

Guidelines for Children's Speakers

Looking for help with the weekly children's talk?

If you're enlisting the aid of members of your congregation, here's a pre-packaged training guide with plenty of concrete advice.

Bear in mind

Little kids can only handle one idea at a time and are very concrete (rather than abstract) thinkers. ie., they ideally want to see, touch and experience to learn rather than just hear. So our task - talking about God who cannot be seen or heard audibly, often in the context of historical events - is going to be hard and need careful preparation to be successful....But it can be done !!

The best kids talks are...

Simple - just one main idea that you can say in a simple sentence

Short - Ideally around 4 mins long. Little children can concentrate well for one minute per year of age on any one activity - eg., a four year old can concentrate for 4 minutes (on a good day!!)

Catchy - Children love repetition. Hearing a song or story 43 times drives an adult mad but children enjoy the familiarity of it. Don't be afraid to say your key sentence eg. "Jesus was kind to Zacheus" 5 or 6 times

Interesting - Shock them by doing something silly - Gain their attention by a 'follow me' game, put on a hat when being a certain character. Remember - we compete with big budget television shows - their expectations are high in terms of the 'grab' Be creative and take a risk.

Well Illustrated - Events from the Bible can seem far off and irrelevant to adults and more so for littlies. Try to give them an everyday scenario for them to hang the Bible idea on. For instance when talking about Jesus as our friend, set the scene with a picture/photo of kids playing/being friends, get them to tell you why they like their friends etc.,

Be well prepared..

As you can see from the above, all of these attributes will take thought and preparation - only ad lib if you are very confident.

Have a beginning, middle and end in your head.

Have a key sentence which you can repeat and which encapsulates the talk

Always have a sentence to end on (this may be your key sentence), so that if you "lose it" entirely you can say your sentence and sit down gracefully. This also prevents us waffling and undoing an otherwise great kids talk.

Practise, practise, practise. A four minute talk is short enough that you can memorise it. This makes for a great kids talk. It also means that if/when the kids are disruptive

you are less likely to be thrown and lose your train of thought. If you are worried that you might forget it, write out three sentences - one for the beginning, middle, and end - wherever you are you can pick up from there

Pray, Pray, Pray. Pray for yourself and the kids. What you are doing in teaching the Bible to the children is of exactly the same importance as teaching the adults. What a privilege and responsibility.

If you're reading a book as a talk...
again, know it back to front.

if you plan to ask a question or two at the end, tell them that - it will encourage them to listen harder.

don't ad lib a question - plan it

Work out the key idea of the story and push it as you read.

Remember that it will be your voice and face more than the pictures which will hold the children. Use of pauses, hushed tones, sharp in-breath of surprise etc. makes all the difference.

Have a concluding sentence planned.

Some tips on crowd control

The more organised you are, the more likely you are to get the upper hand. If you stumble, umm and aah, or have to read your talk, they may well take that as their cue to muck up.

Give the impression that you are confident and in control even if you don't feel that way.

If a child is very disruptive get her to sit right in front of you facing you - this means that you are limiting their audience to one - you!

Some chatty kids want to show you their band aids or tell you they've got that book at home too but it's got a blue cover ...etc etc - Politely, but firmly nip it in the bud - "sweetie, this is my talking time - but I'd love to hear about it later " and swiftly move on. It may seem a little abrupt, but other kids will seize upon any opportunity to hear the sound of their own voice and hijack the talk.

If you are about to ask a question say: "Put your hand up if you know the answer to this question", and only listen if they do. Even if they blurt out the answer, totally ignore it and ask another to answer it and praise them for answering properly Hopefully the child who yelled out will remember for the next time.

Finally...

enjoy it - it can be a great delight to watch a child's eyes widen in surprise at something amazing Jesus did, or a smile spread across their face when you remind them that they can talk to God anytime.

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