

Skills 101



Welcome to Skills 101! This is the place where we'll work together to build skills designed to enhance your teaching experience and help you find new ways to improve your kids' learning! This quarter's skill builder focuses on . . .

Welcoming a New Kid

An effective class builds strong bonds among its students; however, this bond may be so tight that a new student can feel unwelcome. Students and teachers used to seeing the same faces each week may give a new kid the feeling that they consider him or her an intruder. Be extra attentive to the needs of new students! Their presence gives the class the chance to practice what the class has learned!

A new student may have just moved into the area or the student's parents may be looking for a church home. The student may also be a one-time guest in town to visit relatives or from an unchurched family cautiously trying out the church. Your challenge is to make him or her feel at home and invite the other students to welcome the new kid.

Good preparation and a warm welcome will help make a visitor comfortable and eager to return another time. For a kid not raised in the church, the routines of Sunday School and other church programs can be strange. Love, attention and guidance will ease his or her fear and discomfort.

A Good Beginning

Warmly greet each visitor and introduce yourself as he or she enters the classroom. Introduce yourself to the parents as well. Ask the parents if the child has any special medical needs. Tell the parents about any pick-up instructions.

A visitor may feel self-conscious if he or she is the only one with a name tag, so avoid using name tags unless everyone wears one. (But if you don't use name tags, make sure you can remember kids' names!) Invite parents to stay for a short time if the student is having difficulty leaving them.

Take a moment to introduce the visitor to one or two friendly buddies of the same gender. Introduce these students as the ones who will help the new student find his or her way around the room and guide the visitor in the class routine. The new student will feel that he or she has at least one friend already!

During Class

Invite a visitor to participate in class activities, but don't overdo the attention. You may be tempted to gush over a new student, but keep in mind that visitors don't like to be pointed out or given undue attention.

Because a new student may feel uncomfortable sharing supplies with strangers, always have extra Bibles and other class supplies on hand.

If your students are used to lining up in a certain way or sitting around the table in the same chairs, make it easier for newcomers to fit in by having a "visitor's spot" always available. This is an empty chair reserved for guests and a place in the line where newcomers can stand. A new student won't want to compete with other students for a place in line or a chair.

Allow the visitor to participate in discussion as much as he or she wishes, but don't expect it. A new student won't know what has been taught in previous sessions and may know little about the Bible. Avoid calling on the visitor to answer a fact-based question; however, an open-ended question ("How do you feel . . .") can be appropriate. Call the new student by name, but avoid referring to him or her as "our guest" or "the visitor" after the initial class introduction. The student doesn't need a constant reminder that he or she is not one of the original group.

Be attentive if the new student needs help; however, don't hover over him or her. If the guest needs assistance, move near the child and speak quietly so as not to draw attention. A new student may not be able to find verses in the Bible, so help the student and his or her buddy find passages.

An unchurched student may feel awkward during prayer time. Indicate that it's all right for students not to be active participants: "Now it's time to pray. That's when we talk to God. Some of us might want to pray aloud. Others of us might pray silently. Some of us may want to listen to other people pray. Whatever you choose is fine."

After Class

Be sure a visiting student leaves with all his or her belongings. Nobody wants to return to church to go to the lost-and-found office! If parents are late to pick up the student, stay with him or her until they arrive. Never let a student wander through the building alone. Greet the parents as they arrive, and briefly mention an activity that the class enjoyed. Thank the parents for bringing their son or daughter to your class, and let them know you look forward to seeing the child again. Inform parents about any routines related to children's programming at your church (children attend worship services for the first 10 minutes and then leave for age-level activities, children's choir or midweek club meeting, etc.). Within a day or two, send a postcard to the guest, thanking him or her for visiting your class.

