

Religious Education Ministry

Handbook for Teachers and Advisors



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview

- Unitarian Universalism: History, Fact Sheet, Famous UUs, Sources of our Faith, Source Religions, Find Out More

Nurturing Learning and Faith Development in Children and Youth

- Components of a Balanced Children and Youth Ministry
- What Do Our Children Need on Sunday Morning?
- Faith Development Theory
- Child Development
- Ways of Learning, Thinking and Processing the World Around Us
- Ministering to Children with Diverse Needs
- The Benefits of Mixed-Age Grouping

Teaching and Advising as a Spiritual Acts

- The Soul Only Avails: Teaching as a Spiritual Act
- The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life
- Placing Children at the Center

Tips for Teachers and Advisors

- Terrific Tips for Topnotch Teachers
- Chalice Lighting, Opening and Closing Words
- How to Remember the 7 Principles
- Successful Story Telling
- Using Meditation with Young Children
- Games and Songs
- Guidelines for Teachers (Behavior)
- Religious Education Behavior Guidelines Based on our 7 Principles
- Dealing with Classroom Conflict
- Intervention Techniques

Working with Youth

- What Youth Want
- Resources for Youth Advisors
- A Statement about Youth Empowerment
- Tips for Adults: Working with Youth Leaders
- Tips for Youth: Working with Adult Professionals

Guidelines and Policies

- Guidelines for Teachers
- Guidelines for RE Helping Hands
- Mandated Reporting
- Safe Congregations for Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults
- UUA Responsible Staffing & Safe Congregations Forms

Tools for Teachers and Advisors

Additional resources on teaching multiage groups at
<http://www.multiage-education.com/multiagelinks/index.html>

Online tools to make your own:

Word search: <http://cornvalley.peak.org/wordsearch/>

Puzzles: www.puzzlemaker.com

Crosswords:

<http://www.awesomeclipartforkids.com/crossword/crosswordpuzzlemaker.html>

Community building ideas:

<http://www.kidactivities.net/>

<http://teambuildingactivitiesforkids.com>

http://cchealth.org/groups/tobacco_project/pdf/activities.pdf

www.youthlearn.org

Terrific Tips for Topnotch Teachers

Tip #1: If I want them to HEAR it, I talk; If I want them to LEARN it, they talk.

We remember 10% of what we read;
We remember 20% of what we hear;
We remember 30% of what we see;
We remember 50% of what we see and hear;
We remember 80% of what we say;
We remember 90% of what we say and do.

In the classroom, our children and youth will remember more of the lesson if they have the opportunity to talk about it. Instead of reading them the story, have them read it themselves (if old enough!) and then talk about it together. Is there one message that you want the kids to learn that day? Is there any way to make that one sentence into a song they can sing together? Try to fit simple sentences into familiar songs – Old MacDonald; Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star, etc. The more they can talk about, sing, or discuss the message of the day; the more they will remember it.

Tip #2: Never Talk Longer Than the Average Age of the Group

You're probably wondering, "Now just what exactly does that mean?" If you're talking to a group of AARP members, does it mean you speak for seventy minutes? Or to a group of parents of teens for 40 minutes? Do you ask each person his or her age, entering the figures on a pocket calculator to the mathematical averaging? Nope it simply means when you're talking to a five-year-old, you speak only five minutes. If it's a teenager, fifteen minutes is maximum. And if you're speaking to an adult audience, 20-30 minutes of lecture is the ballpark figure.

So how does this work in the classroom? This doesn't mean that you stop speaking entirely for the rest of the class time. It just means that you stop for a few moments and let the kids DO SOMETHING with what you just told them. I know that most of our lessons are broken up into story-activity-closing. If you have a particularly active bunch that has a hard time listening to an entire story, you might want to try this. Can you figure out a way to break the activity up so that you have a part of the story and then follow a little of the activity? Then tell them more of the story and again, have more activity. Find ways to break up the various learning styles – listening, speaking, and acting – so that no one is disinterested for very long.

The point is to break up your presentation/story with short quick little doings. This way, the group can work on and process the information in small chunks. And, if you have older kids, you can always have them pair off into a group of 2 or 3 to talk about that part of the lesson or answer a question that you've provided. If they can talk about it themselves and act upon it, they have a 90% chance of remembering it.

Tip #3: Tell It With Stories

Know someone who is so entertaining that you could listen to her stories for hours and not get bored? A story is a powerful way of illustrating a particular point because it

paints a mental picture and that, as you know, jumps the learning to at least 30% of what's been heard. In fact, if you want to get picky about it, a story is both seeing (inside in your head) and hearing (outside your head) so the remembering factor could be as high as 50% - just like television.

There are two points to remember when story telling:

“What is most personal is most universal.”

Your story can be your own. When you speak from your own experience, you speak your passion and the story carries more fire and feeling. When we tell the stories that make up our own lives, we dip into a larger pool of human experience.

“Ham it up!”

Go ahead and ham your stories up. Using your voice, your body, and your face as instruments to tell the stories will keep your audiences entertained. More importantly, your audiences will remember your stories – and the important information you're illustrating – far longer with a little dramatization.

Remember that children and youth usually have some topic-related stories of their own to tell. If you give them a chance to share their own experiences, quite often they will. Especially if story-telling is difficult for you, then include time for the participants to become the story-tellers. You're off the hook, and they feel honored.

Religious Education Behavior Guidelines

Based on Our Seven UU Principles

This was developed at the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Austin, Texas, and reprinted with permission from Andrea Lerner, Metro New York Religious Education Consultant, Unitarian Universalist Association (<http://www.uua.org/religiouseducation/teachers/supporting/22283.shtml>).

We believe that each and every person is important. (We affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person.)

- Safety is our first concern!
- Children must remain in classrooms or supervised areas until picked up by parents.
- Only gentle play is appropriate on church grounds.
- Treat everyone with respect. Use caring language and behavior.

We believe that all people should be treated fairly and kindly. (We affirm and promote justice, equity and compassion in human relations.)

- Listen and follow directions.
- Be polite. Take turns.
- Care about one another.

We believe that we should accept one another and keep on learning together. (We affirm and promote the acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations.)

- Make a commitment to regular attendance. Your friends and teachers depend upon you.
- Include everyone in activities and planning.
- Friends are welcome. Let them know our rules.
- Participate with enthusiasm.

We believe that each person must be free to search for what is true and right in life. (We affirm and promote a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.)

- Share your ideas and respect the ideas of others.

We believe that all persons should have the right to speak out and have a vote about what concerns them. (We affirm and promote the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large.)

- Express your opinions constructively.
- Respect the decision of the group.

We believe in working for a peaceful, fair and free world. (We affirm and promote the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all.)

- Ask for help when you need it.
- Do your best to get along with others and to be helpful.
- Be willing to listen to reminders about your behavior.
- Participate in church social action projects.

We believe in caring for our planet earth, the home we share with all living things. (We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.)

- Take good care of our church. Help clean up.
- Be careful with our space, furniture and materials.
- Use only what you need. Recycle.
- Be gentle with the plants and animals. Do not climb trees or walk in the gardens.

Guidelines for Teachers

An Excerpt from the Teacher Orientation Handbook

Pat Ellenwood, DRE, Unitarian Universalist Society of Wellesley Hills, Massachusetts
<http://www.uua.org/religiouseducation/teachers/supporting/15455.shtml>

Behavior problems in the classroom may present the most frequent test of our abilities to put ideals into practice. In the past, some teams have offered snacks or treats as a bribe for good behavior. This is not consistent with the covenant and in the long run does not work and may cause difficulty for some children. It is better to work on developing a respect for the group that results in positive behavior.

It is important that there be an agreed on set of guidelines or covenant for the group. If there are different expectations from week to week, it is confusing for the children and ultimately does not contribute to a sense of community among the children and adults. Be sure that in your first meeting you come to consensus on what the expectations are for both the children and the adults. The covenant will be a valuable resource for this. It is better to be proactive rather than reactive.

Guidelines that help include:

- **Please make boundaries immediately clear.** Kids want to know what the limits are. Let them know what is "out of bounds" for you. Rarely is misbehavior directed at the teacher, so don't take it personally.
- **Avoid criticizing a child in public.** There should be at least two adults in the class for every meeting. If a child disrupts the group, the first choice is to deal with the individual in private—not in front of the whole class. It is better to wait until a private moment to discuss the incident with either you or your teaching partner.
- **If you are provoked, be authentic.** It is better to be honest than to be hypocritical but at all costs **avoid sarcasm.** Try to give the child or the class a way out of the difficulty. If it is an individual, give her/him a way back into your good graces—a smile, a hug, or a touch. Children can learn from your politeness, forgiveness, and generosity of spirit.
- **Be prepared.** Know your material well enough so that you know exactly what is to be done during the meeting. Plan for more than you need. If something bombs, you have an alternative. Have everything ready when the kids arrive. The better prepared you are, the more relaxed you will be; the more relaxed you are, the easier it will be to deal with problems that arise.

Additional suggestions that may help to insure a positive outcome:

- A warm greeting for each child goes a long way.
- Remember your sense of humor and beware of false dignity.
- A gentle voice is often more effective than a loud voice.
- Avoid making comparisons or encouraging competition as motivation.
- Let the children know who you are and what you think.
- Express your opinions freely but acknowledge that their opinions are valid as well.
- Let children know that we celebrate the differences among us.

Intervention Techniques

Recommendations from Jane McKeel's and Cheryl Binkley's "Handbook for An Effective Classroom"

It may happen in your classroom. It happens to the best of teachers. In spite of having used the best preventive techniques and having established rapport with your students, a child will behave in a way that disrupts your class. Then this behavior may start developing into a pattern. The Sunday class hour is a small part of any given week. Yet, if you regard a healthy spirit as a vital asset to be developed within young people, it may be one of the most important hours of the week. This means you as teacher have a relatively short time to accomplish some important activities and connections with your group of students, to have a positive impact upon their lives. You'll not be able to maintain a meaningful learning environment if one person or a small group of students repeatedly disrupts activities.

One of the keys to staying on top of the situation is to manage two things at once. These two are: 1) be aware of the lesson being taught, and 2) be aware of the behavioral dynamic within your room.

Staying alert to how students are responding to a given activity and to interactions among the kids is as important as lesson content, for it enables you to notice many important things including when negative behavior first occurs. Then you will be able to intervene quickly in behavior that is counter-productive to what you are trying to accomplish. It is easiest to be simultaneously aware of these things when you are thoroughly prepared. Your preparation frees you to concentrate more fully on the students, rather than worrying about what comes next in the lesson plan. Another way to assure coverage of both issues is to use the team approach. While one teacher works with the lesson tasks and materials another adult can assist with the dynamics of the class behavior.

Students Want to Be Good

Young people usually want to do the right thing. They want the approval of the adults in their lives, and they want to have positive experiences in relation to others. A well planned and structured class will give them the opportunity they want and deserve, the opportunity to be good.

Here are ten simple techniques gleaned from behavior experts, other teachers and classroom experience. Use these guidelines, and you will be pleasantly surprised by the cooperation, attention and good behavior you will see in your class.

1. Have clear expectations. Your students need the security of knowing what the expectations are and knowing that you will insure these expectations are met. To accomplish this, agree to a few basic class rules early and post them in clear view for several weeks.
2. Intervene immediately. When there is a breach of the rules, immediate intervention with a reminder to the class of their agreement will help establish a positive class environment. For example, if the class has agreed to listen when a person is speaking, they will need you to insure that private conversations on the side or other distracting behavior does not occur when someone is speaking. By calling attention to the problem immediately you provide that security and assurance. If their basic class rules are ignored, this conveys a message that "anything goes" or "this class is not important." The opposite message is received when students observe from the start that respect and courtesy are not only encouraged but expected here.
3. Reinforce desirable behavior. Catch them being good. "You kids really got this table cleaned in a hurry. That was a lot of work!" "John, thank you for being focused on the story. It's so much easier to tell a story when people listen well."

4. Allow opportunities for student input. Have them participate in the rule making and problem-solving in specific situations. "How can we make sure that everyone who has something to say will be heard?"

5. Keep students engaged. "Empty" time - either before class begins or during class when some students finish an activity before others - is when counterproductive behavior often starts. Well-planned pre-class activities prevent destructive behavior from starting. Asking students who are prone to disruptive behavior to assist with distributing materials or other helpful tasks often avoids unwanted behavior altogether by keeping them engaged.

6. Use proximity control. Sit between two disruptive students; place your hand upon a fidgety child. Even a pause and direct look into a child's face will often quickly stop a negative behavior.

7. Divide and conquer. If you know certain students have trouble behaving appropriately when together, discretely position them with another person between them or assign them different partners on small group projects. However, also be aware that church friendships are important. We should allow students the same social interactions we expect to have with our friends at church, so long as these don't disrupt class endeavors.

8. Hold a private conversation with a child whose behavior continues to disrupt. "We have a short time here each week and some important things to do. Your constant talking - or negative comments, or teasing others - is creating problems for the class. This behavior is inappropriate. The other students are bothered by it. What can you do to change your behavior?" Allow the child to come up with a suggestion, and make clear that you expect the behavior to stop.

9. Remove the student from the situation. If a student does continue to be unduly difficult, remove him or her from the classroom for a few minutes, and repeat your private conversation. This separates the child temporarily from the class and reinforces your message about the behavior not being permitted.

10. Bring in the reserves. If these efforts fail, it's time to contact your education program's director. The next step, if one is necessary, may be to contact the parents.

Using Meditation with Young Children

Michelle Richards, DRE
UU Fellowship of Elkart, Elkart, IN

Here is a sample of a meditation I have used with kids in our Children's Chapel. I always use the same opening to guide them and remind them of how we are supposed to behave during the meditation to help them achieve a calm state.

"Now it's time for our meditation. It's time to relax our bodies and our minds. If you feel comfortable, you can close your eyes. If not, find a spot on the wall to stare at as you listen to my words.

Place your feet flat on the floor, hands resting in your lap. Take a deep breath in. Now let it out. Deep breath in. And out.

Keep breathing now as you think about a color. It could be your favorite color, or a color you would like to think about right now. Imagine that in your mind you can see a ball of this color. Look at this ball. Think about this ball. Notice its beautiful color.

As you look at the ball in your mind, you can see the ball getting bigger. It is growing. It is getting bigger and bigger and bigger until all you can see is the color. It is a beautiful color. It is all around you. It is inside you. It is everywhere.

Now you watch as the ball begins to shrink again. It is getting smaller and smaller and smaller until you can barely see it. Then ... it disappears. (Pause)

Our meditation is ended. When you are ready, come back to this room and open your eyes."

Several things to remember when doing meditation with young children:

1. Keep it short. Remember attention spans.
2. Stick to active visualizations and objects/things they are familiar with.
3. Use words that are age-appropriate (or just above the heads of preschoolers, they soon learn these terms).
4. After giving the initial directions, do not direct them to do anything but breathe, relax or think of something in their minds.*

* During a children's meditation I once made the mistake of saying "you take off your shoes" as I intended to lead them into imagining they dipped their toes into the cold, crisp water of a creek. Bad idea! The whole meditation was disrupted by a room full of young children taking off their shoes! They obviously thought I meant it literally. I guess I should be happy I had their rapt attention! But this sure was hard to recover from as the adults present (including myself!) began to laugh out loud.

Why should you use meditation with young children?

1. It is very calming for them which is often important on chaotic Sunday mornings.
2. It is a valuable life skill you are teaching them, a skill they can call forth when they are facing hard times in their life.
3. It can serve as a form of prayer -- or substitute for prayer -- as they grow older, teaching them positive "self-talk" to help them through life's difficulties.

HOW TO REMEMBER THE 7 UU PRINCIPLES

*Carol Benson Holst, Religious Education Director,
UU Church of the Verdugo Hills, Las Crescenta, CA*

From the REACH listserv: Thought you might be interested in a song we're learning to help children easily remember the seven principles.

(Sung to the tune of DO-RE-MI)

ONE -- Each person is important

TWO -- Be kind in all you do

THREE -- We're free to learn together

FOUR -- And search for what is true

FIVE -- All people need a vote

SIX -- Build a fair and peaceful world

SEVEN -- We care for Earth's lifeboat

That will bring us back to me and UU... (repeat)

The Benefits of Mixed-Age Grouping

Lilian G. Katz

Clearinghouse on Early Education and Parenting, May 1995
<http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/ecearchive/digests/1995/lkmag95.html>

Goodlad and Anderson, who introduced the modern notion of the non-graded elementary school in 1959, raised our awareness of the fact that age is a crude indicator of what learning experiences children are ready for. Implementation of Goodlad and Anderson's ideas originally consisted largely of organizing children in groups by ability rather than by age, thereby homogenizing groups in a different way! We have come to understand that the benefits of mixed-age grouping rest on the assumption that the differences within a group of children can be a source of rich intellectual and social benefits. The terms "ungraded" and "nongraded" used by Goodlad and Anderson suggest what we do *not* do in mixed-age settings – separate children into grade groups by age – but they fail to describe what we try *to* do. That may be better conveyed by the use of the term "mixed-age grouping." A mixed-age group of children in which the children's age range is larger than a year – sometimes two years and sometimes more – is intended to optimize the educative potential of the mixture itself.

Although humans are not usually born in litters, we seem to insist that they be educated in them. The time that children spend in groups in schools and child care centers, particularly for preschoolers, amounts to replacing families and spontaneous neighborhood groups as contexts for child-to-child interaction for large portions of children's waking hours. More and more children are deprived of the information and models of competencies that once were available to them in natural mixed-age groups. The intention of mixed-age grouping in early childhood settings is to increase the heterogeneity of the group so as to capitalize on the differences in the experience, knowledge, and abilities of the children.

Opportunity to Nurture

When we ask a five-year-old to be tolerant of a four-year-old's first fumbling efforts to put on his or her jacket, or a six-year-old to be appreciative of a five-year-old's early efforts to read, we have the beginnings of parent education. Our young children need real contexts in which their dispositions to be nurturing can be manifested and strengthened. Furthermore, the young children who are encouraged, comforted and nurtured by older children will be able to emulate their older classmates when they themselves become the older ones in a group. Children need opportunities not only to observe and imitate a wide range of competencies, but also to find companions among their peers who match, complement, or supplement their interests in different ways.

Ways of Learning

Single-age groups seem to create enormous normative pressures on the children and the teacher to expect all the children to possess the same knowledge and skills. There is a tendency in a homogeneous age group to penalize the children who fail to meet normative expectations. There is no evidence to show that a group of children who are all within a twelve-month age range can be expected to learn the same things, in the same way, on the same day, at the same time. The wide range of knowledge and skills that exists among children within a single-age group suggests that whole-group instruction, if overused, may not best serve children's learning.

On the other hand, the wider the age span in a group, the wider the range of behavior and performance likely to be accepted and tolerated by the adults as well as by the children themselves. In a mixed-age group, a teacher is more likely to address differences, not only between children but within each individual child. In a mixed-age group, it is acceptable for a child to be ahead of his or her same-age peers in math, for example, but behind them in reading, or social competence, or vice versa.

Research on social benefits indicates that children very early associate different expectations with different age groups. Experiments have shown that even a three-year-old, when shown pictures of older and younger children in hypothetical situations, will assign different kinds of behavior to an older child than to a younger child. For instance, younger children assign to older children instructive, leadership, helpful, and sympathizing roles, whereas older children assign to younger children the need for help and instruction. Thus in the mixed-age group, younger children perceive the older ones as being able to contribute something, and the older children see the younger ones as in need of their contributions. These mutually reinforcing perceptions create a climate of expected cooperation beneficial to the children, and to the teachers who otherwise feel they are doing all the giving.

Increasing the age range automatically increases the number of teachers available, for younger children particularly. One potential problem that may arise when children assume the role of teacher to other children is that some older children will give younger ones incorrect information, poor suggestions, or wrong advice. When teachers observe such interactions, they can benefit from learning where both children need additional help, and they can correct any misinformation that has been exchanged.

Results of experiments in which children worked in groups of three, either in same-age or mixed-age groups, have shown that in the latter, older children spontaneously facilitated other children's behavior. In a single-age triad, on the other hand, the same children spontaneously became domineering and tended to engage in one-upmanship. When groups of children ranging in age from seven to nine years or from nine to eleven years were asked to make decisions, they went through the processes of reaching a consensus with far more organizing statements and more leadership behavior than children in same-age groups. When the same children dealt with identical kinds of tasks in same-age groups, there were more reports of bullying behavior. Other prosocial behaviors such as help-giving and sharing were more frequent in mixed-age groups. Turn taking was smoother, and there was greater social responsibility and sensitivity to others in mixed-age groups than in single-age groups ([Chase & Doan, 1994](#)).

Observations of four- and five-year-olds in a group found that when the teacher asked the older children who were not observing the class rules to remind the younger ones what the rules were, the older children's own "self-regulatory behavior" improved. The older children could become quite bossy, but the teacher has a responsibility to curb the children's bossiness in any group.

Social Participation

In a mixed-age group, younger children are capable of participating and contributing to far more complex activities than they could initiate if they were by themselves. Once the older ones set up the activity, the younger ones can participate, even if they could not have initiated it.

Research indicates that mixed-age groups can provide a therapeutic environment for children who are socially immature. Younger children will less quickly rebuff an older immature child than the child's same-age mates. Younger children will allow an older child to be unsophisticated longer than will his or her age peers ([Katz et al., 1990](#)).

Intellectual Benefits

Even four-year-olds spontaneously change the way they speak to suit the age of the listener. They change the length of the sentence, the tone, and the words they use. Studies of cognitive development suggest that cognitive conflict arises when interacting children are at different levels of understanding, regardless of their ages. If two children are working on a task that one understands well and another does not, the latter is likely to learn from the former if he or she understands the task very well, and if they argue. Only if one understands something very well can explanations be varied during argument ([Katz et al., 1990](#)).

Risks and Concerns

Every method of grouping children has risks. One concern with mixed-age grouping is ensuring that younger children are not overwhelmed by older or more competent ones. Teachers have an important role to play in maximizing the potential benefits of the age mixture by encouraging children to turn to each other for explanations, directions, and comfort. Teachers can also encourage older children to read stories to younger ones, and to listen to younger students read.

Teachers can also encourage older children to take responsibility for an individual younger child or for younger children in general. Teachers can encourage older children not to gloat over their superior skills, but to take satisfaction in their competence in reading to younger children, in writing things down for them, in explaining things, in showing them how to use the computer, in helping them find something, in helping them get dressed to go outdoors, and so forth.

Teachers can show older children how to protect themselves from being pestered by younger children, for example, by saying to the younger children, "I can't help you right this minute, but I will as soon as I finish what I am doing." Teachers can also help younger children learn to accept their own limitations and their place in the total scheme of things, as well as encourage older children to think of roles and suitable levels that younger ones could take in their work or in their activities. The basic expectation is that the children will be respectful and caring of one another ([Lipsitz, 1995](#)).

When teachers discourage older children from calling younger ones "cry babies" or "little dummies," they help resist the temptation of age stereotyping. Every once in a while one can observe a teacher saying to a misbehaving first grader something like "that behavior belongs in kindergarten." The teacher still will expect the first grader to be kind and helpful to the kindergartners during recess, though he or she has just heard kindergartners spoken of in a condescending way! A mixed-age group can provide a context in which to teach children not only to appreciate a level of understanding or behavior they themselves recently had, but also to appreciate their own progress and to develop a sense of the continuity of development.

For More Information

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