

Teaching the Gospel to Young Children and Other Concrete Learners

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How to Teach Gospel Concepts (overview)

Make ideas “realizable.”

Use immediate and concrete as bridge to remote and abstract.

Relate gospel idea to children’s own experiences (repeatedly comment on the relationship in a very simple way).

Use hands-on materials.

Present in novel, interesting, interactive ways (be engaging).

Find an interesting, novel, hands-on object or event to relate to a gospel principle.

Relate a gospel idea to familiar word and common experience.

Contexts, Activities

Role-playing

- Arrange active audience and speaker roles.

- Select good children’s books.

- Object lessons

Hands-on exploration of novel, sensory materials

- Take and eat food on ship; count blessings with beans

- Get, make, do, try, touch, feel, smell, act on (ooey gooey, fun mud, die cuts, stamp pads)

Arts and crafts; cooking, making and doing things

Simulations and real events

- Write commandments; give to others to read and do; list things to “remember.”

Clean the room, deliver package, make gifts, write letters.

Games and gross motor activities (obstacle course, treasure hunt)

Dramatic story telling (entertaining)

Relate good children's books to gospel idea.

Select, adapt children's books.

Arrange audience participation.

Adapt the language.

Relate to the gospel; support children's understanding.

Dramatize: create a "spectacle" with words, voice, props.

Tell rather than read; simplify text or events if necessary.

Involve listeners

Hold a related item; use props, engage in actions, take a role

Answer questions, restate

Fill in predictable elements

Play with repetitive elements; engage in word play

Play with things that begin with "b" (Baptism brings beautiful best blessings.), or a word or phrase ("do," "no," "listen," "special").

Sabotage, violate routines and expectations; let interesting things happen (accidentally spill the materials); create "spectacles."

Act "silly," exaggerate actions.

Vary intonation, emotional tones, take on voices.

Do novel, interesting things.

Enact a common event in a different or unusual way; respond to children's ideas.

Relating Gospel Ideas to Familiar Words and Common Experiences

- Gospel themes: repentance, love, sharing, forgiveness, choice, plan, gifts of the Spirit, children of God, agency, free will, opposition, prayer, missionary work, baptism, faith, healing, missionary work, commandments, following, resurrection, priesthood, purpose of the Church, sacrament, keeping Sabbath day holy, honoring parents, honesty, tithing, Word of Wisdom, obedience, being a good example, gratitude, equality (no respecter of persons), prepare to meet God, pride, honor, worth
- Familiar words and phrases: trade, take off, remove, stick to, missing, can't do without, hide, stretch, take care of, put together, find, pick (choose, select, decide), disappointed, lost, make better, do without, discover, hole, fill up, empty, get away from, break, make better, invite, prepare, forget, remember, sad, empty, full, very, real, pretend, same, get away with, lots, exchange, find, use, works (does what it is supposed to), willing to, take away, rub off, not as good as

Examples of relating concepts to common experiences

- Doesn't work well (make toy car go with one tire missing—doesn't work well. We don't work well when we aren't keeping the commandments.)
- Try to make Kool-Aid without sugar; relate to not wanting to "do without"; wouldn't enjoy life without the gospel.
- Do something sloppy, talk about "getting away with it"—don't want to "get away with" not keeping the commandments.

- Trade objects; relate to repentance, forgiveness, happiness that comes from the gospel; talk about how Heavenly Father wants us to be happy; we can trade unhappiness for happiness, bad acts for good acts.
- Use? Value? Junk?—“What can you do with this?” Would Heavenly Father know what to do with it? Would He help us know what value these things have? Should we decide to throw away or make better?

Effective Story Enactments and Role Play

Support children in roles, allow for repetition.

Guide enactment and convey important ideas by taking three roles: narrator, stage manager, character.

Set an example of enthusiasm; portray emotion ("spectacle").

Repeat, vary, switch roles; elaborate and extend ideas.

Engage characters in conversations.

Accept children's appropriate variations.

Draw attention to points you want to emphasize.

Do something that relates to the story, or like the people in the story:

Example: Follow a compass; eat Passover foods; sew on a button; hammer a nail; eat at “Word of Wisdom” restaurant (make sign, ask for customers’ opinions); arrange experiences that evoke feelings.

Making Modifications in Language

Use exaggerated intonation: pitch, volume, facial expressions.

Keep sentences short; limit complexity—no more than a couple of verbs.

Pair language with gestures, actions, objects, hands-on experiences.

Repeat key words/phrases in context of hands-on activities.

Use concrete terms.

Relate abstract concepts back to the “here and now.”

Consider difficulty level of emotion words (easy: happy, mad; harder: envious, peaceful, grateful).

Provide cues: fill-in-the-blank, initial sound cue, gesture, object.

Managing Behavior

Give important roles and responsibilities.

Know individual children—involve parents in planning your class structure.

Often, engaging activities prevent a multitude of behavior problems.

Secure children's attention before giving directions—have a signal.

Examine your expectations: what is REALLY important?

Be animated, enthusiastic.

Be ready to change activities often.

Be ready to change locations in the room often.

Incorporate body movement, music.

Capitalize on talents of class members (drawing, sharing, helping, memorizing, dancing, etc.).

Include plenty of activities where talking is appropriate.

Accept class members' appropriate modifications of your lesson plan.

Provide extra support for children with comprehension, attention, language challenges.

Children with challenges may also benefit from pre-experiencing lesson concepts and activities.

Encourage children to help each other.

Measuring Outcomes

Ways to evaluate your performance and children's learning:

Parent comments

“The magic Primary teacher”

Children's remarks

Relevant responses; putting lesson ideas in their own words

Willingness to attend family home evening and Primary

Putting ideas in own words

Prodigal son: “You will always be my son.”

Engagement, active participation; emotional involvement

Making appropriate extensions

Putting character ideas in own words (paraphrasing)

Anticipating events in stories; staying in a role

Relating lesson ideas to own lives

Positive comments about Primary or lessons

Recalling and relating lesson ideas and events to others

Relating events from Primary that occurred in the past

Gospel Activities for Young Children

Ways to Make Abstract Concepts Concrete

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Word of Wisdom

- Create a “Word of Wisdom” restaurant. Take on the role of host, cook, or server. Let children be the customers. Serve the children a small amount of good food to taste. Announce that the restaurant only serves foods that are good for people (fruits, vegetables, grains, a little bit of meat). As children are tasting the foods, continue to state that the restaurant does not sell alcohol, tobacco, drugs, coffee, and tea. It is called Word of Wisdom Restaurant because it only sells things that are good for children.

Lehi's travels

- Pretend the children are on the boat heading to the American continent. Set up chairs to look like a boat or use a cardboard box or chairs placed upside down. Give out seeds to hold (so they could plant when they arrived). Talk about how Lehi and his family took a boat trip. Pass out foods that could be eaten on the ship (things that wouldn't spoil easily, such as potatoes). Pull out different kinds of foods (packaged, convenience, and basic staples) and talk about what they would have been able to take. Talk about why they are taking the trip. Give children tastes of food that Lehi's family would have been able to eat and take on the boat (e.g., dried apples). Talk about whether or not the family would have been able to cook their food. (Maybe try tasting raw potatoes.)
- Have children make paper boats (talk about needing to follow directions as Nephi needed to follow directions). As they follow directions (paper bowl stapled in ‘v’ shape, pieces of cloth attached to stick to make sail), continue to comment on how Nephi needed to follow directions and why he was building a ship. (Have children make tools by tying sticks together, etc.)

Purpose of scriptures

- Bring out large piece of paper and marker. Ask children what they want you to remember to do, to buy, and to get. Write down their suggestions (bring stuffed rabbit, bring red marker). Continually pair comments about why prophets wrote the scriptures. Refer to the list of things the children want you to remember and carry out their requests if at all possible. Continue to talk about how Heavenly Father wants them to remember the commandments and to know what the prophets said.

Making of the Book of Mormon

- Illustrate making of the Book of Mormon plates by engraving scribbles on metal foil with a stick. Staple sheets of foil together or attach with binder rings to make a book of metal plates. Tell how their plates are like the Book of Mormon and comment on the differences. Let the children try writing with metal (dull knives, for example) and sharp stones.

Priesthood; power

- Pass something from one person to another or have each person give an instruction about how to make or do something (decorate a cake, put a structure together with blocks, make a fruit salad, build a toy with glue and soft wood). Talk about how Heavenly Father has given instructions to the priesthood to do what he wants to have done.
- Show the use of power of tools – try to open a can without a can opener. Let child use a safe tool or appliance (pretend cloth or paper dolls get wet and dry them with a hair dryer). Talk about power in the priesthood is like a tool.
- Try to use electric device without plugging it in—no power. Show mechanical tool—can do things with the tool that we can't do without it.
- Card stock keys and paper lock. Opens up to information, knowledge, power of the priesthood. (Have to peel the back of label to make sticker stick.) Same as with blessings, ordinances. Play with various real keys. Place out keys and find the object the key unlocks (need the right keys).

Restore—bring things back the way they were before

- Dirty objects that can be cleaned with wipe-off towelettes or tissue paper
- Find some old object the child hasn't seen before (old toy from DI). Let them know they can have it, but first they get to make it better (restore it, make it like it was, good and new).

Knowing God

- Know vs, guess. Do you know, or are you guessing? (Put object in cookie box and ask, what's in here? Do the same for other common containers.) Differentiate between know vs. guess. Comment on how prophets know what God wants us to do.

Value

- What we trade and don't trade (keep important things). Give the children objects in packages or envelopes, each child receiving something different. If the child doesn't like what they get, permit them to trade or have other objects present that they can trade you for. Comment on how we can keep things of value. We can trade sorrow for happiness, sin for being good, etc.
- Follow commandments, keep safe. Somebody knows something you don't know (the prophet). Why we keep safe, why we follow and keep safe. Bring out puzzles or something that can only be put together with instruction. Need to follow someone else's instruction to accomplish

the task (like the prophet). Need to follow commandments to get things done, get what will make us happy.

True church, real

- How can we tell it is the true church? They all look alike. Have churches (buildings look alike) with doors—pictures under the door. Have other objects that look like the real thing (plastic lime that looks real, egg that looks real (but with inside removed); wrapper that is made to look real, but object has been removed).
- Pull out something and it gets bigger (fold a piece of paper). Box that looks like one thing but has something else in it. Say, “I’m wrong—didn’t know.” Who could have told me? (The person who could look inside and see—some children get to look inside.) Have to ask Holy Ghost to know which church is true.

Need help, can’t do by yourself

- Two-part puzzle or object to put together—one child gets wrong part—have to find someone who has the right part for their object (picture with two parts; something broken in two—one child gets half of one of the objects, and the other child gets half of the other). Give children something to do that they need help with (hold both ends of paper puppet, for example). Everybody has a part.

Repentance

- Stickers—peel off parts, see something underneath (slates)
- Picture of child in plastic wrap or plastic bag—make dirty with washable markers

Can’t hide from Heavenly Father

- Crumple up a piece of paper, try to hide in pocket.
- Still knows what it says

How we know what we need to know

- Give some odd things to each child (or part of an object). Ask if they know what it is. Some won’t know and will have to ask. Just like having to ask Heavenly Father.

Avoid trouble—listen

- Book about child who got into trouble because he/she couldn’t listen. (Act out “up” and “down” book). Hold up word for children to read (one big word or sign).

Isn’t as good without

- Part of object or toy— isn’t as good without the rest. Church wasn’t as good until Heavenly Father told Joseph Smith how to make it right, whole, complete. Give child things that aren’t good without a part. Give something that isn’t any good until they are told what to do with it—same as prophets. Have children go through the house and find things that aren’t good without another object or part. Stove isn’t good without pans to cook in or food. Shoe isn’t good without shoelace.

Worth—value

- Give lots of money to help people. Talk about things that are worth more than money. Put dot or sticker on things in house that are worth more than money. Church spends lots and lots of money to save people, to tell them about the gospel.

Take good care of, prepare

- Pass out something that I didn't take good care of (crayon that I stepped on, for example). Pass out something that I did take good care of (ribbon or bow, something small for each child). Which did I take good care of? Heavenly Father and prophets want to take good care of us. They want us to stay clean and good.
- Prepare the room for something to do or make (paint, cook). Relate to the prophet preparing us to meet Jesus.