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**Kids Conference Plans**

**Purpose:** This conference plan details a conference experience for Kids Sunday School and small-group leaders. The goal is to provide an overview of the book *Stand Up* and to apply its content to the Bible study setting of conference participants.

The plans can be used as one 2.5 hour session (with breaks) or as three 45-minute sessions (one 45-minute session for each chapter). If you choose three 45-minute sessions, you may lead the sessions over 3 consecutive weeks or use the plans during quarterly leadership meetings, with one session each for three consecutive months.

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**Conference Segment 1: Our Purpose**

**Finding The Purpose of Sunday School**

Why do our groups exist and why do we do what we do as leaders?

**Focal Wall:** The theme of this conference is western cowboy. Using items like boots, lassos, and other cowboy items is appropriate to decorate with. The focal wall should have the cutout of a person and the boots and spurs as directed in Steps 2 and 3.

**Gather and Prepare:**

**Step 1:**

* Write the following statements on strips of paper: *Cowboys are often seen wearing bandanas, but why?, Cowboys love their chaps, but what?, Cowboys always wear boots, but why do they have high heels?, Every cowboy wears a hat, but why?, Cowboy shirts are distinctive, but why do they have snap buttons?*
* Attach each strip under different chairs in the conference area.

**Step 2:**

* Cowboy hat
* A silhouette of a person (In proportion to the cowboy hats created next). Attach silhouette to focal wall prior to conference.
* 6 Cowboy hat shapes cut out from heavy-weight paper.
* Write the following statements on each cowboy hat cut out: *Disciples are made in smaller groups., Making disciples requires proximity., Growing disciples read God’s Word daily., Disciples replicate themselves., Disciples have preferences for Bible study., Disciples benefit from greater accountability.*
* Place the cowboy hat cut outs in the cowboy hat.
* Jute or Twine (approximately 9 yards)
* Tape

**Step 3:**

* 3 Spur-shaped cutouts. Write one of the following statements on each spur: *Children are inquisitive, Memorization and Repetition, Systematic framework for processing ideas.*
* 3 Boot-shaped cutouts. Write one of the following statements on each boot: *A Q&A format draws kids in by appealing to their inquisitive nature, Kids learn by repeating things they’ve heard, Using Q&A helps kids process the things they have learned.*
* Tape the boots to one side of the focal wall and the spurs on the other side of the focal wall.

**Step 4:**

* MP3 audio file of “Happy Trails to You”
* MP3 player, speaker

**Teach**

**Step 1:** Introduction: But Why? (10 minutes)

* Introduce yourself and explain that during this conference, you will be sharing with leaders the purpose of Sunday School groups.
* Share that understanding your purpose in Sunday School starts with understanding why we have Sunday School.
* Explain that you have prepared a quick activity for the group to get them in the mode of determining the answer to the question: *why?*
* Direct conferees to check under their seats for a strip of paper. Ask conferees who have a paper strip to take turns reading the questions written on the strips. Allow other conferees to answer the questions on the strips, then share the actual answer if it has not been shared yet.
  + **Cowboys are often seen wearing bandanas, but why?** *Cowboys actually call bandanas, neckerchiefs, and wear them loosely around their necks so that they can pull them up over their noses in the case of a dust storm or easily spin around to cover their necks in the blazing sun.*
  + **Cowboys love their chaps, but why?** *They help to protect riders' legs from scraping on brush, injury from thorns of cacti, sagebrush, mesquite and other thorny vegetation.*
  + **Cowboys always wear boots, but why do they have high heels?** *The underslung heels keep a cowboy’s feet in their stirrups.*
  + **Every cowboy wears a hat, but why?** *The wide rim of the hat keeps the sun off of the cowboy’s face, while the light color deflects the sunlight. The high crown keeps the cowboy’s head cool.*
  + **Cowboy shirts are distinctive, but why do they have snap buttons?** *Cowboy shirts have snap buttons because they are easy to use with one hand. You always have to keep one hand on the reins!*
* Ask one final question: We know of traditional churches, home churches, cowboy churches, churches that meet in pavilions or in tents. We know that there are even online churches, but in all these settings there is something distinctive about having Sunday School at church. Why do churches have Sunday School? *To make disciples. Sunday School might have many different functions, but the center of it all is the command and the mission of making disciples.*

**Step 2:**Pin the Hat on the Cowboy (15 minutes)

* Display the cowboy hat that you have placed the prepared cowboy hat statements in. Also, bring attention to the silhouette of the cowboy that you have on the focal wall. Share that you will ask for several volunteers to come up and be blindfolded and “pin” (tape) a hat on the cowboy.
* Call for volunteers. Quickly blindfold one volunteer at a time, spin him around, and let him place one of the prepared hats on the wall as close to the cowboy’s head as possible.
* Congratulate the volunteer who gets her hat closest to the cowboys head and explain that you will now share with the conferees some principles for discipling kids through Sunday School. Start with the cowboy hat that is closest to the correct position and share the other from nearest to farthest from the correct position.
  + **Disciples are made in smaller groups.** *Kids Sunday School classes should maintain a low teacher/student ratio. When classes are full and volunteers are few, there is a lack of one-to-one interaction that is essential for making disciples.*
  + **Making disciples requires proximity.** *Kids Sunday School teachers must be willing to invest in relationships. Due to the busy nature of today’s children, we have very limited time with kids in church settings. It is essential that leaders take time to build relationships with the kids that expands beyond Sunday morning. Sending postcards, attending special events, and contacting the kids in the classroom regularly builds relationships which is essential to disciple-making.*
  + **Growing disciples read God’s Word daily.** *Kids need Bibles that they are interested in using and that they understand. As kids Sunday School leaders, we must have Bibles in our rooms and make sure that the kids who are in our rooms have Bibles they can use at home. Using resources like the devotional Magazines from LifeWay (More, Adventure, and Bible Express) help encourage daily Bible reading habits.*
  + **Disciples replicate themselves.** *This is a hard one for kids, but not impossible. Kids Sunday School leaders should be equipping the kids in their classrooms to defend their faith and know why they believe what they believe. It’s called apologetics and it is never too early to start helping kids defend their faith. A great resource for helping kids with this is “Big Picture Questions and Answers” from LifeWay.*
  + **Disciples have preferences for Bible study.** *You might have noticed that there is no shortage of Sunday School curriculum available for children. What you might not realize though is that each curriculum choice doesn’t have the same focus. Sometimes curriculum can focus more on values than actual biblical principles. Other curriculum can tend to focus more on entertainment than life change in Christ. It is important that each children’s Sunday School classroom use a curriculum that is rooted in Scripture.*
  + **Disciples benefit from greater accountability.** *Kids lives today are fueled by expectations in all areas. Whether in sports, school, or extracurricular activities; kids face lots of pressure. We aren’t wanting to pressure kids, but we should give them reasonable expectations for Christian growth.*

**Step 3:** Boots and Spurs (15 minutes)

* Explain that disciple-making involves conversation with kids. Kids learn through critical thinking and even hearing themselves answer questions. Kids Sunday School should involve a focused Q&A format.
* Display the boots and spurs on the focal wall. Ask a volunteer to come read the phrase on one of the spurs and match it to its appropriate boot using a piece of jute twine.
  + **Children are inquisitive** (Spur): **A Q&A format draws kids in by appealing to their inquisitive nature.** (boot)  *Explain: children are naturally inquisitive, curious, and are passionate pursuers of answers. Many children seem to ask questions incessantly and feel a great sense of accomplishment once they’ve run through their gambit of questions to get their answers. A question-answer format draws kids in by feeding this part of their nature.*
  + **Memorization and Repetition** (Spur): **Kids learn by repeating things they’ve heard.** (boot) *Explain: when we commit biblical truths to memory, they become a resource for the Holy Spirit to use in our lives for real-life transformation. Few ideas will truly change us if they are not deep in our hearts. A systematic Q&A approach is built on children memorizing answers. As children mature, these memorized statements can be fleshed out with deeper understanding and application. “I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you” (Psa. 119:11).*
  + **Systematic framework for processing ideas** (Spur): **Using Q&A helps kids process the things they have learned**. (Boot) *Explain: our Bibles contain so much information that it can be overwhelming to figure out where to start and how teach it. Though a Q&A approach is not intended to teach the Bible comprehensively, using a simple question-answer format provides both a starting point and a structure that become manageable for adults and kids.*

**Step 4: Happy Trails to You** (5 minutes)

* Explain that one of the great joys of being a teacher is seeing the kids you’ve discipled continue in their faith journey. As a children’s Sunday School teacher, you will be able to watch the kids you teach as they hit milestones like accepting Christ, being baptized, going on mission trips, graduating high school, college, marrying, and having children of their own.
* One of the steps in disciple-making is releasing them to go and make more disciples.
* Tell the conferees that you will play a music clip. While they are listening to the clip, encourage the conferees to think of one aspect of disciple-making that has been discussed today that they can do better.
* Play the clip and guide conferees to pray silently, asking God to help them commit to being disciple makers in children’s Sunday School.
* Thank the conferees for their attention. Dismiss by praying for God to bless the disciples and disciplers who have attended this conference.

**Conference Segment 2: Our Posture**

**Finding The Posture of Sunday School**

How do we set the standard for others to follow?

**Focal Wall:** The theme of this conference is western cowboy. Using items like boots, lassos, and other cowboy items is appropriate to decorate with. The focal wall should have a large sheet of green craft paper attached as described in Step 2.

**Gather and Prepare:**

**Step 1:**

* Blank copy paper (1 piece for each conferee)

**Step 2:**

* Green craft paper—attach to focal wall.
* Cow-shaped cutouts (1 for each conferee)
* 6 Cow-shaped cutouts—Write the one of the following statements on each cow: *Direction, Inspiration, Encouragement and Prayer, Mentors, Feedback, A Challenge.*
* Tape

**Step 3:**

* Western style lasso (if Lasso isn’t available, make a circle out of rope or use a hula hoop)—Place on floor in front of focal wall.
* Sheets of paper with one of the following statements written on each paper: *Be consistent, Consistently late, Pray daily for students and wisdom, Don’t threaten, Tell their parents, Tell children the rules and then reinforce them, Expect children to know the rules without being told, Be generous with praise, Only praise the best kids, Model proper behavior, Dislike the behavior, not the child, Shun the bad child, provide choice and alternative solutions, Expect all children to like everything, Be fair, Be judgy, Never confront or embarrass the child, Yell at the child.*

**Step 4:**

* No preparation needed

**Teach**

**Step 1:** Introduction: Cowboy Up (10 minutes)

* Introduce yourself and explain that during this conference, you will be sharing with leaders how to find the proper posture for children’s Sunday School. Explain that there is a certain level of expectations that we should have for volunteers in our Sunday Schools, however, many times we forget to tell the volunteers what our expectations are of them before they accept the role.
* Explain that in cowboy lingo, the term *cowboy up* means to that you are stepping up to a specific task or being positive about a hardship coming your way. Explain that this conference will be all about getting Sunday School volunteers to “cowboy up” to their task of leader kids.
* Distribute a piece of copy paper and tell the conferees that you are going to need them to “cowboy up” to some hard to understand western lingo. Explain that you will share a western term, then the conferees will have 10 seconds to write the definition of the term.
* Share the following terms allowing 10 seconds between each term: *Acknowledge the corn, Balled up, Put the licks in, Rib, Texas butter, Wake snakes.*
* Call for a few volunteers to share what they wrote down each term as you debrief the Western lingo and their actual definitions:
  + Acknowledge the corn: Tell the truth.
  + Balled up: Confused
  + Put the licks in: Run very fast
  + Rib: wife
  + Texas butter: Gravy made with flour, hot water, and fried steak grease.
  + Wake snakes: Cause a ruckus

**Step 2:**Volunteer Roundup (15 minutes)

* Tell conferees that one of the most frustrating things about volunteering is when you feel like you are ill-equipped or not needed. Give each volunteer a cow-shaped cutout ask them to write one thing they wish they had been told when they first started working in children’s Sunday School.
* Allow conferees to come and put their “cows to pasture” on the green craft paper on the focal wall.
* Discuss a few of the items the conferees have suggested and then place your prepared cows in the pasture, explaining that these are some items that volunteers need in order to “cowboy up”:
  + **Direction.** Volunteers need to know what to do. Volunteers need clear directions and to be shows what success looks like in the ministry.
  + **Inspiration.** Volunteers need to know that what they are doing matters. They need to see ministry results.
  + **Encouragement and Prayer.** Volunteers need to know that their leader cares for them.
  + **Mentors.** Find experienced volunteers to help the new ones along. Give volunteers someone who has lived in their shoes, who can answer questions, and help them get started.
  + **Feedback**. Volunteers need to know how they are doing. If you’ve encouraged them and shown you care, then feedback is just what they need.
  + **A Challenge.** Allow volunteers to grow! Give volunteers something new to tackle. Volunteers will drop out if they feel like their job in the ministry is not valuable.

**Step 3:** Lasso that Behavior (17 minutes)

* Part of the posture of the children’s Sunday School leader is maintaining an orderly class. Explain that you have placed several statements around the room which have good or bad tips for classroom management.
* Guide participants to move around the room and place retrieve the statements and place the “good” examples inside the lasso and the “bad” examples outside the lasso on the ground in front of the focal wall.
  + **Be Consistent!**  There’s nothing more confusing than allowing bad behavior one week and the next week punishing kids for that same behavior. Be consistent with your expectations and enforcement of classroom rules and procedures. Kids like to know that they can count on you to be consistent.
  + **Pray Daily for Students and for Wisdom!**  God is the source of wisdom. He will help you know how to work with all kids. He will change behavior when other techniques won’t.
  + **Don’t Threaten!**Kids understand better than we realize what our boundaries are when it comes to punishment. Don’t bother with void threats that you are not able to follow through with. However, when you do use a particular threat to clarify your response to a behavior, be sure you are willing to follow through.
  + **Tell Children the Rules and then Reinforce Them.**  Make sure your kids understand the rules. Sometimes kids don’t fulfill our expectations because they don’t know what we expect. When they understand that basic rule everything else seems to fall into place.
  + **Be Generous with Praise!** You can find something nice to say about every kid in your room. Do it! When kids realize that the best way to get your attention is to behave correctly, they will work hard to please you, get your attention, and they adore the praise. Sometimes it’s easier to focus on the bad behavior than the good. We spend tons of time harping of bad behavior when the pleasant praise will often times change a poor behavior choice.
  + **Model proper behavior for the children.**  Too many times our behavior doesn’t match our expectations for the kids.  If sitting on the table isn’t appropriate for the kids, then DON’T SIT ON THE TABLE.
  + **Dislike the behavior, not the child!**The Bible doesn’t say that you have to like all the kids in your class.  However, it’s very clear that you are to love each one with an unconditional, Christ-like love.  Be very careful not to equate the behavior you detest with the child you love.
  + **Provide choice and alternative solutions.**  Kids will work hard to see their choices be successful. The key here is providing a teaching session that allows for choices.  Don’t ever think that one activity fits all.
  + **Never confront or embarrass a child in front of the class.**  As tempting as it might be, don’t confront in an effort to embarrass.  There will be times when immediate action must be taken, but don’t choose that option as your rule. Kids deserve our respect and embarrassing them in an effort to correct their behavior will ultimately backfire on you. In a public place, quietly discuss the behavior problem without breaking his spirit. Embarrassing a child in front of his peers will most likely result in additional bad behavior.
  + **Be fair!**  Kids are quick to see when things aren’t fair. You can’t punish one child for something you allow another child to get by with. You can’t choose to have favorites in the classroom.

**Step 4: Happy Trails to You** (3 minutes)

* Thank the conferees for their attention. Remind conferees that they should cowboy up to their responsibility of being great leaders!

**Conference Segment 3: Our Preparation**

**Being Prepared for Sunday School**

What do we do to prepare ourselves and our group to make disciples?

**Focal Wall:** The theme of this conference is western cowboy. Using items like boots, lassos, and other cowboy items is appropriate decor.

**Gather and Prepare:**

**Step 1:**

* Chenille stems—enough for each conferee to have several

**Step 2:**

* 8.5 x 11 sheets of paper—on each sheet write one of the following statements: *1. Read the Scripture passage for next week from your Bible., 2. Read the session point and any biblical background information., 3. Read the teaching procedures and begin gathering supplies., 4. Pray for Sunday School kids and contact any kids who missed last Sunday.,*

*5. Reread the Scripture passage and complete gathering supplies., 6. Pray for your teaching team and connect with them about who will do what. 7. Review the Scripture passage and teaching procedures.* On the backside of each paper write the numeral *10.*

* Hide the statement sheets throughout the room.

**Step 3:**

* Cut out the letters *B, I, B, L, E, S, T, O, R, I, E, S.*
* Tape the letters on walls throughout the room.
* Download the song, “Git Along Little Dogies”
* MP3 player, speakers

**Step 4:**

* No preparation needed.

**Teach**

**Step 1:** Introduction: Your Brand of Sunday School (10 minutes)

* Introduce yourself and the conference. Tell the conferees that the amount of time spent on preparation for Sunday School each week is directly correlated with the success of the class. Adequate preparation minimizes downtime, reduces behavioral issues, and ensures optimal learning.
* Explain that on a ranch cowboys often label their cows using a specific symbol, a brand. The brand is heated and then pressed into the skin of the cow. Ouch! Well, we aren’t going to brand conferees today, but we are going to ask them to think of a symbol that would describe what they believe parents think when they think of their child’s Sunday School class. An example would be that a teacher who has a really fun class might have a smiley face for a brand.
* Share that you have chenille stems for the group to mold into their class brand.
* Distribute the chenille stems and allow a few minutes for the conferees to make their brands.
* Share your “class brand” and allow a few volunteers to share what they chose as their brand and why?
* Debrief by sharing that one’s level of preparedness is linked to how the conferees saw their brand. A teacher who chooses a Bible as a brand probably spends a lot of time preparing the Bible story.

**Step 2:**Cowboy Time (15 minutes)

* Share that cowboy time is considered to be 10 to 10, or 9:50 AM/PM. Explain that 9:50 AM or PM became cowboy time, because that’s sort of what it sounds like when a horse is galloping. *10 to 10 to 10 to 10 to 10.* As a group repeat the italicized piece together.
* Explain that there is no perfect way to prepare for Sunday School, but that you would like to challenge the group to begin thinking about how they could use cowboy time in their preparation.
* Explain that around the room, you’ve hidden seven sheets of paper. Each paper has a statement and the number 10 on it. Ask the conferees to find the sheets of paper and then return them to you.
* Review and discuss the steps in order that the conferees found statements:

1. Read the Scripture passage for next week from your Bible.
2. Read the session point and any biblical background information.
3. Read the teaching procedures and begin gathering supplies.
4. Pray for Sunday School kids and contact any kids who missed last Sunday.
5. Reread the Scripture passage and complete gathering supplies.
6. Pray for your teaching team and connect with them about who will do what.
7. Review the Scripture passage and teaching procedures.

* Ask the conferees who thinks they could spend 10 minutes per step each week. Guide the conferees to say with you again: *10 to 10 to 10 to 10 to 10 to 10 to 10.*
* Explain that conferees might not feel they have 70 minutes each week to prepare but we can all carve out 10 minutes per day. Encourage conferees to make preparation a priority.
* Challenge the conferees to set 9:50 AM/PM on their phones to remind them to pray for the kids in their classes.

**Step 3:** Git Along Little Dogies (15 minutes)

* Share that Roy Rogers once wrote a song called “Git Along Little Dogies”. It’s probably a song many of the conferees have heard. Share that in the cowboy world, saying “Git along little dogies” means gathering up the herds to move them to their next pasture.
* Explain that your little “dogies” are misplaced and you need help gathering them up, but your little dogies are letters. Ask the conferees to search the room for different letters of the alphabet. Play the song “Git Along Little Dogies” while they search.
* Share that the little “dogies” that we gathered are actually tips for telling Bible stories to kids. Call for conferees to bring their letters up one by one when you call for them. Tape them on the focal wall.
  + **B**ecome acquainted with the story.
  + **I**n your study, plan for as many senses as possible to be involved in telling the story.
  + **B**e sure to consider your audience—age, tastes, vocabulary.
  + **L**earn the purpose for telling the story.
  + **E**liminate events/elements that are unnecessary.
  + **S**equence the events of the story with a simple outline.
  + **T**ell the story to yourself—over and over.
  + **O**rganize a captivating introduction and crisp conclusion.
  + **R**emove any competitive influences while telling the story.
  + **I**n your lap, have an actual Bible.
  + **E**nthusiasm is a must. Kids will get just as excited as you get about the Bible story.
  + **S**upport your preparation experience with prayer.
* Explain that a major part of our preparation should be learning the Bible story. We should communicate God’s Word with great confidence.

**Step 4: Barkin’ at a Knot** (5 minutes)

* Tell the conferees that you are a realist. You understand that conferees will not always be able to prepare as well as they know they should, but they should always know that preparing for a great session isn’t just “barkin’ at a knot.”
* Ask conferees to take their phones out and google “Barkin’ at a knot”. Ask a volunteer to share the definition of the term. *(doing something useless, wasting your time)*
* Remind them that preparing to teach the word of God will never be a waste of time, but God will reward their efforts tenfold.
* Pray, thanking God for the conferees and asking Him to bless their efforts as they prepare to teach kids in Sunday School.