Chall, J. (1983). *Stages of Reading Development*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Appendix M - Book scavenger hunt

Cut out these clues and give them to your volunteers so they can search for a book that matches their clue. Talk about the characteristics of good books using the clues as a basis for the discussion.

A book with a catchy first page	An interesting alphabet book
A book that the story is told through the picture	A culturally diverse book
A book that teaches about another place or culture	A book that can help with math skills
A book with rhymes	A book that you can read with a child by taking turns reading each page
A book that challenges traditional male/female stereotypes	A book that has a story which children can act out or tell using puppets
A book suitable for a child who is just starting to read	A book that is beautifully illustrated
A book about relationships (child/parent relationships or friendships)	A fantasy book
A book that suggests activities other than reading	A book that teaches about the world we live in
A book that teaches about history	A book that boys would enjoy
A non-fiction book	A book with a wonderful story
A book which is an "old" favourite	A book that has a TV series based on it
A traditional folk tale	A humorous book

Appendix N – Group activities

There are many literacy based group activities that you can use in a reading circle.

Rhymes and songs - Choose a few simple rhymes which accompanying actions such as Eensy Weensy Spider. Ask children to gather around and start with a popular rhyme. Tell the rhyme, with accompanying hand and body movements. Then tell it again and encourage the children to participate.

Riddles and Tongue Twisters – Have fun with words.

Jigsaw sentences - Write a few sentences with the children. Cut the sentences into individual words and place them on the table in random order. Have the child put the words in the correct order.

Word scavenger hunt – Write a few words on small pieces of paper and hide the words around the room.

Sentence scavenger hunt – An added twist to the word scavenger hunt; write 3 sentences with 6 words each on three different coloured pieces of paper. Cut the words out and put on small pieces of paper. Hide the words around the room. Divide the children into 3 teams. Each team needs to find the words for one colour and put the sentence back together.

Newspaper scavenger hunt - The children are given a section of a newspaper and are asked to find listed items, words, or headlines. The children can compete in teams.

Word bingo – Create bingo cards with words rather than letters. You can choose words with a theme, for example, a particular sport such as basketball or words from your community.

Alphabet soup – Select a theme such as animals, sports, countries etc. Brainstorm words starting with the letters A, B, C, etc., for each theme.

Scrabble - Write a word on a big piece of paper, or on a blackboard. In teams or as a large group the children can brainstorm words to add and expand on the first word.

Telegrams - A telegram is a coded message. Give the children a list with each letter of the alphabet having a different code. (For example: The letter “A” can be represented by an apple, etc.) Ask the children to write a sentence or two in code, and then exchange their sentences with the other children to decode.

Address book - The children can make their own address books, listing emergency numbers in the front, and other addresses and phone numbers in alphabetical order.

Pen pals - The children can be pen pals with the other children at the reading circle, or with children from other reading circles or other schools in Canada. All you need is an address and enthusiastic children.

Post cards - The children can make post cards with an illustration on the front and a message on the back to send to parents, friends, or relatives.

Concentration - Make up a duplicate set of word cards. Mix up the cards. Have the children place them face down. The idea is to find the matching words and put them into piles, so they are left with many pairs of words.

Story web - A group of children can make up their own stories. Have them sit in a circle with one person beginning the story. Give that child a ball of yarn. They can choose anyone in the circle to continue with the story, by throwing them the ball of yarn. Be sure to hold on to a piece of the yarn when you pass it. As the story continues the web will grow.

Story telling circle - The children and volunteers make up their own stories and share them with each other.

Bookmaking - Using blank paper, have the children write a few sentences per page and illustrate each page. The book can be stapled in the corner, or tied with string along the side. The children can share their books with the other children in the reading circle. Create a library of books.

Let's make a word – Make as many words as possible from a big word.

Make bookmarks - Make bookmarks with slogans, pictures or a bookmark that focuses on a specific book or story.

Word search – Create a word search for the children to complete using words from the reading circle and the community.

Play board games – Scrabble, Upwords, Trivial Pursuit

Puppet Making and Show – Make puppets, write a play and put it on for parents and friends.

Word Wall – Post words on a wall.

Good websites for educational activities to enrich a reading circle:

www.gryphonhouse.com

www.abcteach.com

www.rif.org/readingplanet

www.nurseryrhymes4u.com

<http://puzzlemaker.discoveryeducation.com>

www.funbrain.com

www.enchantedlearning.com

www.mathcats.com

www.teach-nology.com

Appendix O - Scenarios

This appendix refers to the volunteer training on page 11 of this guide. These scenarios represent situations that volunteers may need to deal with when volunteering in the reading circle. Not all situations apply to every reading circle. You can either choose the scenarios from those below that reflect the program or develop your own based on challenging situations that you or your volunteers have encountered in the reading circle. If you are writing your own, do not include any names or identifying information. Only distribute the scenario description and not the points to be raised.

Scenario One

You read with a group of four children who are in grades 3 and 4. Two of them enjoy reading with you, but Sandy and Randy are constantly chatting and giggling. They playfully kick and punch each other at every opportunity. They love talking about Transformers. Sandy and Randy are distracting you and the other two children. What could you do?

Points to be raised:

- The objective of this scenario is to help volunteers think of creative ways to manage children's behaviour.
- Discuss as a group how to read together more effectively.
- Sandy and Randy may be frustrated or bored. Work with them individually to understand their strengths and weaknesses.
- Try a different activity.
- Give Sandy or Randy a "leadership" role, e.g., handing out cards, collecting papers.
- Channel energy by focusing on interests. Read and write about Transformers or other things that interest the boys (non-fiction and novels). Write stories about their interests or use written conversation.
- Make a deal with them – if they participate, during the last 10 minutes of every session they can play a literacy game they like as a reward.
- If you have tried several strategies without success, speak to the organizer of the reading circle.
- A ratio of 1 volunteer to 4 children is too high. Think of ways to lower the ratio. For example, can some of the children read on their own for a while. Or can an older child in the circle read with a younger child?

Scenario Two

You are matched with Jorge, who is 8 years old. Jorge is very interested in space and science. He chooses information books that have a vocabulary level that is far too difficult for him. He likes you to read these to him. You have tried to encourage him to read by selecting more simple picture books, but he rejects these. What do you do?

Points to be raised:

- The objective of this scenario is to reinforce some of the points raised in the “reading tips” discussion of the workshop.
- Reading is not only just about “sounding out” words; we read for pleasure and we read for information. Jorge has an obvious love for space and science so use this “strength” to help him learn how to read. Congratulate him on his interest in knowledge.
- Read aloud to Jorge from books that are complicated to satisfy his thirst for knowledge. It is important for new readers to hear fluent readers read so they know what fluent reading “sounds like.” Then ask him to read simpler books about space so he can practice his reading.

Scenario Three

You are matched with seven year old Bonnie Smith. She just wants you to read to her, and she wants her two favourite books read over and over. When you encourage her to read, she goes back to these favourite books, and recites the words from memory.

Points to be raised:

- The objective of this scenario is similar to scenario two i.e., to reinforce some of the concepts raised during the reading tips discussion of the workshop.
- It is okay if a child wants to read the same book over again. (Repetition is how kids learn about exceptions to the rules. Also some kids gain confidence from reading a familiar book.
- Strike a compromise with Bonnie. Every week read those “favourite books” then read a couple of new books.
- Write a story using names and scenes from book – look for new books with similar stories or characters.

Scenario Four

In your role as organizer for a reading circle, you have recruited two high school students to read with the children. Both volunteers chat and play-wrestle with the children and sometimes all the children try to jump on both volunteers. You believe that the volunteers are distracting the children and do not seem very interested in reading to them. What do you do?

Points to be raised:

- The point of this scenario is to help volunteers and reading circle organizers remember that high school students have a lot of energy but they need a lot of supervision as they are practically children themselves.
- Speak with the volunteers outside of the reading circle. Voice your appreciation for their abilities to build relationships with the children.
- Talk about what you observe in the reading circle, that the children do not read with them but want to play. Their answers may surprise you. They may ask for pointers on how to focus the children on the books or they may suggest a change for the structure of the reading circle. Whatever their response, listen to them first, then offer suggestions.

Scenario Five

You volunteer at a reading circle where you regularly read to the same small group of children. One of the parents approaches you after the reading circle and is clearly distressed. She tells you about her concerns for her son's reading. It appears that he is far behind his classmates at school. She is visibly upset because you share your time with several children and urges that you only read with her son. You are not quite sure what to say to the mother.

Points to be raised:

- The objective of this scenario is to help volunteers prepare for interventions from parents. Most parents are extremely supportive and appreciative of the time and effort that volunteers give to their children. Only occasionally, volunteers encounter difficult situations with parents.
- Listen to parents and validate their concerns but do not try to negotiate directly with them. Talk directly with the organizer(s) of the reading circle about any issues or concerns that parents raise.
- Perhaps, more one-to-one support can be found for the child either through the reading circle or another service.

Scenario Six

You volunteer at a reading circle where many of the children are recent immigrants. Most of the children have difficulty speaking and understanding English. One of the children is Binh, a 12-year old girl who was born in Vietnam and is new to Canada. Binh has difficulty speaking and understanding English.

Points to be raised:

- The objective of this scenario is to discuss some strategies to help children who speak English as a second language.
- Learning a new language happens gradually. Listening comes first, then speaking, reading and writing. Set aside five to ten minutes every time you meet with Binh to focus on speaking.
- Create flashcards of words she finds difficult. Help Binh practice these words using the flashcards.
- Help Binh create a “word bank” of difficult words. Review these words with her.

Important: ESL strategies cannot be examined adequately using one scenario. Depending upon the learning needs of the children, you may wish to provide further training to the volunteers on helping children improve their English language skills.

Scenario Seven

One of the girls in the reading circle is Sheena, who is a quiet girl. Sheena mentions that she doesn't like gym because her legs are ugly. She usually has her arms and legs covered. One day, you notice that her arms are all bruised. When you mention the bruises, she asks if you can keep a secret.

Points to be raised:

- The objective of this scenario is to review the policies that the organization has in place to protect the safety of children.
- Because of your role as a volunteer and mentor, children may tell you about abuse or other dangerous situations. As a volunteer – and indeed as a citizen – your role includes looking out for the safety of children. If, in your honest judgment, you believe that a child may not be safe, you must report this information to the Children's Aid Society.
- Tell Sheena that you will keep the secret, but if someone is hurting her (or someone she knows), you will have to tell someone in charge. Being honest and upfront is the best

option. The child can then decide whether to tell you, understanding that if the secret is more serious, you will take action (reporting it to the reading circle organizer, contacting the Children's Aid Society, etc.).

If a child discloses an abusive situation to you:

- Listen without detailed questioning.
- When she is finished talking, tell her that you have to tell someone else about what she said AND that you will try to help her.
- Remember that you cannot counsel the child. Leave this to trained professionals.
- Offer assurance to the child that you believe her.
- After she has left, write down everything she has told you.
- Speak to the person who is responsible for supporting the reading circle..
- Contact the Children's Aid Society or Family and Children's Services in your area **immediately** and ask them what you should do next. They are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. These services will guide you through the next steps of the reporting process.
- Even if you cannot contact Children's Aid immediately, let the child go home, unless you believe she is in immediate danger.

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