

Children's Ministry  
Preschool Sunday School

Tips for Building Relationships with 3-4-5 year old Children

When they display behaviors like:

**SEPARATION ANXIETY**

Developmental task: learning to part from and manage without a beloved parent; theory of attachment

- ask mom/dad to say good-bye and tell the child they will return (sneaking off is detrimental to the child)
- continually offer reassurance to the child that mom/dad will return for them
- invite the child into the group by offering a meaningful activity, especially a sensory activity (like Play-Dough or pan of water or sand)

**NERVOUS-ANXIOUS**

Developmental task: learning to participate in group life and relating to peers

- Rituals provide stability that can be calming (lighting of Christ candle, etc)
- consistent model for weekly lesson
- posting a written agenda or schedule for your time together and reviewing it at the start of class (circle time)

**BOREDOM (may look like wandering or poking friend)**

Developmental task: developing a sense of responsibility for their own feelings and empowering the child to manage them; stimulating imagination and wonder;

- give choices; this makes a child think
- ask open-ended questions
- evaluate your lesson; are you doing all the work?

**INTERRUPT-er**

Developmental task: children need to learn to self-regulate. It takes time for them to learn to control their emotions and their thoughts

- Use an object to pass to the child whose turn it is to talk; a concrete way to know when it is your turn and when it is not
- state the rules for group life clearly and simply; we raise our hands (4 & 5's); we take turns talking; we don't interrupt others
- Work with your teammates so that the main speaker can ignore the constant "interrupter" and the teammate can gently coach the child to settle; this eliminates negative energy from fueling the need to interrupt

**CURIOUS**

Developmental task: organizing an ever-expanding world; the toddler explorer turns to the preschool research scientist

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- keep lessons active
- incorporate activities that encourage the child to think and present some challenge
- acknowledge their “discovery” and offer a time to explore it; ie, when we finish the Bible Story we’ll look at that; follow through; don’t threaten with it

**INTROVERTED (and overly quiet or withdrawn)**

Developmental task: learning to participate in group life

- sit next to this child and model what you’d like them to do
- ask open-ended questions, but don’t expect a verbal answer; give them time to think
- give choices
- be sure your lesson is not all large group activities; an individual-based activity is not as stressful for this child; good lessons offer both

**UNCOOPERATIVE (look at suggestions under Boredom, too)**

Developmental task: increasing awareness of their own individuality; autonomy

- Encourage child to manage the details of the class routine alone, offering help only when needed; organize lesson materials so that it is physically possible for them to work independent from you.
- Give choices: allow the child to think, rather than simply do
- Organize the lesson time so that the child has complete freedom of decision between a carefully limited set of choices.
- Be positive: “do” works better than “don’t” ; be sure your directions are clear
- offer leadership role that is appropriate to their age; helps to engage them

**CLASS CLOWN – OFF ON TANGENTS - NONSENSE**

Developmental task: discovering that words are powerful things; being able to use them makes the preschool child feel much more able to control the world

- Ignore the behavior; again work with your teammates so that the main speaker/leader can continue and the teammate can gently touch the shoulder of the child and whisper “it’s time to listen” etc.
- Re-direct with an open-ended question to get back on task; especially when everyone’s cat has died.
- Allow a “silly time” – could be a stretch right after the story when everyone can do their best “silly dance.”

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