

How can we adapt teaching to the Nursery & Kindergarten child?

Three to Six Years Old (before entering Primary School)

Nursery / Kindergarten Class

1. Physical Development-Three to Six Years

Nursery children are growing rapidly. For this reason, they have a real physical NEED to move constantly, even during teaching time. Because they are so active, they also tire easily. They need lots of opportunity for movement, but they also need rest times. Therefore, the teacher should plan for active teaching methods. Example: They can all make motions that go along with the story together. You can break the teaching up into segments and intersperse songs with motions and rhythmic activities with the teaching. After 20 minutes or so, there should be a little rest time. The rest time may begin with a quiet song.

2. Mental Development- Three to Six Years

Nursery children can give attention to teaching only for a short time—about 2 minutes. The teacher should plan many different activities from which to draw. Each segment should be very short. There should be a big variety in the kinds of activities in which the children participate. Bible verses should be short—still only 5 or 6 words unless associated with a song. Then maybe 10 to 12 words could be easily learned.

These children NEED to play; this is just the way God made them. Therefore, the teacher should look for ways to teach the children through directed play. Examples: Making gestures or motions as if they were the person being described in the lesson. Using finger play to show the movements described in the lesson. If you are teaching a Bible verse, they can clap their hands or feet on every syllable. Nursery children do not learn as readily by hearing a lesson as they do by doing something. That's why skits and motions and acting out of all kinds can be very successful.

Give the children things they can touch. Example: They can smell the fragrance of flowers God made; they can drink water like God gave the children of Israel when they were thirsty in the desert. They can handle boards like the ones the soldiers used to make a cross for Jesus, etc.

Nursery children love repetition and review, and they need it in order to learn. The teacher can continue the same lesson or the same idea for two weeks, or even, with some variety added, for an entire month. It is also important to review Bible verses (Bible words) and songs, saying or singing them over and over. Little children seldom get tired of this.

When the teacher teaches, he can repeat certain phrases in his teaching. Preschool children love the repetition and the rhythm of it. Example: Joseph walked beside a donkey. Klop! Klop! Klop!

Mama Mary rode on the donkey. Klop! Klop! Klop!

She held little Jesus in his arms on the donkey. Klop! Klop! Klop!

Joseph was going away. Klop! Klop! Klop!

Mama Mary was going away. Klop! Klop! Klop!
 Little Jesus was going away, too. Klop! Klop! Klop!
 They all were going away. Klop! Klop! Klop!
 They were going to Egypt. Klop! Klop! Klop!
 God told them to go. Klop! Klop! Klop!

Nursery children do not understand most symbols well. Usually they think it very literal terms, believing every word the teacher says it concrete terms. Example: If a teacher says Jesus is the door, they may think of him being a physical door made of wood with a doorknob. It is best to stay away from teaching and Bible verses that are largely symbolic.

On the other hand, Bible stories that show how Jesus is and how God is help them to understand God's character. When they see Jesus being kind and loving, they understand that He is kind and loving, etc.

It is obvious that nursery children, having not yet attended school, do not yet know how to read or write. Therefore, flashcards using words cannot help them, although flashcards using pictures can. The address of the verse (where it is located in the Bible) is not of great importance to them. It is enough to simply call memory verses "Bible Words".

Pictures should be realistic rather than cartoon-like or symbolic. Pictures of people should show the whole person, not just a part like a head or a hand. Backgrounds need not be complicated. Unnecessary detail should be eliminated from the picture.

Objects like wood shavings or metal pieces can be glued over appropriate parts of pictures to make "touch and feel" pictures.

Nursery children like bright colors like red, green, yellow, and blue.

3. Emotional Development- Three to Six Years

Nursery children are often very fearful. If anything in the classroom makes them fearful, remove it if you can. Do not use masks or costumes that may make them afraid. Speak to them in quiet, peaceful words, not in an angry tone of voice. The teacher should not should fear, but neither should he ridicule the them if for any reason they are afraid. Their emotions can change very quickly, so it often helps to ignore their fear and try to distract them with some other activity.

These children will do almost anything to please their teachers. Therefore it is important not to be insistent on them receiving Christ. Certainly the teacher should never refuse to help any child who is ready to receive Christ, as some will be. But neither should he emphasize it so much that the child responds simply to please the teacher. Such a response is not real salvation and could confuse the child later on.

4. Social Development- Three to Six Years

Nursery children love the words "I, me, mine, my, myself." They use these words a lot because children start out basically self-centered. Nursery children are only beginning to become aware that there are others in the world besides themselves and their mommies and daddies. The lessons the children can most easily relate to are those that deal with people close to them—the family of Moses, Jesus with his mother and Joseph in their home, etc. Families they can

understand. Kings and warriors and prophets are much more difficult. During prayer time, prayer should include the families of the children.

5. Spiritual Development- Three to Six Years

Nursery children understand things they can see and feel and touch—things that are concrete and real. It is hard for them to understand that God is a Spirit, but they can more easily understand Jesus, because of His humanity. They can understand some of the characteristics of God by seeing in stories what God (or Jesus) DID and SAID.

These years are for many children years of preparation. Most children will make decisions for Christ later on during their primary school years. However, some children are ready to come to salvation during the preschool years, especially if their parents are regularly teaching them the Word of God at home. Therefore, we should do a good job of teaching foundational truths: who Jesus is, what the Bible is, what sin is, what Jesus did for us. The teacher should not pull hard to get the children to come to Christ for salvation, but he should always help any who show a readiness to do so. He should faithfully teach all the children, because that will help prepare them to receive the Lord in later years.

The teacher should gently help the children develop their concepts of right and wrong. Often little children think of GOOD as being what makes their families or their teachers happy with them. They think of BAD as being something that brings them punishment or gets them into trouble, something mommy doesn't like. Teach them that God is the one who can tell us what is GOOD and what is BAD. This helps lay the foundation for understanding what sin is.

If they are loved in their families, they can begin to understand that God loves them. You should teach much about God's love. Teach them that God loves us, sinners. He loves us even when we do wrong. Never teach that God WILL love us IF we are good! That is not a true statement, and it is not biblical. The Bible is clear that God loved us while we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8).

Preschool children do not need to worry about doctrines that are hard to understand. In-depth doctrinal teaching about many issues should be left for later years.