



What to DO When Kids Are New!

It's a funny thing—as hard as we work to build relationships with the kids we teach, and then as much as we try to help them build relationships with each other, that whole “tight relationship” thing can be a hindrance when a new kid shows up! Kids who take comfort in seeing the same faces each week might look at a new kid as an intruder.

Let's face it—being new is likely to mean feeling uncomfortable. Whatever the reason this child is visiting, a teacher who's prepared and glad to see him or her will go a long way in helping the kid feel comfortable and eager to return another time. Here are some strategies for doing just that.

At the Door

- Warmly greet each visitor (but don't be gushy). Introduce yourself at eye level with the kid. Introduce yourself to the parents if they are present—and do ask the parents if the child has any allergies or medical issues.
- Make it a habit for everyone to wear a name tag. This not only helps you to remember names but also keeps a visitor from feeling self-conscious as the only one with a name tag.
- From the first class session, have a “buddy system”—tell kids that whenever a visitor comes, he or she will always be introduced to a buddy who's a regular and who will clue the visitor in on what comes next. Have in mind ahead of time one boy and one girl who'd be a great buddy. Introduce the visitor to that same-gender buddy as the person who will help the visitor find his or her way around. The new kid will feel that he or she has at least one friend already!



During Class

- Visitors often don't like to be pointed out or given undue attention. Include but don't push. Don't call on the visitor to answer fact-based questions, but be sure to invite him or her to answer open-ended questions ("What do you think..." or "How do you feel ...")—questions with no "right" answer.
- Always have extra supplies on hand so that a visitor isn't sitting empty handed when other kids have a book or Bible.
- Keep a "visitor's spot" available—an empty chair reserved, a place just for newcomers. It's honor without embarrassment.
- Be attentive if the new child needs help but don't hover. Give the class buddy a chance to help! If one is struggling, help both the visitor and the buddy.
- Unchurched kids may feel awkward during prayer time. Indicate that any level of participation is OK: "Now it's time to pray. That's when we talk to God. Some of us might want to pray aloud. Others of us might pray silently. Some of us may want to listen to other people pray. Whatever you choose is fine."

After Class

- Greet the parents as they arrive, and be sure to mention an activity that the child enjoyed. Thank the parents for bringing their son or daughter to your class and let them know you look forward to seeing the child again.
- Within a day or two, send a friendly email to the family, welcoming them. And send a postcard to the guest, thanking him or her for visiting your class—snail mail still makes a big impression on kids!

With these strategies in place, we can make a visitor feel at home and help the other students to practice the very things (like love, acceptance, welcome and kindness) they have been learning in class!