

Characteristics of a Preschool Child

Physically Able to button, zip, buckle. Cuts simple shapes with scissors, puts on shoes, climbs easily, moves about quickly. Able to copy simple figures, can roll a ball to hit an object, has a high need for motor activity, may alternate handedness.

Mentally Often not able to distinguish between fantasy and reality. Able to follow two- or three-step directions, can retell stories, can recognize cause and effect. Recognizes letters of the alphabet and numerals, often reverses letters and numerals when writing, has beginning sense of time (clock and calendar). Is likely learning to write own first name. Likes repetition, often asks “why,” exaggerates in storytelling, likes new and big words.

Socially Likes to whisper and tell secrets, may demonstrate healthy self-confidence, may test limits continually. Values friendships. Plays more interactively; less parallel play.

Emotionally Very responsive to happiness and laughter, may experience intense feelings, may be very sensitive to correction, may take on the emotions of the adults around them. May have genuine questions about life, death, heaven, hell.

Spiritually Can learn basic information about God: He made the world, He loves and cares for me and all people, He forgives us when we are sorry for doing wrong, He loves us even when we sin. Can learn that Jesus died to take our punishment and that He rose from the dead and is alive. Can learn that we may talk to God in prayer about anything at any time and in any place. Can learn simple life lessons from Bible stories

Tips for Teaching

- Pray for your students and their families. Seek God’s wisdom for effective teaching!
- Plan more lesson activities than you will likely use, to allow for flexibility. Include hands-on and creative art opportunities.
- Have all supplies ready before class. When you are missing a supply/visual in class, be open about finding it and quick to apologize: “I’m sorry that I’m missing my blue chalk. Let’s see, I think it is over here.”
- Welcome children with individual names (e.g. “Here comes Andrew, and there is Charlie, and I think Amber is wearing a smile.” This can also be done by singing simple pitches. Use their names regularly throughout the class session.
- Singing simple instructions may bring the group attention together with a tune. Group attention can also be gathered by changing voice dynamics quickly (e.g. loud voice, quickly dropping to a soft voice), by clapping a rhythm and even asking students to join you, or by dimming lights and encouraging “quiet, inside voices.”
- Be physically at or near the eye level of the children when possible.
- Move among the children as you speak and present some of the time.
- Involve the children in presentations with movement: Stand as tall as Goliath. Show me how big the stone in the sling might have been.
- Use large, simple, colorful visuals to complement the Bible lessons.
- One simple object visual, pulled from a bag or box with a surprise inflection engages students’ attention.
- To help children feel comfortable and happy, insert humor when you think the class will be able to enjoy it, and then get back on track.
- Keep children “with you” by having them participate in the language of the story: Have them experience a new word on their own lips, saying, “try this word after I say it,” as you tell a story or deliver information.
- Include position changes for the children while you are teaching: stand, move to circle, stretch your hands high, sit on the floor.
- Involve children frequently in logistics, both as a group (“When I tap your head, crawl to the center of the circle and put your whiteboard in the pile.”) and individually (“Nathan, please collect the pencils.”).
- Arrange small carpet squares or masking tape on hard surface floors to designate group positions and spacing.
- Affirm positive student behavior throughout a class session.
- Be generous with verbal “thank yous.” (Thank you for sitting in any chair that’s close to you. I’m so glad we can all be friends today.)
- Sing/say a closing prayer together at the end of a session.
- Have take-home materials and other student belongings (jackets, supplies, etc.) ready at the end of the class hour (in each child’s hands, in mail boxes, or on hooks outside the door for parents to pick up).
- If parents are picking up their children, stand at the classroom door and call each individual child from their seated place when the parent arrives at the door.
- Review Bible verses or hymns while waiting for parents to arrive.

Tips for Storytelling

- Be on or near the eye level of the children.
- Have a routine tune to sing or another method of indicating it is time to hear the Bible story.
- Exaggerate voice inflections in explanations and story character presentations. Use sudden surprises in your voice. Change your voice dynamics often.
- Include body language with hand gestures.
- Use a simple prop or an object presented on a tray to draw focus and interest.
- Use classroom items for props and stimulate imagination: “Let’s pretend this chair is the mountain.”
- Include sensory effects. Spray a mist of water during the storm at sea. Blow wind with a hair dryer. Have children make rain sound by snapping two small lids that have been taped together. Open a can of tuna for a fish catch smell. With deep reverence, wash the children’s feet after they have stepped in a paint pan and walked down a paper road. Pass little pieces of unleavened bread.
- Involve children in repeating word phrases. Each time the word phrase comes in the story, signal the children to speak it together with you, with exaggerated expression.
- Ask the children to perform an action when certain words are heard in the story: “When it rains, wiggle your fingers.”
- When a story picture is available in the lesson book or on a poster, help children visualize the story and characters by pointing out details and asking for observations.
- When reading the story from a book, dim the lights in the room and shine a large flashlight from your lap onto the page you are reading (or let a student hold the flashlight).
- Share a song you know that supports the story.
- Occasionally, let a friendly puppet tell the story.
- Ask for volunteers for story characters in a simple drama presentation, directing as you tell the story. A strip of fabric tied around a head or a sheet draped on a body can suffice as a costume.
- Tell the story using flannelgraph figures. Invite a different volunteer each week to move a figure as appropriate in the story.

Tips for Memorization

- Use shortened editions of memory verses for preschoolers.
- Sing Bible verses to a simple tune you create using just a few notes. Some verses could also be sung to a familiar tune.
- March to a spoken or sung Bible verse, as appropriate, or create correlating hand motions.
- Have a Bible in hand some of the time as you teach a verse, pointing out and exhibiting that the memory verse is God’s truth from the Bible
- If the verse will allow for an illustration by teacher or children, take a short time to draw one to help in comprehension of the meaning.
- Repeat and review verses often, including verses from previous lessons.

- Play an oral game, seeing who can be first to finish a verse the teacher starts.
- Pass out color cards to guide certain students in reciting the verse: “When I hold up my red card, the reds stand up and say today’s verse together.”
- Toss a large, lightweight ball in the air. The one who catches it gets to say the Bible verse.
- Have the class recite the verse from different physical positions: class stand, recite verse; class sit, recite verse; class raise hands, recite verse, etc.

Tips on Discipline

- **Seek God’s wisdom.**
- **Plan to be flexible.**
- **Model expected behavior.** Show children how to sit/stand/kneel at the appropriate time by doing it with them. Speak with graciousness and respect to each student and other adults.
- **Affirm good behavior.**
- **Relay positive comments to parents relating to attitude and behavior.** This promotes a healthy school-to-home connection and affirms good behavior at an additional dimension for the child. It also lays groundwork for later communication that may be related to negative behavior.
- When necessary, **ask the parent** for suggestions regarding overcoming specific misbehavior.
- **Plan for more activities than you will likely have time for.** Keeping a good pace usually eliminates or at least reduces behavior challenges.
- **Move with a tune ♪.** Singing at every turn alerts children to response and eliminates space for misbehavior. “Let’s sit down over here in a circle” (to the first phrase tune of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” or another little tune that comes to mind, filling in syllables as needed). Repeat the sung words until everyone has moved.
- When needing to bring attention together and bring volume of the group down, **speak or sing loudly for a few words**, then reduce your volume as you perk ears to what directive is next.
- In transitions between activities, **move on!** Be ahead of the children. Rather than waiting until all is still/in place/all standing according to your directions, begin the activity with enthusiasm. In many situations, the forward movement will eliminate transition misbehavior.
- **Surprise an erring child** with a positive redirection: “You are a great leader, Charles. Stand tall and show us how to do this.”
- **Thank the child in advance** for the behavior you are wanting, to make it happen. “Thank you, John, for folding your hands on the table while we pray to Jesus.”
- **Allow space for each body.** Being too close may encourage using hands, arms, shoulders in ways that are distracting to others.
- **Intersperse movement with verbal teacher explanations.** “Stand up and speak this big word on your lips after me: ‘sal-va-tion.’ Now sit down and try this word: ‘res-ur-rec-tion.’”
- When a child is very wiggly on his/her chair, move alongside or behind the child as you continue teaching and **touch/rub their back across the shoulders** to calm them. (But always be conscious of using appropriate, respectful actions according to your particular setting.)
- When the class seems out of control or hyper or stressed, call for the **“Four Big B’s”** (taught in advance and reviewed when things are peaceful):
 - *Brakes* – teach them to make a screeching brake sound together as they push one fist against their other flat hand.

Breathe – teach them to put hands on their diaphragm and feel it fill as they take lots of air in, then flatten as they breathe out.

Brain – teach them to place their hands on their head around their brain and say together: “Thank you, God, for my quiet brain.”

Body – teach them to put their arms around their body and say, “Thank you, God, for my peaceful body.”

- **Consider one minute per year of the child’s age** for the length of “time-outs.”
- Have a designated **“four-minute quiet corner”** available for the child who is presently not handling group teaching/activities. He may ask to go there with a hand raise or teacher may tell him, “Thank you, Jason, for going to the four-minute quiet corner to think about what you are doing in the circle time.” Later, “Jason, you are welcome to return to circle time.”
- Occasionally, or as needed, have a **kinesthetic object** for each child to quietly handle during a story. For the story of “The Lost Sheep,” give each child a small cotton ball to feel and handle. If a child misuses the object, take it from her as you whisper in her ear, “I’ll give this back to you in a minute if you are ready to keep it quietly in your own hands.”
- **Avoid drawing excess attention to a particular child to correct/modify behavior.** For some children this brings the attention they want. Give that needed attention to them in other ways as much as possible. When speaking to the group, suddenly drop your voice or loudly whisper the child’s name and the redirection, then raise your voice and continue on with the class teaching.
- **Teach what it means to compliment.** Practice giving compliments. When a child misbehaves by giving “put downs,” review the skill of speaking well of another person, asking children to think of compliments.
- **Teach the word “ignore.”** Help children learn in advance what it means when it is necessary to ignore someone/something. When a child is misbehaving to get attention, remind the class with a signal or a soft voice, “It is ignore time.” Continue on with the lesson, all the while trying to get the erring child back on track.

Teaching Music

- Sing, sing, sing! Sing as children enter the classroom. Intersperse spoken directions with sung directions to any simple tune that comes to mind. Repeat directions to a tune. Transition from the table to the circle, from the chapel to the classroom, from the lesson to the written work, with a tune. Teach children the practicality and joy of our singing voices!
- Teach a biblical concept with singing: “Sing back to me after I sing to you, ‘God made Rachel,’” going quickly around the class, using each name (e.g. three notes “do-re-mi”).
- Help children discover highs and lows in their voices by matching pitches while doing high and low body movement.
- Use your hand or body to show pitch levels and direction of the notes of a melody.
- Help children listen carefully to match pitches with their singing voice. Encourage each one as you walk around the circle listening to voices as they sing a pitch together.
- Encourage children to sing with a tall, relaxed body, letting the beautiful voice God has given them ride out of their mouths on a deep, steady, flowing breath of air.
- Help children discover keeping a beat with different rhythm instruments: “You play when my picture shows your instrument. Now everyone play. Can you feel the beat together?”

- As the class sits in a circle on the floor, teach rhythm with a pair of small rocks for each student (about the size of their grip): “When teacher taps the rocks together in a beat, you may pick your rocks up and echo the beat. Now let’s tap our rocks softly to the beat of ‘Jesus Loves Me.’”
- Teach by echo. Sing a phrase on “doo, doo, doo” and ask children to echo. Add the next phrase. Then go back and add the words.
- Speak the words of a hymn you are teaching phrase by phrase in the rhythm of the music, asking the children to repeat it. Then add the notes.
- Repeat songs often. Children learn quickly, and even more challenging songs/hymns will soon be comfortable and enjoyed by all.
- Use actions or hand signs. The kinesthetic activity helps a child learn and retain the text and the music. When the actions have been learned, ask a child to lead the group.
- Ask children to draw a simple illustration of a phrase from the hymn you are teaching.
- Insert surprise and changing voice inflections as you help children understand the meaning of the text.
- Put one big word from the hymn stanza you are teaching on the board. Pronounce it, clap out its syllables, and briefly tell its meaning. Then show surprise and point to it when it comes in the hymn as it is sung.
- Create a spirit of reverence and respect toward God by the way you teach and sing the music.
- Use a variety of accompaniments as appropriate and available. Play the piano, strum an autoharp, a ukulele, a guitar. Invite a parent or volunteer in to accompany. Use a recorded accompaniment. Bring the children to the sanctuary to sing a learned hymn with organ or piano accompaniment. Then have the children share their music in a church service.
- Observe birthdays with a special birthday song that all the children learn (a traditional birthday song could end with the phrase, “May Jesus bless you”).