



Tips to Making Dinosaur School Developmentally Appropriate

Using the Curriculum in *your* classroom?

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Tip #1: Tailor Lesson Plans

Tailor lesson plans according to children's interests, attention span and developmental abilities. Each lesson plan provides a content theme (e.g., feeling proud and frustrated) to be discussed in large group circle time, as well as suggested scripts using the puppets, role plays and 3-4 videotape vignettes. Each lesson plan also includes 3-4 ideas for small group practice activities and suggestions for ways to promote the theme throughout the day and week.

It is better to cover less material in a particular lesson, and do it well, than to rush through new content and lose the attention and understanding of the class. For some classes, breaking a single lesson plan into more several shorter lessons offered more frequently may be necessary to teach the material well. We do not recommend skipping material, as the lessons are carefully sequenced and build upon each other; rather some classes may cover material from 30 lessons in 30 sessions while other classes may take 45-60 sessions to cover the same material.

For preschool children one lesson plan theme will likely need to be divided into 2-3 separate lessons offered over several days. You can easily divide lessons by concentrating on one key point from the circle time discussion (e.g., discuss one feeling versus 3 feelings) and *either* showing 1-2 videotape vignettes *or* practicing several role plays. These shorter circle time discussions can be combined with one of the suggested practice activities. Please note that there are many more suggested activities for themes that are not in lesson plans but can be found in Book One. Then in the subsequent circle discussion on the same lesson you can add a new key point, show a different vignette and chose a different activity.

For kindergarten and grade school students, the amount covered in the large group circle time will depend on the attention span and developmental ability of your students. Circle times that incorporate music, movement, group games and a variety of learning modalities (visual, auditory, role plays, games, stories, puppet use etc.) will engage children's attention longer than less interactive styles of teaching



Tip #2: Ensure Meaningful Circle Time Discussions

Make the large circle time discussions and role-plays relevant to the culture, community and issues important to the students in your classroom. Sometimes teachers ask for scripts for each of the lessons. While we have provided some scripts, in general we prefer not to do this because we want teachers to feel they can be flexible and creative in the ways they present the core material to students. For example, if bullying on the playground is an issue in your school and playground, then this issue will provide key thematic material for problem solving and friendship role-plays. If children experience some trauma in the community (e.g., earthquake, fire, shooting) then content related to feelings of fear and problem-solving ways to keep safe will be important to weave in circle time discussions. On an individual student basis, topics such as divorce, moves, death of a parent, or medical issues (e.g., need to take insulin or wear a hearing aid or glasses) can be discussed and role-played by the puppets. Students can help the puppets identify the feelings associated with any of these problems and can help to role play positive coping and problem solving strategies.



Tip #3: Maintain Order of Curriculum

Do the lessons and small group activities in the order outlined in the manual. It is important to start with school rules and school study skills at the beginning of the school year because these units set the stage for appropriate classroom behavior. The feelings unit is next and provides the basis for all other units. It is key to establish a feelings vocabulary before working on problem solving.

Try to use one of the small group activities recommended for each lesson (we have starred our favorites). These activities have been chosen to compliment and reinforce the large group lesson. If you do choose to use an activity that is not recommended for the lesson, make sure that your students have all the necessary background for the lesson (e.g., if the small group activity requires identification of 10 feelings, make sure your students have already learned these feeling words). In addition, look ahead to make sure the activity is not more appropriate for an upcoming lesson.



Tip #4: Adjust Emphasis of Content According to Age of Students

For preschool and kindergarten children the emphases of the content should be on the feelings unit and friendship skills with some beginning work with problem solving and basic school rules such as “keeping hands to own body” and using “walking feet”.

For school age students the emphases will be on more advanced problem solving including evaluation of solutions, anger management strategies and other self-management approaches, and school study skills such as ways to concentrate, work hard, check work, and the importance of trying again when mistakes are made.

Large Group Circle Time



Tip #5: Plan for variety and novelty in presentation.

Vary your circle time presentation. For example, one lesson may center around showing 1-2 vignettes and role-playing scenes based on these vignettes. Another lesson may begin with a problem presented by the puppet that the children then help to solve and reenact. Other lessons on similar content might involve a group game (pass the hat), visualization, or guest adult who presents a problem for the class to solve. Presenting the same content in multiple ways will ensure that all students have a chance to absorb and practice the new concepts. Small group activities should also be varied to include a mix of puppet plays, art activities, writing assignments, word searches or mazes, puzzles, bingos and so forth.



Tip #6: Start circle time with an interesting toy or favorite activity.

As children begin to transition from another classroom activity to Dinosaur circle time, the teacher can start by sitting in the circle place and doing something interesting such as, blowing bubbles, passing out hand lotion to those sitting, spraying “dinosaur” rain (water), playing a favorite movement song (Dina’s rap), passing feeling dice, or using a funny puppet. This will engage the children who are ready to start while also capturing the attention of children who are slower to make the transition.



Tip #7: Selecting and using videotapes.

Choose videotape vignettes for circle time that are relevant for the class. Prepare students for what they are about to see on the videotape before it starts. Challenge them to look for a particular incident on the tape. (e.g., “Okay detectives, show me a quiet thumb’s up when you see the girl following the teacher’s directions”). Then focus the group by saying: “ready, set, action” to signal start of videotape. Pause tape frequently to ask questions and to praise children who are attending. Whenever possible, after showing a vignette have students practice the skill demonstrated on the video (or role-play an alternative better response). This will help students move from watching to actual practice. In general, 1-2 vignettes per circle time with mediated discussions and role plays will be enough. Vignettes not shown can be shown in subsequent lessons. Distracted children can help by using the remote control or pressing the button to start the vignette.



Tip #8: Show cue cards of key concepts being taught in your circle time discussion.

While showing videotapes or discussing a topic in circle time, show the cue cards to highlight the key point. Students can be selected to hold these cards and show them around the circle. Pair the word on the cue card with the picture and encourage children to read the word. In addition, you can post the cue cards (e.g., quiet hand up, walking feet, hands to self, inside voice) in strategic areas in the classroom. For example, put the “hands to self” cue card in front of a wiggly child’s carpet square, or during choice time, put the “sharing” cue card in the block and car area. The Wally relaxing or Tiny Turtle cue cards can be hung in the Time Out or Calm Down area.



Tip #9: Use prosocial children as models during circle time.

Call on a student who will model appropriate responses before calling on less competent students.

Small Group Practice Activities



Tip #10: Modeling and Preparation for Small Group Activities is Key.

Always describe and demonstrate the small group activity before the children go to their small group tables. Seeing the puppets model how to do an activity will assure a successful small group activity as well as help those who are coaching small group activities understand what is to be accomplished.



Tip #11: Selecting Small Group Activities According to Children’s Learning Needs

In the manual you will see small group activities (and lesson plans) organized as Year One and Year Two. Year one small group activities tend to focus on pre-reading and pre-writing skills and are less complex. Year two activities have more emphases on reading and writing and assume children have completed the first year curriculum and lesson

plans. You can choose activities from Year One and Year Two activities according to each student's abilities and your goals for them. Each unit provides a checklist showing whether the small group activity is primarily an activity focused on a science or math concept, reading, writing, communication or cognitive activity and whether it is basic or advanced. Basic refers to preschool children and advanced to early school age children.



Tip #12: Selecting Children for Small Groups

Be thoughtful about how you split up children for small groups. You may want to modify an activity so that there is a simple, medium, and advanced version with children grouped according to their abilities (e.g., one table with 5 piece puzzles, one with 20 piece puzzles, and one with 50 piece puzzles). Other times you may want to mix developmental ability levels so that more advanced children can assist less advanced children. Don't put all the children with impulsivity or short attention span at one table! Post children's names on dinosaur name tags at their seats.



Tip #13: Adjusting Small Group Activity so that Every Student is Successful

For children with poor fine motor ability, adjust games to make the activity successful. This can be done by putting puzzles on felt boards, adding velcro game pieces to keep them from slipping, limiting the number of pieces of a puzzle, setting up a child's materials on a tray, using large pencils or chalk to write, providing special loop scissors, pre-cutting shapes for an activity, or taping down paper so it won't move.

For children with learning problems, simplify the small group activity or use a different activity from the same lesson plan so that the child can be successful. For example, if a child is unable to write, you can transcribe his responses to the problem on the paper, or write a word or letter down for him to copy. Alternatively, you can encourage the child to draw a picture of his solution. Chose the basic version of the bingo game or a puzzle with fewer pieces before proceeding to the more advanced version.

For children with social difficulties or special needs pair them with more skilled, prosocial "buddies" (popular students) who can help them. Buddies play with the assigned child doing a preplanned activity. Rotate buddies to avoid burn out and praise them for their friendly interactions with the designated child. Buddies can also be paired with a child who is learning disabled or having motoric difficulties in the same way to help with an activity.

For children with english as a second language, use picture cue cards with every new concept taught, simplify your language and model behavior being taught frequently. At

the beginning of the year you might want to provide translators for the group discussions and small group activities and gradually phase them out during the year as english is learned.



Tip #14: Using the Wally Problem Solving Detective books.

Read these small books to children in groups of 4-5 students so that everyone can see the pictures. Limit story telling to 2-3 problems per session. For preschool children or children who can't read, shorten the stories at first and then gradually increase the length. For use with the entire classroom, scan book pictures into a computer and use an overhead projector so that the whole class can see the picture. These books can also be used as prompts for mini "plays" where children act out the solutions with small hand puppets. Read stories several times to increase children's mastery of the stories. Older students can write their own stories about problems that are encountered by Wally, Molly, Tiny, Oscar and their friends.

Promotion Activities



Tip # 15: During free choice and unstructured times such as recess or lunch, model social and problem solving skills by playing with students and describing their prosocial skills (trading, helping, waiting, sharing).

Spend time playing with children and commenting on how they are using friendly behaviors such as sharing, helping, taking turns, asking politely, waiting and so forth. When problems occur, encourage children to use Wally's Problem Solving detective kit to search for possible solutions. To make these solutions accessible and easily transportable (on field trips and on the playground) they can be reduced in size, punched with holes and put on key rings. Then they can be worn by the teacher or playground supervisor on his or her belt and referred to at a moments notice.



Tip #16: Always give students the dinosaur homework and review it each week. Be sure to send home letters to parents describing each of the new dinosaur units.

Children this age love the homework, and it provides an opportunity for parents to be involved in what you are teaching. It also provides support for developing these skills at home. Emphasize to parents that the point of this homework is to spend positive time with their child reviewing the concepts. Parents should not worry about "right" and

“wrong” answers, and should limit the amount of time spent on the assignments (unless the child is asking to work more). If children do not complete the homework at home, provide time and support to do it at school.



Tip #17: Invite parents to participate in Dinosaur School.

Parents can help by assisting with small group activities, materials preparation, or doing homework with students who need help at school. Parents enjoy this material, and the more they understand it the more they can incorporate these ideas at home. Hold parent dinosaur school nights to tell parents about Dinosaur School. Invite the children and do some of the dinosaur activities together.