



Get Prepared to Teach

Most of us have an owner's manual for every gadget we own. We seldom read these, assuming that we can figure things out on our own. Sometimes that works. But when it comes to the short and precious time we have to teach God's Word to children, we need to know the ground rules that will take teaching from humdrum to worthwhile!

Almost anyone can throw a few materials together, run into a classroom and keep children from hurting themselves for an hour or so, then send them on their way. For some of us, that's all we have ever seen. But is it effective teaching?

The attitude expressed by the adult in the above example shouts to kids: "This doesn't matter. You aren't worth preparing for. You kids won't know the difference." Sadly, children absorb our unspoken attitudes quicker than they do our words. They will soon conclude that indeed this is just another place they "have to" go, another situation where the children are not very important. That is NOT the message we want to send to

children. Church classes should be a place where we "show off" what God's love and grace are like, delighting them with how much He cares and how much we care!

When we finish a class session, we might say to ourselves, *Whew! Glad I don't have to do anything about this again until next week!* It's a far more common feeling than most of us care to admit! But that attitude can keep us from doing what we need to do most: nurture relationships with children and involve them in life-changing Bible learning. To do this, **a teacher's work needs to be ongoing.**

So prepare yourself!

One terrific teacher says, "Begin preparing for the next class session as soon as this session is over. Look at the next session while the manual is still open! When you know what is coming next, you have time to think things through, collect materials you otherwise wouldn't have thought of and can be relaxed instead of harried."



Prepare the Bible content.

Never assume that you already know the story. Early in the week, block out an hour of time during which you will read the Scripture and the teacher's devotional and pray for the children in your class. Familiarize yourself with the age-appropriate version of the story from the lesson. Your goal is to be able to tell it without being tied to the teacher's guide. Maintaining good eye contact is essential to keeping children involved.

Prepare the environment.

Look at your classroom both when children are in it and when it is empty. Ask yourself, *What clutter collects in this room? Where are the bottlenecks where children can't move freely? What items distract children?* Take time to eliminate clutter, rearrange space and make the room a place that is inviting and involving. If you share a room, meet with those who share the space to work out ways to keep the room functional and inviting.

Prepare the materials.

Ask yourself, What are some things that might happen if the children have to wait while I collect supplies for this activity? What could result if I don't have materials ready for group time? It can be very difficult to refocus children's attention after they have waited for an adult to prepare materials. Being prepared is the best way to improve wandering attention—and to show kids you care about them!

During the week collect materials and prepare them for the activities you have chosen. Stack materials in the order of use. If your church has a supply room, plan to arrive early enough to gather needed materials before going to your classroom. When you arrive in the classroom, it's easy to place the stacked, prepared materials where they will be used.



Prepare to arrive early.

If you've taken the steps above, you have only some simple setting up to do when you arrive in the classroom. You've eliminated that panicky feeling of needing to do a lot of preparation in a hurry. It's important to remember that no matter what your class's stated starting time, class begins when the first child enters the room. Arriving early to set up materials is well worth your commitment.

One veteran teacher points out that this first 15 minutes or so after you enter the classroom has the most potential for doing the very thing we are called to do as teachers: nurture relationships and involve children in life-changing Bible learning. **Children need to be the priority, not our preparations.**

Have at least one or two activity centers prepared by the time the first child arrives. This gives even early arrivals a choice of activities. If you still have some setting up to do, make helping you one of the choices you give as a child enters the room. (Yes, this means you must be ready for church half an hour earlier. Commit to it as part of your ministry!)

Prepare ways to interact.

We quite often can picture what we will be doing during a given part of the class session. But a good question to ask is, What will the children be doing during this time? Be familiar with the discussion questions provided in your curriculum. Have a couple of backup ideas in mind (a simple game or an open-ended art activity) in case something you have planned doesn't work well. When children are involved in an activity, it is never time to sneak away to do something else. **This is another prime opportunity to build relationships and involve children in understanding God's Word.**

Take one more tip from a veteran teacher: We have very little time to impact children with the good news of God's love. Being prepared makes us ready to do this with an attitude that "shows off" His love and care to the children we teach!