



How to Train Youth Helpers for Early Childhood Ministry

by Sharon Ellard

Teenagers can be very effective early childhood teachers or helpers. Teenagers usually enjoy playing with preschoolers. Many teens also have experience baby-sitting for young children.

Caring for preschoolers in a group, however, differs from either experience. Teens need to understand these differences in order to be better helpers in early childhood ministries.

Guidelines for Teen Helpers

Here are several guidelines to help teenagers become effective members of any early childhood ministry team.

Communicate specific expectations.

Teens need to know what you expect them to do when they are helping to teach a class. Decide whether teens will work as young teachers, as caregivers, or as playmates. If you want teens to supervise learning centers, for example, describe ways they can connect play activities with Bible ideas.

Explain the impact of imitation.

Preschoolers will behave the way they see others act. They especially admire teenagers and are very easily influenced by them.

Explain to youth helpers how much young children will want to

be like them. Ask them to be good role models during worship, story time, and hands-on learning. They can do that by taking part in all activities with the children.

If a child is not coloring a picture, for example, a teen could offer to color the page with her, and ask which part of the picture



the child would like him to color. If the teacher wants children to make the sound of sheep during a Bible story, she might ask a teenager to make the sound first then ask all the young children to imitate that sound.

As the young children watch the teenager participate, they will probably take part too.

Describe group care.

Ask teens to focus attention on several children at a time unless you assign them to a specific

child who needs special attention. They also need to learn to position themselves so they face the center of the room. This position will allow them to watch for possible problems throughout the room.

Explain safety needs.

Often teens like to wrestle with or chase young children. Youth teachers need to understand that energetic play can quickly get out of control in a group of young children. Help teens learn how to guide children to safe kinds of play such as walking, not running, or building low block towers that won't collapse on top of little heads.

Help teens interpret preschool body language.

If teenagers come on too enthusiastically, they may frighten young children. Describe how to "read" preschoolers' body language.

Encourage teens to use their talents and skills.

Ask teens about their skills and talents, such as singing, drama, puppetry, ballooning, or storytelling. Plan ways for teens to use their skills in lessons with preschoolers.

Express appreciation.

When teens know how much they influence young children, they are more likely to continue their ministry.

Questions For Further Study—

1. List three principles youth helpers should understand about ministering to young children in a group setting.
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)

2. List three examples of talents that teens may bring to their ministry to young children.
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)

3. What is one possible positive outcome of expressing appreciation to youth helpers?



This article was taken from a reproducible early childhood mentoring packet called *Help for New Teachers*, by Sharon Ellard, Early Childhood Consultant in the Sunday School Field Ministries Department. Each page of the resource addresses one commonly asked early childhood question. The complete resource is available from the Gospel Publishing House, order number 02-0706. Call 1-800-641-4310.