

ABCs of Working with Kids

A is for Active You have to be active. If you sit out of every activity, the kids won't think you care about them.

B is for Belonging. Children want to belong, you have the ability to help them feel as they do belong.

C is for Cheerful Be cheerful. Even if you're in a bad mood, be sure to keep a smile on your face. A bad day for you is a bad day for the kids.

D is for Desire You have to have the desire to give kids a fun program.

E is for Everyone Interact with everyone and get everyone involved! If you notice one of the kids in your group is shy, be sure to get him/her involved with the other kids even more.

F is for Funny Kids don't want an adult who's serious all of the time. Make jokes, have a good time.

G is for Guide It's your job to guide your children in the right direction of their life.

H is for Happy This is a given. You have to be happy. Don't be angry all of the time.

I is for Independence Teach children to become more independent than they are.

J is for Join in Don't sit on the side lines. Participate and have fun with the kids. Even if it means running around a playground or going down a slide. Do it.

K is for Kids This could have two meanings. The first means that you have to be good with kids to be a successful. The second is to let the kid inside of yourself come out. You may not be the most active or creative person outside of this program, but here that doesn't matter. Even if you aren't the best at drawing, draw anyway.

L is for Laugh You should always laugh. If one of the kids tells you a story or joke that they find funny but you don't, laugh anyway. Of course, remember to laugh at appropriate times. If a kid trips on a rock and falls, that's not the time to laugh (even though you may want to). If a kid draws a bad picture, don't laugh at it.

M is for Make Friends Make friends with the kids. Obviously this will probably happen, but make sure it does. Never ignore one child. Also, have kids make friends with each other.

N is for No Yelling You should never yell. You might scare them or make a bad situation worse. Or if you yell enough, they might actually get used to it and yelling won't be a threat to them.

O is for Options Give options. They'll have to learn sometime to choose and make decisions. Why not help them out. Sometimes they might not like the options, but they'll have to choose.

P is for Patience Have patience. This is pretty self-explanatory.

Q is for Questions Instead of punishing two kids for fighting right away, ask questions. Ask why they were fighting, what started it, who started it, was there a better way to solve the problem.

R is for Relationships Build relationships with the children.

S is for Sanity Be sure to keep your sanity, no matter how stressful times can get. Talk to other adults for suggestions.

T is for Teach Teach the ways of life. Teach them to try and become the best person they can be.

U is for Understanding We are all understanding people. If a child is upset, sit down and talk with them and listen to what they have to say.

V is for Vigilance We are in charge of making sure things are safe in our program.

W is for Wisdom Share your wisdom with the kids and watch them grow as the weeks go on.

X is for eXcellence You have a limited amount of time to give to the kids. Give it your all 100% of the time and be excellent.

Y is for Yes I Can This is not only a place for kids to learn new things and explore outside of their comfort zone; we can do this too!

Z is for Zzz Let's face it: get all the sleep you need to be well-rested for Wednesday afternoons!

Top Ten Tips for Working with Kids

1. Get to know each one individually.

Take time to get to know some of the interests, talents, and qualities of each child. Until your children feel they are building a relationship with you, that is the point where they start to feel secure and connected.

2. Get into routines right away.

For most children, routines provide security because they are predictable, and they help to know what is expected of them. For example, try using the "five-minute warning" routinely before the end of every activity period. Announce to kids, "Okay, we have five minutes before we have to clean up!" Transitions are hard for children because they involve a small loss of what they have just invested their pride and energy into doing. Using the five-minute warning consistently in other words, doing it routinely, helps children master those transitions.

3. Keep your directions simple!

Giving too many things to do at once is confusing and often results in not too much getting done! Especially for younger children who have shorter attention spans and for children who are easily distracted, try the following routine:

Step 1: Tell a child one thing to do. ("Get your homework out of your bag")

Step 2 : Ask them to repeat back to you what you have just asked them to do. ("So what are you going to do right now?")

Step 3: Instruct the child to come back and tell you when they've finished.

Step 4: Praise them for getting it done!

Step 5: Repeat the process with a new task for the child.

4. Get on their train before you try to get them on yours.

There's an expression called "getting on a train." When a child is doing something other than what she should be—rather than get into a struggle with her, experts suggest that you take a minute or two and join in whatever she is doing. In other words, take a moment to look at the pay attention to what they are doing before coaxing them away from it and onto the task at hand. Entering that child's world on her terms is a great way to develop influence with that child — which is a more powerful and lasting way of motivating children than using threats or force.

5. The human brain can't hold a negative.

When you tell a child at the swimming pool, "Don't run!" what his brain hears is "Run!" When you tell a child, "Don't talk while I'm talking!" his brain hears, "Talk while I'm talking!" It is impossible to tell someone not to do something without suggesting they do the very thing you don't want them to do. What is more effective is telling them what we want them to do. For example, at the pool, say, "Walk!" In a meeting say, "Listen while I'm speaking. You can have a turn when I am finished". Turning negatives into positives is more than just a subtle rephrasing of words. Children today are visual learners, meaning they get a picture in their brains of what behavior we are suggesting when we talk. Giving them a clear picture of what we want, rather than what we don't want helps steer their behavior in a more constructive direction. "Keep your hands to yourself," or, "Use your words when you are upset," are examples of telling children what we want from them that help them behave more appropriately.

6. Sarcasm has no place here!

I once heard an adult shouting at children who were late to line-up: "Come on, ladies! My old grandmother moves faster than you guys!" Sarcasm may be said with a hint of affection or humor, but this subtlety is lost on children younger than fourteen — the age at which the human brain "gets" sarcasm. Not that children won't mimic the sarcasm they witness... they will. But, what younger children "repeat" is simply hostility — any hint of affection or good-natured humor that one might embed in a sarcastic remark to a friend is lost on younger children.

7. Drop the rope!

If you have ever heard a child say to an adult, "You're not the boss of me! I don't have to listen to you!" then you have witnessed an example of how American children have been encouraged to "speak up" and assert themselves.

Unfortunately, many children today confuse rudeness with assertiveness. When a child says something provocative, like, "This is a free country! I can do what I want!" or, "My parents don't make me do that, you clean up!" rather than get into an argument — which I call picking up the emotional rope — use the following four-step response:

Step 1: Stay calm and let go of the provocation (in other words, drop the emotional rope!).

Step 2: Make children "right" about what they are "right" about. For example, "You're right. I'm not your parent!"
Or, "You're right — it is a free country! Isn't that great!"

Step 3: Pause and then simply say ". . . and . . . everybody knows that her, part of being responsible is cleaning up.
And

you can do this — it's no big deal!"

Step 4: Then stop talking and move on! One of the biggest mistakes adults make with children is we talk too much!
Less is

more!

When it is clear that you are not going to pick up the bait and get into an argument, you throw that child off balance. Second, using the word "and" as opposed to the word "but" helps kids stay with you. Third, state simply and calmly what everybody knows which helps you maintain the upper hand emotionally and signals to the child your confidence. When you detach and move on you are essentially taking the high road. Children would much rather argue with you than do what they are supposed to do. Detaching takes that option away. Picking up the "emotional rope" is the single greatest mistake adults make with children.

8. Try using the "triple play" with children who are having a hard time fitting in.

One of the challenges facing adults I hear about most frequently is the child who is a little socially awkward or shy. This is where a technique I call the "triple play" comes in. Try pairing that child with one other child (preferably one he helps choose) and do a fun activity together. When children play together they get to know one another more easily and introduce them to others too.

9. Teach children how to share and have gratitude.

You may actually have to teach how to share or have a sense of gratitude. Teaching them how to share and have gratitude will help them work together. Try gathering the kids for a few minutes at the end of the day and have them raise their hands when they have an example to share with the group of something that happened that day that they are grateful for or something that someone has shared with them that day, like friendship or a toy or their time and help during clean-up. Encouraging gratitude helps create an environment where friendship and respect flourish.

10. Listen, Laugh and Enjoy!

The word "TOP" is rendered in large, bold, 3D block letters. The letters are a vibrant orange color and have a slight shadow beneath them, giving them a three-dimensional appearance. The 'T' is on the left, followed by the 'O', and the 'P' is on the right. The letters are set against a plain white background.

Additional Communication Tips

Communicating with children:

- Always give directions using positive statements (ex. "inside voices please").
- Listen to children and respect individual differences. When you take time to listen, you show a child that he/she is important.
- Have eye contact- kids know you are listening when you are making eye contact. Lean for a teen, squat for a tot.
- Avoid talking down to children.
- Be clear in your expectations.
- Discuss with the children the activities for the day.
- Use motivating words.
- Praise and Reinforce good behavior.
- Flexibility and adaptability are essential.
- Have empathy, realize that some children may be dealing with less than ideal situations unbeknown to you.
- Always intervene when you hear children putting each other down.
- Use a sense of humor, an easy-going attitude, patience and creativity
- Always end the day on a positive note. Ask questions like "What was your favorite part of the day?". You will be amazed what matters to the children.

HOW TO HAVE FUN

- This program about relationships and connections between kids and volunteers. Don't be lazy! Interact with children. Don't just tell them how to do things--do it too! Play UNO, , play in the soccer game. It makes the day so much more fun for you too!
- You are a role model, so act like it. The children will do what you do. Think of how you want the kids to behave and act that way. Be professional in front of the children.
- Be friends but do not let them get away with things. Treat kids who get on your nerves like you do your favorite. Basically, don't play favorites!
- Break up cliques early. It is unavoidable that there will be cliques. Make sure that you make them mingle as much as possible.
- Be proactive rather than reactive. Anticipate what is going to happen and then plan accordingly.
- Grin and bear it. You may be tired, hungry or have 100 other things that you need to get done at work. People who work with kids need to be some of the best actors in the world at times.
- Try to spend a few minutes of face time with each new child. They will like you more if they feel that they are the center of attention, and it will allow you to understand them better. We can tag team as a group.
- **Prepare.** Prepare for each day and whatever it may throw at you. If you prepare yourself, you can prepare the kids. They will have less anxiety about the day and have something to look forward to.
- Ask questions, start conversations and play games that help the kids get to know each other.



HOW TO PICK TEAMS

Have you or someone you know ever been the last person selected to be on a team? If this has happened, then you are aware of the damage it causes to one's self esteem. Making teams by using team captains who select players, one by one, from the group has severe consequences.

Consequences:

1. Child loses self confidence
2. Child may become a behavioral problem
3. Child does not want to participate
4. Child does not want to return to the program

Creative Ways to Make Teams

- Have children line up and count off using numbers, objects, animals (tigers and bears), etc.
- Have everyone take off one shoe and put it in a pile. Volunteer randomly throws shoes to his/her left and right. Children go to the left or right to pick up their shoe. Two teams are made of the right/left throw.
- Make teams according to birth month, birth dates, or birth season.
- Draw names from a hat (use name cards).
- Have children pair off and each pair find another pair to form four and each foursome find another foursome...go until you have the correct teams designed.
- Play a game or icebreaker that results in formed groups.
- Have children group according to material items, NOT physical characteristics (all who are wearing a watch vs. those who aren't; those with white shirts, those with other colors)
- Volunteers randomly select teams (not too exciting, use as a last resort).
- Mingle, Mingle, Mingle—group mingles around, leader calls out random numbers, the group has to get in groups of that many, play multiple rounds.
- Toe to Toe - Have the kids stand toe to toe with someone their height. One of the kids is skittles one is starburst. Send one to one side, one to the other. Keep dividing until you get desired group size.
- Come up with a few ways of your own!



GAMES

Play with the kids . Kids will be most likely to play a game if you are actively participating. Enjoy yourself and be part of the group, but be cautious not to play at skill levels above the kids that make the game unfair or dangerous.

Facilitate equal playing action for all participants. Be very mindful of how many times a kid has (ie) received the soccer ball. Quite often, less active kids are left on the sidelines while more athletic or outgoing children dominate the game. If you are playing any activity, find a way to keep activities moving and changing to give everyone equal quality playing time. This same principle applies to sports-minded children who may be uncomfortable playing dramatic games.

Keeping score is not always important! You'll quickly find that by simply not keeping score, many games become more fun. Whenever possible, try to limit the focus on "winning" or "losing" and concentrate more on having fun, and staying active. This is not to say that you should never keep score - it's simply not always important.

Re-invent any activity by changing the rules .Any game can be adapted to make it more interesting. Here are several adaptations of kickball as an example: Run the bases backwards, run them in reverse order, give all infielders water balloons to use to throw players out instead of the ball, hit the ball with a bat, use a beach ball or have entire sides kick before rotating instead of having traditional outs.

Learn games at all physical activity levels. Every group is different, and every day is different as well. Good volunteers have a bag a tricks for the various personalities or weather conditions that they come across.

Always, Always, Always encourage teamwork, fair play, and sportsmanship! Set the tone right away - games are meant to be fun and should reflect the values of the Y. Set ground rules for physical or less active games alike, such as, "Only positive comments," or "No name-calling."

Always stop the game while you're still having fun. Children will always want to return to a game that was stopped that they were enjoying. If you play a game until everyone is dropping out or arguing, that's how they will remember it.

Let children lead games. Give children an opportunity to be the group leader, explain the rules, choose captains, set boundaries, and arbitrate arguments. It helps build leadership skills, independence, and self-esteem.

