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Some of this material was originally published in *Early Childhood Smart Pages* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2002), *Children's Ministry Smart Pages* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2004), and *Preteen Ministry Smart Pages* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2005).

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How to Use this Book

IF YOU ARE A CHILDREN'S PASTOR OR DIRECTOR,

- 1.** Read the Straight Talk on Training section that begins on page 11 for an overview of the steps you can take to effectively train leaders and teachers for your children's ministry.
- 2.** Skim through the Contents section to get an idea of the topics for which articles, tips and miniposters are provided. Cataloged by subject and always at your fingertips, this book (and the CD-ROM) is ready to assist you whenever your children's ministry volunteers need training in a specific topic.
- 3.** Use the Monthly Calendar (p. 43) to plan and schedule several training events.

IF YOU ARE A SMALL-GROUP LEADER OR TEACHER,

- 1.** Skim through the Contents section to get an idea of the topics for which articles, tips and miniposters are provided.
- 2.** Keep this book as a handy reference when you need concise, down-to-earth information about your job as a children's leader or teacher.

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STRAIGHT TALK ON TRAINING

STRAIGHT TALK ON TRAINING

Sometimes children's pastors are so glad to have someone willing to lead a group that they are tempted to forego the steps that are needed to help the willing volunteer become an effective teacher. But here's the straight talk: A teacher who receives little training is unlikely to experience a fruitful ministry. Turn to the page numbers listed to get the essential information you need about how to motivate and build your volunteers.

Guideline 1: Get the Big Picture of Training (p. 13)

Plan a year-long calendar of teacher-training strategies and enrichment events that work for your church, updating the plan on a regular basis as needs and concerns arise.

Guideline 2: Make Meetings Effective (p. 18)

Plan and lead meetings that motivate teachers to attend, develop their skills and provide opportunities for team-building.

Guideline 3: Focus on Publicity (p. 25)

Make publicity a priority so that training efforts are not wasted.

Icebreakers (p. 22)

Build community among your volunteers with these fun get-acquainted activities.

Training: Tough Questions, Real Answers (p. 27)

Get the advice you need to make training happen!

Guideline 1: Get the Big Picture of Training

Just think of the many parts of a teacher or helper's job in your children's programs: leading small-group discussions, storytelling, understanding of a child's characteristics, knowledge of appropriate teaching methods, awareness of your church's policies and procedures, how to talk with children, handling discipline challenges—and more! So no matter what you call it—teacher-training, teaching enrichment, networking or orientation—the process of building up the skills of your volunteers is a significant part of an effective children's ministry.

Look at the Benefits

Some view training as something one acquires and possesses. Training, however, is actually a process whereby a volunteer improves and gains confidence in the skills they use. Training allows for growth and development of additional new skills. Training ensures vitality and freshness for the entire staff.

Consider who benefits from ongoing training opportunities. Children benefit as they participate in well-planned activities that nurture their understanding of God and His love for them. Teachers benefit because they experience increased confidence in teaching and enjoy the sense of teamwork that comes from group-training experiences. You, as the leader, benefit because well-trained teachers are more likely to enjoy their ministry experience and continue as volunteers.

A bonus benefit is that teachers are often parents who are volunteering in ministry for the first time. The skills they gain in teacher-training are often the same skills they need as parents. Therefore, training volunteers makes a significant impact in parent education.

More Than a One-Time Event

For those children's ministry leaders whose schedule is already full of endless details, it may seem that scheduling and leading even one training event is enough. However, in order for training to truly make a difference, it must be an ongoing process. Here's why:

- ▶ Teachers do not automatically know how to guide others in Bible learning. When left untrained, most adults tend to teach in the way they were taught, leading to very inconsistent classroom experiences for the children in your programs. Volunteers who come from an unchurched background have even less experience on which to build.
- ▶ New teachers need the promise of training. Having an ongoing training program will encourage new volunteers to commit their time and energy and will make the task of recruiting volunteers easier.
- ▶ Training that extends throughout the year enables volunteers to absorb information in manageable sections—rather than being overwhelmed by “everything you ever wanted to know about teaching children” in one training event. Teachers are more likely to put new information into practice if it is received in bite-size pieces.
- ▶ In any children's ministry, teacher absences will have to be filled during the year. An ongoing training plan throughout the year makes it possible for new staff members to be given the thorough training they need, instead of a haphazard, quick orientation.
- ▶ As circumstances and programs change throughout the year, it is easier to communicate and discuss procedural changes when a training plan is already in place.
- ▶ Both experienced and inexperienced teachers will appreciate the boost they receive from training meetings. Experienced teachers need fresh enthusiasm and inexperienced teachers need the practical wisdom of other teachers.

Your efforts in training will pay off as you see teachers encouraging each other, supporting one another in trying new ideas, evaluating progress, finding solutions to problems and sharing successes!

Training that Works

In order to make the most of your training efforts, focus in on these significant aspects of training:

- ▶ Work hard at keeping your training practical. The focus of any training, whether it is a weekly e-mail sent to your volunteers or an article posted on your church website, should be on specific ways in which the information being taught can be used in upcoming children's ministry programs. Identify at least one or two ideas they can put into practice right away. For training meetings, always ask teachers to bring the curriculum from which they are teaching. Make an effort to show how training principles relate to specific curriculum components. One of the questions that must be asked is, "How much of this training can be used by a teacher in next week's session?"
- ▶ From event to event and year to year, offer training that is based on the same teaching/learning philosophy. When all training events are carefully chosen to reinforce each other, you can be sure that your staff is not presented with conflicting educational philosophies and methods, and more than one age level can be trained at a time.
- ▶ Whenever possible, include a time in each training event that involves teachers in experiential learning. Unless a teacher tries a new skill or method, he or she will probably not feel confident enough to use it in class. Involve participants in observing and practicing the skills they are being trained to use.



Pre-Service Training

The first step in training actually begins when a volunteer accepts a task in your children's ministry. You can't separate recruiting and training; these elements must be linked in order to make your volunteer's experience positive. Beginnings are the most important—and probably the most risky—times for a new recruit.

- ▶ Consider planning a basic orientation class that presents key topics: how children learn, age characteristics and needs of children, discipline tips, small-group discussion guidelines, etc. Large churches may have enough new teachers to conduct orientation classes as part of their adult education program. Send an invitation to the orientation class to each new volunteer, and follow up with a phone call to encourage attendance.

▶ Make sure to provide a new volunteer with a current job description. When you review the job description with a new volunteer, be sure to answer the question, What are the basic things a person should do in order to succeed in this ministry? Explain why each action is important and how it will benefit the volunteer by helping him or her succeed. (For example, "It is important to prepare all materials before the session begins so that you can welcome and greet children as they arrive. Having time to welcome and greet children is a good way to build relationships with and among your class.")

▶ Schedule a time for the volunteer to observe a class or program already in progress, preferably assisting an experienced teacher several times. (See the Observation Form on p. 44.)

In-Service Training

In order to motivate and sustain interest in training opportunities, incorporate several different methods of training.

First, all teachers will benefit by attending training conferences or workshops in which their teaching skills can be improved. Both new and experienced teachers need opportunities to learn new skills, correct mistakes and expand their vision of ministry. Many churches find it helpful to plan at least two special training events each year, approximately four to six months apart.

More than one such event is advantageous because not all teachers will attend any single event and new teachers need significant reinforcement during the first year or two of service.

Depending on the size and resources of your church, you may take teachers to a local, regional or denominational convention or seminar. You may cooperate with one or more other churches in your area. Or you may plan and conduct the event just for your own staff.

If inviting teachers to attend a conference in your community or region, carefully select from possible events to make sure that the information communicated will support and enrich the philosophy of education in your ministry. The advantage of attending events outside your own church is that they often create enthusiasm and excitement about ministry.

In planning an event at your own church, consider several options for speakers and programs:

- ▶ An experienced public or private school teacher who can address a particular topic such as age-level characteristics, discipline tips, etc.
- ▶ A children's leader from a nearby church.
- ▶ A teacher in your church who has demonstrated effective teaching techniques.
- ▶ A teacher-training video that provides a discussion guide (available from curriculum companies or your local Christian bookstore).
- ▶ A round-table format at which several teachers share specific tips regarding a particular topic.

A second category of training is to invite teams of teachers to meet together for planning and problem-solving. Quarterly or monthly meetings of this nature keep the program functioning well and build a sense of teamwork. The advantage of such meetings is that teachers will have an extended time period to focus in on needs and concerns in their classes and programs.

A third type of training is intended for individuals. Send weekly or monthly e-mails to your volunteers that include announcements, encouragement, as well as training tips. Training articles such as those in this book can be sent via e-mail, included in newsletters or posted on your church website in a section just for volunteers. (See articles which begin on pp. 71.) You may also provide teacher-training books or videos which the volunteer may read or watch at home. In addition, you may arrange for the teacher to observe an experienced teacher in action.

Get Started

So how does a busy children's ministry leader go about getting started with a training plan (or freshening up an existing program)? Begin by evaluating the existing training in your church. Answer the following questions. (Note: If you are a new leader at your church, interview a long-time teacher or past leader to find answers to the questions.)

1. How is a new teacher most typically trained?
2. What training opportunities have recently been offered to the teachers in your program? How often do these training events take place?
3. Are the training opportunities instructional, inspirational or both?
4. How and when do most teachers plan together? What is done to encourage teachers to plan together?
5. What obstacles keep teachers from attending training events or planning meetings?

Use the answers to these questions as a guide to help you form a plan for training. Use a blank monthly calendar form (see p. 43) to schedule ongoing training techniques as well as several training events during the year. See the Sample Calendar on page 17 for ideas. Check dates and room availability on your church's master calendar. If your training plans are on your planning calendar from the very beginning, they are less likely to be forgotten or crowded out by other events.

Plan for a variety of events that include once-a-year teacher orientations, individual training through the use of e-mails, newsletters, your church's website, videos and/or books, age-level meetings, speakers, attendance at conferences, etc.

If you are creating a training program, it's wise not to overwhelm your staff (or yourself!) by planning a full-blown calendar of training all at once. Establish priorities such as

- ▶ a general teacher orientation at the beginning of each teaching term
- ▶ at least one follow-up meeting later during the year. (Larger churches will want to conduct these meetings by age level; smaller churches will find it necessary to meet with all teachers together, allowing some time during the meeting for teachers who teach together to meet.)
- ▶ a plan to orient and train new volunteers who join your staff during the teaching term, either through group meetings (in a large church) or by individual training (in a small church)
- ▶ a monthly e-mail providing encouragement and a training tip to all volunteers.

Every year, expand your training program by adding one or more training components (attendance at training conferences, observation at other churches, etc.).

Ideas

- ▶ Ask teachers to write brief examples of ways they have put teaching principles into practice, or information they have gained from a workshop or seminar, etc. Include this information in your monthly training newsletter (sent by mail or e-mail or posted on your church's website). **Tip:** Include a Teacher Challenge Devotion (see pp. 57-69) in each newsletter.
- ▶ When someone agrees to volunteer in your children's ministry, send a Ministry Welcome Packet that includes a list of the children with whom he or she will be working, names and phone numbers of teaching team members and one or more of the training articles in this book ("Ten Commandments for Teachers" on page 308 and "The Value of Children" on page 281). **Tip:** In the Welcome Packet, also include a gift certificate from a local coffee shop, a magnet with your children's ministry slogan on it, a bookmark, etc.
- ▶ After any training event, evaluate what learning occurred. Were your objectives for the event met? Have teachers acquired or improved the needed skills? If the answer is yes, concentrate on the next area of need. If the answer is no, consider how you can address the

CALENDAR

JANUARY

- Teacher training event by age level.
- E-mail teaching tip to all volunteers.
- Display miniposter in Supply Room and classrooms.

FEBRUARY

- Include article on prayer in newsletter.
- E-mail teaching tip.

MARCH

- E-mail Teacher Challenge Devotion to all.
- Display miniposter.

APRIL

- Teacher training event with outside speaker.
- E-mail article on Easter to all.
- Use Publicity Clip Art.

MAY

- Include article on learning styles in newsletter.
- Display miniposter.

JUNE

- E-mail Teacher Challenge Devotion to all.
- Display miniposter.

JULY

AUGUST

- E-mail article on age-level characteristics to all new teachers

SEPTEMBER

- Orientation meeting for all volunteers. Use Icebreaker ideas.
- E-mail Teacher Challenge Devotion.
- Include article on teacher preparation in newsletter.

OCTOBER

- E-mail teaching tip to all volunteers.
- Display miniposter in Supply Room and classrooms.
- Attend training conference. Give Teacher Training Certificate.

NOVEMBER

- Include article on discipline in newsletter.
- E-mail teaching tip to all volunteers.
- Display miniposter.

DECEMBER

- E-mail Teacher Challenge Devotion.
- Display miniposter.

need in a different way. **Tip:** If you feel that teachers need further information on a particular topic, use the contents in this book to find a topic-related article. Mail or distribute to teachers (along with a note thanking them for attending the training event).

► Take advantage of churches in your area that have effective children's ministries. Arrange for one or more teachers to observe at the church. **Tip:** At your next training event, invite the teachers who observed to report back to the rest of your staff.

► Provide a variety of training books and/or videos in a central location for volunteers to borrow. **Tip:** Give a book or video to a volunteer to preview and report on at a training meeting.

► Pair a new teacher with an experienced teacher in a mentoring relationship. Begin by asking the veteran to suggest several practical tips for success and by asking the novice to ask several questions. **Tip:** Encourage the use of e-mail for teachers to share questions and answers, as well as prayer requests.

► Post miniposters in classrooms or teacher workrooms that feature a specific training tip or a particular teaching strategy of which teachers need reminding. Change the posters frequently to keep interest high. **Tip:** Use the miniposters in this book (see Contents).

► Have teachers conduct a self-evaluation (see "Improving Your Role" on p. 42) to help them plan specific ways to improve their teaching. **Tip:** Follow up by asking teachers to share one action they plan to take.

Guideline 2: Make Meetings Effective

"Oh no, not another meeting!" How many of us have heard that response when announcing a teacher-training meeting? And how many of us have said those very words when receiving an invitation to a meeting?

There's no doubt about it, you and your volunteers are busy people who need to make wise choices in the use of time. Help your staff recognize the benefit they will receive from teacher-training meetings by planning valuable, effective meetings. (Good publicity is also a key component of effective meetings. Get information about publicity ideas and hints in Guideline 3 on p. 25.)

Sample Meeting Agenda (60-90 minutes)

1. Welcome and Icebreaker (10-15 minutes)

Welcome participants, make brief announcements, pray and involve participants in an icebreaker activity. (Note: Refreshments may be served as part of this opening time segment, or they may be served at the end of the meeting. An icebreaker can also be an effective activity as people arrive, ending the activity with a welcome and prayer.)

2. Skill Improvement (20-30 minutes)

Involve teachers in activities and discussion to help them improve one aspect of their teaching.

3. Teachers' Planning and Sharing Time (20-30 minutes)

Provide time for teachers to focus on the next session(s), planning activities and procedures and identifying needed materials and responsibilities. Teachers share insights and concerns about the children they teach and discuss ways to meet children's needs.

4. Devotional and Prayer Time (10-15 minutes)

Using the teacher devotional from an upcoming class lesson, discuss how the Bible story or passage relates to current life situations. Lead teachers in prayer for each other, for each other's families and for the children and their families as well. (Optional: Serve refreshments.)

When Teachers Meet Together

There are three basic things that should happen when teachers meet together. While each component does not need to receive equal time, your volunteers will find benefit in each of these components.

▶ **Sharing and fellowship.** This important component can happen in several different ways. Refreshments, use of name tags, icebreaker activities (see Icebreakers on pp. 22-24), table discussions, devotionals and prayer times can all be used to create a sense of shared ministry among your staff. If your volunteers miss out on adult opportunities for fellowship, these opportunities for getting to know each other and building unity is especially important. Especially in large churches, but even in small churches, it is important to encourage volunteers to get acquainted in informal ways.

▶ **Skill improvement.** Whether through watching and discussing a teacher-training video, listening to a speaker or brainstorming ideas to meet a particular teaching challenge, teachers need to focus on one specific skill or topic at each meeting. Whenever possible, provide time for teachers to apply their learning to classroom situations. Limit the amount of time in which teachers are expected to sit and listen. Remember that EVERYONE—children and adults—learn best as they are actively involved in the learning process.

If teachers from a variety of age levels are meeting together, it is recommended that general teaching principles be presented first to the entire group. Then, divide into smaller groups by age level for discussion of ways to apply teaching principles.

▶ **Lesson preview.** This component of volunteer training gives your teachers and helps time to plan essential lesson details (who will lead which activity, what materials are needed, etc.). In order for this part of the training to take place, volunteers need to have their curriculum available to look at and plan from. Encourage teachers to skim the Bible content and learning aims of upcoming lessons. Even meeting together briefly to plan one lesson will help your teaching teams work more effectively.

Ideas for Skill Improvement

Pay careful attention to what you provide for the skill-improvement component in your teacher-training meetings. New teachers will benefit the most from these activities, experienced teachers will be able to help new teachers grow in their understanding of teaching procedures and even those who teach alone will find it beneficial to talk over teaching methods with another teacher of the same or similar age level.

▶ Send an article from this book to teachers a week or so before the meeting. Ask teachers to read the article. At the training meeting, lead a discussion about the teaching methods presented in the article. Ask, “What new teaching strategies did you discover in this article? Based on the information in this article, what is one way you can improve your teaching?”

▶ Arrange for teachers to observe a well-taught class in action. Teachers sit in a semi-circle in an open area of the classroom and observe an experienced teacher demonstrate a particular teaching skill.

▶ Find one or more children’s ministry leaders in your area whose philosophy of Christian education and ministry is similar to yours. Establish a system in which you take turns leading workshops at each other’s churches.

▶ Investigate the resources available at a local community college, university or library. Teacher-training videos that deal with topics such as discipline or communication techniques may be available for rental. Preview the video ahead of time to select the most helpful video

segment(s) for your teachers to watch, and to develop several questions for teachers to discuss after watching the video.

- ▶ Identify people in your church who are experienced teachers in public or private schools. Invite the teacher to become acquainted with the church's ministry to children by informally observing one or more classes. Then ask the teacher to present a brief workshop on specific teaching skills that would be helpful in the church setting.
- ▶ Ask the company who publishes your curriculum if they have speakers or consultants who are available to speak at churches.

Tips for Success

The key to good meetings is good preparation. Good preparation includes:

- ▶ Carefully planning the meeting agenda in order to begin and end the meeting on time. Customize the sample agenda on page 18.

Training Event Publicity Time Line

1. Clear the date and facilities needed with church calendar and all necessary church staff and/or committees at least three to four months in advance.
2. Communicate date and topic to all volunteers two to three months in advance.
3. Publish weekly announcements in church bulletin and/or newsletters four weeks in advance. Also display posters as attention-getters showing details of the training event (time, date, location, topics, speaker, etc.). Make sure that all printed information is complete and accurate. Use a checklist to avoid errors.
4. Send an invitation to all volunteers three weeks in advance. Include a registration form for them to return, or a phone number to which they may R.S.V.P. Arrange child care, transportation and financial assistance as needed.
5. Phone or personally contact each volunteer one to two weeks in advance to confirm his or her attendance. Follow up with another contact (e-mail or mailed reminder) the week of the training event.