

How can we adapt teaching to children in Classes 1-3?

Class 1-3

Sometimes called Primary Class

1. Physical Development-Class 1-3

Primary children tire easily because they are always in motion, doing, doing, doing. They get tired, but they do not like to stop and rest. Therefore it is important for the Sunday school program to have the opportunity for them to do a variety of activities, activities involving lots of movement, followed by quieter times of rest, using quiet songs.

Their large muscle groups are growing very rapidly, which results in a need to move and exercise. When these children sing, they should always use rhythmic exercises of some kind involving their large muscles. During teaching, they should be acting out the story a lot. They can all make the appropriate motions together as a group. You can also begin to assign parts in skits, each child acting out a different part. Before class and at other times, they should play many active games.

Their small or fine muscles, on the other hand, are only beginning to grow. So, although they may be able to write or color, they are often not very good at these activities because they use the fine muscles that are not fully developed.

2. Mental Development- Class 1-3

Primary children can listen attentively to teaching for longer than preschool children, but still not for very long. The teaching should not exceed 7 to 10 minutes. It helps if the teacher can divide the lesson into two parts, each 4 to 5 minutes long, and sing some active songs in between the two parts.

These children still need much review, but they no longer need to hear things repeated over and over like little children do. The teacher can teach a new lesson each week, but also allow for a review time each week. They should also review the previous week's memory verse by repeating it or singing it twice, but also teach a new verse each week (saying or singing it at least 6 times).

These children primarily understand things that are RIGHT HERE AND NOW. They are not adept at understanding the other times like the future or the past, or other places, especially far-away, unknown places. They cannot learn historical dates or chronologies or geography with much understanding. Lessons need not follow chronological order. The teacher should emphasize the life application so they can begin to understand how to apply Bible truths to their everyday lives here and now.

Primary children are very curious. They ask lots of questions. Answering their questions can be a very valuable teaching method, because if they have asked a question, you know they have some interest in knowing about that topic or issue.

Their memories are also strong. It is very important for the teacher to carefully note and fulfill all his promises to them. Otherwise he may be considered unfaithful or even a liar. They can learn all but the hardest memory verses, usually the whole verse and the address (where it's found in the Bible). They should memorize many verses that show the need for and way of salvation.

Primary children are developing in understanding, but they still are not strong at understanding most symbolism. It is best to use verses and lessons that say exactly what they mean without symbolic language whenever possible. There is one symbolic approach, however, that in our experience seems to be well understood by children. It is the wordless book, which uses colors to symbolize Gospel truths. The gold page represents heaven, the black page sin which blocks our way to heaven, the red page the blood of Jesus shed for our sins, the white page cleansing from sin through faith in Christ, and the green page growth after we have received Christ.

Those who are learning to read and write in school are proud to show it off and eager to try to use their new skills. The teacher may now use word cards and flashcards with simple writing effectively, as well as writing on a blackboard or on the ground. However, remember that these children are only beginning to learn to read. Give them encouragement if they try hard and if they get even one word right. Ask for volunteers to read. Avoid calling on children and making them read.

Those who are not able to go to school, or those who are having difficulty learning to read in school often feel ashamed. Do not laugh at them or scold them about their reading, or push them into reading publicly before they are ready. The teacher's use of flashcards in Sunday school should help improve their reading level.

Primary children are also beginning to understand and use simple math concepts. They like Bible games and Bible lessons that specify numbers up to ten, like "two blind men" or "ten lepers".

3. Emotional Development- Class 1-3

Primary children have not yet developed patience or control over their emotions. The teacher should therefore talk to them quietly most of the time. He should avoid overly exciting their emotions. They become angry very quickly. However, if the teacher does not pay much attention to it, their anger often subsides quickly. They are still afraid of many things. Lessons showing God's care for people can be an encouragement to them.

4. Social Development- Class 1-3

These children are beginning to understand that there are others in the world. They can sympathize and identify with other people, especially through stories. Good Bible lessons can help them understand how they can help others. Friendship with other children is very important to them. Many times it is good to try to get all the children within a group of friends to come to Sunday school. The teacher also can encourage the children to bring their friends. Boys and girls can be friends and can be taught together in a single group. The teacher can be either a man or a woman. The children are always polite to those in authority. They will follow the Sunday

school rules if they know and understand what they are. Discipline is not usually a major problem.

5. Spiritual Development- Class 1-3

Primary children ask many questions and are very curious about death. Some lessons should talk about heaven and hell, and how a person can be saved.

They want to do well. They can understand right from wrong, and can understand the concept of sin if it is well explained. This is a time when they can begin to understand how Christians should live—what they must do, and what they should avoid. Since they want so urgently to do well, they can understand what God approves and does not approve. They can understand that we have sinned because we do not always do what God approves.

Even though they are beginning to understand right from wrong and the reality of sin, they still often think of evil as being only what their parents disapprove, and good as being only what they like. They need teaching that will reinforce the idea that the Word of God shows us what is right and wrong.

Primary children can have very strong faith. They believe God will help them when they pray. Some lessons may show HOW God wants us to pray, what can STOP or HINDER our prayers from being answered, what prayers God is pleased with, and some different ways God can answer our prayers (YES, NO, WAIT, IF...).

If they are taught well, primary children can easily understand the Gospel. The lesson should include an invitation to receive Christ, but the children should not be forced or pulled or manipulated into responding.