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**Preschool Conference Plans**

**Purpose:** This conference plan details a conference experience for Preschool 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**

**GATHER AND PREPARE**

* Decorate the room with western items such as bandanas; lassos; boots; cowboy hat; stick horses, and the like.
* Tear Sheets
* Markers
* Distribute sticker/cowboy piece as conferees enter. (Or place in chairs prior to session.)
* Copy Item 1 (3 Questions) on cardstock. Attach to the walls of the room, along with tear sheets. (Option: place conferees in three groups and give each group a question.)

**WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION** (8-10 minutes)

Ask conferees to find someone with the same sticker/piece they have and discuss one of the following questions. (After 1-2 minutes, have conferees find another partner and move to another question.)

* What is your favorite memory about SS growing up?
* Name a time you felt loved at SS
* Tell a favorite teaching moment
* What’s a favorite Bible story you love to tell?

Ask conferees to be seated.

Let the group know that you’ll be talking about three aspects of Sunday School (or life group, etc.)—Our Purpose; Our Posture; and Our Preparation. This first session, the focus will be Our Purpose – or the “why” we do what we do.

**TEACH** (25-30 minutes)

**Lasso the Purpose (10 minutes)**

Ask conferees to go to each lassoed question (Item 1) on the wall and write a short answer   
on the tear sheet. (Option: place conferees in three groups and distribute one card   
to each group.)

* Questions:
* Why does your church do Sunday School?
* Why does your church do Sunday School for preschoolers?
* Why do YOU teach Sunday School?

After everyone has had a chance to answer the questions, take time to discuss.

Mention that Sunday School overall is an opportunity to intentionally teach the basics of the Bible. But our purpose is not to give a history lesson. The purpose of Sunday School is to   
change lives.

**Head, Heart, and Hands (20 minutes)**

The book outlines three areas where significant changes must be made in our lives.

1. Head – “Follow Me” (Changing our thinking.)

First we must allow God to change the way we think. Share that 90% of a child’s brain is developed by the age of 5. This is when a child becomes the person he is going to be— he learns appropriate behavior, language, boundaries, empathy and other social skills that will remain with him for life.

* A preschooler will follow you, the teacher, first. How do we go about helping change the way a preschooler thinks? (Ask group for answers – share the following as needed.)
* Bible stories
* Conversation
* Bible Verses
* Songs

Next, we have to let God work on our heart.

1. Heart – “Love How He loves.” (Change from the inside out.)

* Ask the group: How does God love? *(unconditionally)*
* Remind the group that a teacher must love each child the way God loves. This means even those who challenge us week after week.
* A preschooler will experience your love first, before he understands God’s love. What are ways we can show a preschooler love and teach her about God’s love? (Ask group for answers – share the following as needed.)
  + - Welcoming her at the door.
    - Knowing his name.
    - Changing diapers.
    - Showing patience.
    - Being consistent.
    - Knowing the child – likes, dislikes, hobbies, and the like.
    - Listening to the child.

Finally, because God has changed our thinking and our heart, we need to change what we do.

1. Hands – “Do What He Does” (Change our actions.)

As mentioned earlier, Sunday School leaders don’t just teach a history lesson. Instead, we teach life application—why it matters—the “so what” of the story.

Remind the group that a preschooler will mimic the actions of a teacher before he understands what God wants him to do. Preschoolers learn through imitation. In addition to Bible stories, teachers also teach a child social skills—things like sharing, taking turns, speaking kindly, cleaning up.

We should provide positive reinforcement to these actions when a child does them (especially without prompting). Remember, whatever gets the most attention will be continued.

Ask the group how we can encourage preschoolers in “doing what He does?” (Suggestions)

* Planning activities that help them apply the Bible passages taught during the session. (As time permits, give specific examples of how to do this.)
* Demonstrate kindness.
* Conversation
* Guidance in play as needed.

**Relationships (10 minutes)**

Note that the book mentions that if we want to feed babies – we have to hold them close. The same goes with teaching preschoolers. If you want to feed them scripture – build relationships; hold them close (parents as well).

Question the group about suggestions for building relationships with kids and their families. Ask, “How can we as teachers build relationships with preschoolers and their families?”

(Suggestions)

* Greeting at the door
* E-mails
* Cards
* Attending activities such as soccer games and the like.

Discuss that one purpose of Sunday School is to reach families. We have a great opportunity to do this through teaching preschoolers. Showing that we care – even outside the classroom.

* Talk with parents about putting the child (family) on the ministry list. Ask them about prayer needs; invite them to church activities; introduce them to other families with preschoolers and young children.

ACTIVITY: Guide the group to stand and make a circle. Ask group to hold hands. The group will likely face the inside of the circle. Ask who they can see. Have the group turn around and face outward and hold hands. Talk about outreach to preschoolers and their families.

Challenge teachers to notice what’s on the outside of their circle. Point out that inreach (ministering to church families) is important, but preschool teachers have a unique opportunity to reach families outside of church. We can make an impact on preschool parents when they know that we care for their children and for them—even when they’re not members of the church.

**Pray**

Pray that God will help us remember our purpose in teaching Sunday School and that He would help us focus on preschoolers and families inside and outside the church.

**Conference Segment 2: Our Posture**

**GATHER AND PREPARE**

* Two books of equal size
* Masking tape
  + Make a “Start” line and “Finish” line at the front of the room
* Tear sheets
* Markers
* Write the following Scripture passages on individual index cards.
  + Proverbs 22:6
  + Titus 2:7-8
  + James 3:1-2
* Prior to the session, distribute the Scripture cards to three volunteers who are willing to read the verse to the group when called on.

**INTRODUCTION** (5 minutes)

Welcome the group.

* Ask two volunteers to stand at the “Start” line at the front of the room.
* Give each volunteer a book and ask him to place it on top of his head.
* Challenge the volunteers to walk to the “Finish” line, balancing the books on their heads (with no hands).
* If a book is dropped, the person must return to the “Start” line and try again.
* The first to reach the “Finish” line wins the challenge.

Remind the group that we are covering information from the book: *Saddle Up*. During this session, we will be talking about the teacher and what posture we need to take when we accept the responsibility of sharing Christ with preschoolers.

**Scripture** (10 minutes)

Emphasize: “We must be in the right spiritual posture to receive God’s work in us and then let Him work IN and THROUGH us.”

Discuss that teaching should be approached with fear and trembling; this is a holy task – not babysitting – not “cattle herding.” As preschool teachers, we are given the task and privilege of laying a good, solid foundation and introducing kids to Jesus.

Ask the three volunteers holding the scripture cards to read the verse from their cards.

Scripture verses about teaching:

* Proverbs 22:6
* Titus 2:7-8
* James 3:1-2

Discuss these scriptures and welcome comments from the group.

**Wanted: The Perfect Teacher** (15 minutes)

Ask the conferees to gather into three groups. Distribute a tear sheet and marker to   
each group.

Instruct the groups to each make a “Wanted Poster” for what qualities we would look for  
 in “The Perfect Teacher.” Let the groups know that they can include words on their posters  
 if necessary.

Encourage each group to show and describe its poster. Attach all three posters to the wall.

Discuss drawings and mention any qualities that might need to be added.

**What is Your Posture?** (15 minutes)

Read John 15:5 - *“I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me.”*

Talk about the following three postures mentioned in the book:

1st posture – Abiding

* To abide means to remain.
* If a vine or branch doesn’t remain attached, it becomes a useless stick.
* We need regular glimpses of Jesus.
* We can’t accidentally abide in Jesus. It must be intentional.

Ask: How are you ensuring that you are abiding in Christ?

2nd Posture – Kneeling

* + Acknowledges our weakness and dependence on God
  + Shows our recognition of God’s strength
  + Pray regularly and specifically (know our kids/families specifically so we know what to pray for)
  + Pray collectively with others (fellow teachers and families)

Remind teachers that as we pray, God bends our hearts toward Him.

3rd Posture – Serving

* Communicates that we value people.
  + We have a great impact on parents of preschoolers when show value to their children.
* Love as the Father loves us
  + One way that Jesus demonstrated His love was by washing disciples’ feet.
  + Ask for suggestions of how we can show love. (Suggestions: we can show love by changing diapers; missing adult classes; planning; being consistent.)
  + Our service should be humble; sacrificial; unbiased. Behind the scenes – not wanting or caring recognition.

**Pray and Dismiss** (5 minutes)

Emphasize that it’s imperative to abide in Christ. Remind conferees that it is easy to fall away and get caught up in “doing” for Christ instead of “abiding” in Him. Not abiding in Him can lead to burnout.

Pray for guidance and strength as we focus on our posture in Christ: abiding, kneeling, and serving as we teach.

**Conference Segment 3: Our Preparation**

**GATHER AND PREPARE**

* Cardstock (white)
* Copy paper
* Tape
* Gift bags - 2
* Locate, print, and cut the apart 2 sets of of clipart or a graphic of a cowboy with the following pieces:
  + Hat/Head
  + Face
  + Bandana
  + Body/Arms
  + Legs
  + Boots

Places 1 set in each gift bag

* Giant Inflatable Cube (or square box)
* Write the following words each on a separate piece of 8-Inch-by-11-inch cardstock.
  + Hat/Head
  + Face
  + Bandana
  + Body/Arms
  + Legs
  + Boots
* Place the word cards into the slots on the cube (or attach with tape to the box)
* Copy Handout 3 (1 per conferee)

**INTRODUCTION** (10 minutes)

**Saddle Up and Get ‘Yer Gear**

Tell teachers that during this session we will be talking about “Our Preparation” as teachers and how we need to equip ourselves for this important task we’ve taken on.

Place the conferees in two groups and give each group a gift bag.

The object is to have each group roll the inflatable cube to complete their cowboys. Start by having one group roll the cube. The group can pull the piece indicated on top of the cube out of the bag and attach it to the wall. The second group may then roll the cube. If a group rolls the same piece twice, they must skip their turn and pass the cube back to the other group. The first group to finish their cowboy wins. (You may choose to offer a prize.)

**TEACH** (30 minutes)

Take each of the pieces of the cowboy and discuss how each one is an important part of the overall picture of what we do in Sunday School.

* Hat/Head – Study the scripture
* Face – Know your kids (Characteristics)
* Bandana – Add variety (Learning Preferences)
* Body/Arms – Bible Story Group Time
* Legs – Learning Activities
* Boot – Life Application

Hat/Head – Study the Scripture

* Stress that teachers need to study the scripture passage for the session. Find out what God has to say to them and then they can teach from the overflow.

Face – Know the kids

* Discuss the following characteristics as time allows.
  + Active
  + Sensitive
  + Explores Limits
  + Self-focused
  + Short Attention Spans
  + Curious
  + Creative
  + Literal Minded

Bandana: Add Variety

* Briefly remind teachers that kids learn in a variety of ways. Discuss each of the following learning preferences.
  + Physical
  + Logical
  + Musical
  + Natural
  + Relational
  + Reflective
  + Verbal
  + Visual

Body/Arms – Bible Story Group Time

* Give tips on group time.
* Needs to be short – 12-15 minutes max. (depending on age of children)
* Include activities that allow for sitting, standing, and movement (games, review, music)
* Open the Bible to the correct passage, but tell the Bible story in words that preschoolers that can understand.
* Short prayer

Legs: Learning Activities

* Ask teachers to contemplate how a teacher can help kids discover what God wants   
  for them.
* Plan learning activities (based on how kids learn – not on what’s easiest)
* Connect learning activities to the Bible story.

Boots: Life Application

* Point of the day
* What does this story mean? Then and Now?
* What is the main focus. The point of the day?
* How can it change us?
* What does God want us to do?

**CONCLUSION**

Leaving any part of our cowboy would leave him wanting. Granted, some parts, like the bandana, may not be as important as others. But, the better dressed (prepared) we are, the better the session will be for you and for the kids. Review the importance of each piece of the cowboy.

**Pray and Dismiss**

Pray, thanking God for all teachers. Ask His blessing on their preparation and that we would seek to glorify Him as we seek to share Christ’s love with preschoolers and their parents.