**First Assembly of God**

**NextGen Handbook**

**Updated January 2023**

**Welcome!**

We are excited for you to become a part of the NextGen ministry team at First Assembly! The following handbook is designed to acquaint you with our vision and goals and to provide an overview of the ministry that God has called us to.  We feel that the next generation is not only tomorrow’s church, but the church of **NOW**, as well! It is our desire to minister to youth and kids in a spirit-led, fun-filled, and secure environment. We want First Assembly to be a place where the nextgen loves to be!

**You don’t have to KNOW-IT-ALL!**

You don’t have to be a polished professional, just come with a passion for reaching and discipling the kids of this generation for Jesus Christ!

**There are plenty of opportunities**.

Every individual is not the same and neither are the ministry opportunities.  Whether you enjoy holding babies, singing, telling Bible stories, working with puppets, acting, or just being a smiling face, there is a place for you on the NextGen ministry team.  We will discuss these opportunities with you and help you find a place where you can use your God-given talents and abilities to invest in the lives of children.

**The Benefits are eternal.**

Nothing is more fulfilling than to watch a child grow in his or her faith.  It’s all about planting seeds and letting the Holy Spirit water them.   When you pour into the next generation you cannot go wrong.  I can look back and very distinctly remember teachers and leaders that profoundly impacted my life.  So, thank you for making the sacrifice and the commitment to minister to God’s harvest.  I am excited to serve alongside of you as we minister to the next generation of First Assembly!

Blessings,

Jared Lilly

First Assembly

Children’s Pastor

**Volunteers**

**Qualifications**

* NextGen Ministry volunteers must know Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.
* All volunteers must have completed and signed an application for Children’s Ministry.

**Application Procedures**

* Applications are available online and from any NextGen Leader.
* Applications must be completed in full and submitted through our online system.
* Each volunteer must make an appointment to be interviewed by the Children’s Pastor or Youth Pastor.
* Commit to serve through the end of the calendar year. Commitments renew annually at yearly meeting.
* New volunteers will spend observation time and/or hand-on-training with an experienced staff member before they are placed in ministry.

**Volunteer Guidelines**

* Volunteers should arrive and be prepared at least 15 minutes prior to when their ministry responsibilities begin.
* Volunteers should notify their direct report 2 weeks prior to being absent.
  + In cases of sickness or emergency, please your ministry leader as soon as you know you will be absent.
* **All substitutes must be approved by the children’s or youth and must have a volunteer application on file.**
* All volunteers should attend at least one church service weekly in addition to their area of service.

**Classroom**

**Classroom Guidelines**

* Classrooms should never be locked while in use.
* Doors should remain partially open when occupied by minors if there are no windows in the door.
* **Please do not allow any unauthorized individuals into your classroom or trust children to their care.**
* Please leave facility as clean and organized as you found it.

**Supply Request**

* Please submit all supply requests by using the provided form on the Volunteer Resources link.
* **Supplies should be requested at least one full week in advance.**
  + If it is an item that will need to be ordered, please make the request at least 3 weeks in advance.

**Events & Special Activities**

* All activities and special events must be approved by the Children’s or Youth prior to being planned and announced.
* All off-site events and guest speakers require approval of the lead pastor.
* Proper release / permission forms must be prepared and distributed through the Children’s Ministry office at least 2 weeks prior to the event.
* Promotional materials for the event should be submitted in an editable format to Children’s or Youth before distributed.

**Illness**

* We maintain a well-child policy. We do not provide care for sick children.
* If a child is know to be sick, they should not be accepted into the classroom.

**Ministry Etiquette**

**Visible Ministry**

* Extreme wisdom should be used at all times and in all areas when ministering to children.

**Classrooms**

* Atleast two workers should be present with children in classrooms at all times. If necessary, 2 classes should combine to accomplish this. There should **never** be a class with only one adult present.

**Restroom Procedures**

* Restroom policies differ at varying age levels, use discretion and sensitivity.
* All children must be escorted by First Kids staff to the hallway outside the restroom areas. When escorting children to the restroom, try to take them in pairs.
* The adult volunteer should stand outside the door. Escorts should be the same sex as the children they are accompanying.

**Physical Affection**

* Physical affection is important to a child, but should be in the presence of other volunteers.
* Physical affection should be limited and brief in nature.
* Hugs should be from the side.
* When approached by the child physically, do not reject the child, but guide their affection to an appropriate contact.

**Guiding Behavior**

* Absolutely no physical discipline will be permitted, nor is a voice to be raised toward a child – even family. Guests and onlookers do not know if a child is yours or a student in your class.
* Strive to redirect behavior with positive affirmation; in other words, instead of telling a child what not to do, tell them what to do.
* Set clear limits of behavior expectations.
* As a last resort, after much positive effort, and with approval from the children’s pastor, a child that continually disrupts can be removed from the classroom by calling upon a parent or escorting the child to their parent(s).
* If a parent is called upon and must discipline their child, they should not do so in the presence of other children.

**Incidents/Accidents**

* In case of accident or incident, fill out the Accident/Incident report completely and turn in to the Children’s Ministry office ASAP.

**Incident/Accident Report**

**Our Children’s Ministry strives to protect the safety of all children. We endeavor to communicate, as best we can, with the parent(s) guardians of those children regarding their needs, behavior etc. This report is simply a reporting of facts and does not imply any guilt or liability associated with this incident.**

**Child’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Location of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Time: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Description of incident / accident:**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Was there an injury? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No**

**Was there anyone else involved? \_\_\_Yes \_\_\_No**

**Injury Description:**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

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**Action Taken:**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Action Taken By:**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Checklist:**

**\_\_ Child’s Needs cared for**

**\_\_ Report filled out completely**

**\_\_ Parent(s) Informed**

**\_\_ Parent(s) signed Report**

**\_\_ Children’s Pastor informed (same day if possible)**

**\_\_ Report to Children’s Ministry office**

**I have been informed of this incident.**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Parent/Guardian Signature Date Phone**

**Please contact the Children’s Ministry office with questions or concerns.**

**704.524.0791 | jaredleelilly@gmail.com**

**Sensitive Situation Report**

**It is the desire of our Children’s Ministry to create an environment of safety and security. We must be prepared to take an active role in recognizing and reporting possible signs of child abuse. We also realize that we are bound by law to report suspected child abuse within a limited time. This report is designed to serve as an account of conversations between children and adults related to an alleged abusive act and is not intended to replace the required state forms and interviews. All conversations and contents of this report must be kept strictly confidential and restricted to the team member who encountered the report, and the children’s pastor. Its contents may be disclosed to the senior pastor and additional people may be included as directed by the senior pastor. Please note – everyone is a mandatory reporter of suspected abuse in the State of North Carolina**

**Child’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Situation Category: (check which apply)**

**\_\_ Suspicious marks or bruises**

**\_\_ Child-reported abuse**

**\_\_ Observed parental “harshness”**

**\_\_ Child sex-related words**

**\_\_ Adult Comment**

**\_\_ Nutrition Concern**

**\_\_ Hygiene Concern**

**\_\_ Neglect Concern**

**\_\_ Other**

**Details of Situation:**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Action Taken:**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Name of Person Filing Report:**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Printed Name Signature**

**Please make this report immediately with the Children’s Pastor. This confidential report will be locked in the children’s ministry office. Please contact the Children’s Ministry office with questions or concerns.**

**704.524.0791 | jaredleelilly@gmail.com**

**Kid Builders:**

(Use them non-sparingly)

That’s great!

You’ve got the right idea.

Good work!

Nice going!

Thank you very much!

That’s neat!

Good idea!

Keep it up!

That’s a good point.

Exactly!

I like that.

That’s much better!

Very interesting.

Beautiful!

Terrific!

That’s a good start.

You’re getting it!

Beautiful!

AWESOME!

Bingo! You got it!

Cool!

Thank you for….

You did a GREAT job!

Excellent work!

Right on!

I’m proud of you!

MAKE YOUR OWN LIST!

The Calling

I am a minister.  
I minister to the largest mission field in the world.  
I minister to children.

**M**y calling is sure; my challenge is big; my vision is clear; my desire is strong; my influence is eternal; my impact is critical; my values are solid; my faith is tough; my mission is urgent; my purpose is unmistakable; my direction is forward; my heart is genuine; my strength is supernatural; my reward is promised; and my God is real.

**I**n a world of cynicism, I offer hope. In a world of confusion, I offer truth. In a world of immorality, I offer values. In a world of neglect, I offer attention. In a world of abuse, I offer safety. In a world of ridicule, I offer affirmation. In a world of division, I offer reconciliation. In a world of bitterness, I offer forgiveness. In a world of sin, I offer salvation. In a world of hate, I offer God’s love.

**I** refuse to be dismayed, disengaged, disgruntled, discouraged, or distracted. Neither will I look back, stand back, fall back, go back, or sit back. I do not need applause, flattery, adulation, prestige, stature, or veneration. I do not have time for business as usual, mediocre standards, small thinking, outdated methods, normal expectations, average results, ordinary ideas, petty disputes, or low vision. I will not give up, give in, bail out, lie down, turn over, quit or surrender.

**I** will pray when things look bad. I will pray when things look good. I will move forward when others stand still. I will trust God when obstacles arise. I will work when the task is overwhelming. I will get up when I fall down.

**M**y calling is to reach boys and girls for God. It is too serious to be taken lightly, too urgent to be postponed, too vital to be ignored, too relevant to be overlooked, too significant to be trivialized, too eternal to be fleeting, and too passionate to be quenched.

**I** know my mission. I know my challenge. I also know my limitations, my weaknesses, my fears, and my problems. And I know my God. Let others get the praise. Let the church get the blessing. Let God get the glory.

**I** am a minister. I minister to children. This is who I am. This is what I do.

-by Roger Fields

**The World of the Preschool Child**

What follows here is a brief description of some of the characteristics you’ll see in the children you lead and learn from. It leaves much unsaid—and is certainly no substitute for getting to know your group firsthand. But we do hope it will give you some insight into what you may anticipate from preschoolers—intellectually, socially, and spiritually.

**Intellectual Characteristics**

Children at this age

 think very concretely and literally, not abstractly or figuratively as youth and adults do; to a preschool child, things *are* as they appear to be.

 are not capable of reasoning or organizing abstract faith concepts along logical lines.

 learn through their experiences at home, church, preschool, caregivers.

 learn with their whole bodies; love to taste, touch, move, explore, smell, watch, and wonder.

 are just beginning to develop some literacy skills; some can write their own name, recognize the letters of the alphabet, and count to twenty.

 love to use language to please adults; “right answers” do not necessarily indicate comprehension.

 enjoy being told stories and read to; repetition an important way to learn.

 are often easily distracted from staying “on task.”

Tips for Leaders

 Try for a reasonable balance between times of quiet listening and active, “hands on” participation

 Relate learning to the experiences children already have or to new experiences you can share with them.

 Give your little ones plenty of opportunity to move around.

 Keep games, stories, and other activities short, with transitional periods that enable movement from one part of the room to the other.

 Provide a variety of learning experiences: stories, art, music, words, numbers, group interaction, etc.

Avoid using figures of speech, symbolism, analogies.

**** Remember that each child develops at his or her own pace; nurture each child’s strengths.

**Social Characteristics**

Children at this age

 are blissfully egocentric; see the world through their own eyes.

 are developmentally incapable of understanding another’s perspective or emotions.

 are self-centered, yet are significantly influenced by others, especially mom, dad, teachers, other significant adults.

**** are on the verge of experiencing a wider world of people; many young children still want to play alone and must make a real effort to have any meaningful play with others.

Tips for Leaders

 Accept the children’s developing concepts of themselves without judging their apparent egocentrism

 Emphasize the theme that we are special to God: we’ve been created by God, belong to God, and are dearly loved by God.

 **Recognize that you are a role model for your little ones, someone who is a picture of God’s love and care.**

 Encourage cooperative play with others, while remaining sensitive to individual needs for attention and recognition.

 Do your best to make the learning fun; make your room a “safe” and friendly place where kids will want to be every week.

**Spiritual Characteristics**

Children at this age

 have a growing sense that God is very special and real rather than pretend.

 tend to have a very literal concept of God, perhaps as a “grandfather” figure who lives “up there.”

 readily accept what you say about God.

 sense that God loves them and cares for them.

 enjoy some Bible stories, especially about Jesus; want stories retold often.

 can develop attitudes of love and trust toward Jesus and God.

 do not yet have a built-in control (conscience) that nudges them toward right behavior for its own sake; do the “right thing” out of fear of punishment or to win approval.

 sense that “church” is a good place to be..

 recite simple prayers ; in some cases may add own ideas to “form” prayers.

Tips for Leaders

 Above all, let the children know that God loves them and cares for them; teach this in the context of common childhood experiences with which the children can identify.

 Let these little ones sense your own wonder and awe about who God is and what God has done.

 Focus on attitudes and actions that exhibit faith.

 When do you teach religious concepts, keep them simple and few: (God loves us; we love and obey God; God is good; Jesus is God’s own Son); repeat them often.

 Nurture faith by giving your little ones a love for the stories of Scripture and by laying attitudinal foundations for later understanding of Scripture’s great truths.

**The World of Kindergartners and First Graders**

What follows here is a brief description of some of the characteristics you’ll see in children in kindergarten and first grade. It leaves much unsaid—and is certainly no substitute for getting to know your group firsthand. But we do hope it will give you some insight into what you may anticipate from children in this age group.

**Intellectual Characteristics**

Children at this age

 are beginning to enter the exciting world of symbols: numbers, letters , words.

 are dealing with the complex process of learning to read and write; expect wide variations in ability levels.

 still depend very much on concrete experiences; continue to learn with their whole bodies: love to touch, taste, feel, smell, explore, watch—and wonder; learning best through *doing*.

 are still many years away from being able to deal with abstract faith concepts along logical lines; still interpret what they see, hear, and experience in a very literal way.

 enjoy listening to stories and retelling or reenacting them; listen with more discernment than preschoolers.

have an increasing attention span but still need to move frequently from one task to another.

Tips for Leaders

 Share the excitement of learning to read and write; use these emerging skills as tools for asking faith questions and for helping children make personal responses.

 Don’t assume that because children are learning to read and write, they can use these skills effectively; be patient and encouraging when asking children to count or to recognize letters or copy words; adapt each session to best meet the needs and abilities of your children.

 Plan your sessions to give children frequent opportunity to change activities and move around; balance active participation with some quieter activities.

 Plan learning experiences that appeal to different kinds of intelligences (word smart, number smart, picture smart, music smart, and so on. Avoid using figures of speech, symbolism, and analogies to explain faith concepts.

 Continue to relate learning to experiences the children have already had or to new experiences you can share with them.

**Social Characteristics**

Children at this age

 are still largely shaped by home and family; trust learned at home helps shape their concept of God and other believers.

 are also experiencing an ever-widening social world through attendance at school, either part-time or full-time; here they are learning new skills and making adjustments to many new and important people in their lives.

 are beginning to learn how to play with others, though still strongly egocentric, how to cooperate, how to behave in group settings; they are more open to learning about the church as God’s family.

Tips for Leaders

 Establish a good relationship with the home, when possible; include many home- and family-related illustrations when talking together about faith concepts; encourage families to read the children’s take-home papers to them.

 Draw on children’s common experiences in school for illustrations and guidelines for behavior.

 Watch for opportunities to build community among the children; i.e. to trust each other, to pray together, to grow together in the faith.

 Look for teachable moments to help kids sense the diversity among themselves and among all of God’s people.

 Remember that the children look to you as someone they love and trust; you are an important “flesh and blood” example of faith in their young lives.

**Spiritual Characteristics**

Children at this age

 have a very real spiritual nature, a strong sense of who God is; often relate to Jesus as their friend.

 are aware of right and wrong, but are still likely to define “wrong” in terms of its immediate consequence (“Taking cookies is wrong if Mom catches me!); can begin to understand the joy that comes with forgiveness.

 understand God’s love and our response within the context of everyday experiences and, to some extent, within the context of God’s family, the church.

 can be delighted and awed by Bible stories; use imagination to ask questions about the Bible and God.

**** can express their love for Jesus in their own words and actions.

Tips for Leaders

 Continue to help the children realize that God loves them and cares for them.

 Help the children sense that they are an important part of God’s family, the church. Encourage the children to say their own prayers to God at home during the week and to be good listeners when God’s Word is read.

 Let the children sense your own wonder and reverence about who God is and what God has done.

 Continue to focus on attitudes and actions that exhibit faith, rather than on teaching complex religious concepts.

 Invite the children to express their feelings for God in a variety of ways that allow them to be spontaneous and child-like in their praise and worship.

**The World of Second and Third Graders**

There’s much more to be said than what is stated here and, of course, each child is unique. The best way to get to know the children is to observe them from week to week, listening to what they have to say and being their friend as well as their leader.

**Intellectual Characteristics**

Children at this age

 are becoming capable of thinking logically (simple classification, grouping, and ordering) but they are not yet able to reason abstractly; they still need specific, “concrete” examples.

are reading well above grade level in some cases; others are still struggling to learn the basics; some are able to read from the Bible.

 are beginning to understand the use of religious rituals and symbolism .

 are developing the ability to think in sequence and to understand cause and effect.

 have a growing sense of time and space; are able to differentiate between now and long ago, between fantasy and reality.

 are great collectors of just about anything you can name.

**** enjoy listening to well-told stories, making up stories, retelling and reenacting stories, and comparing one story with another.

Tips for Leaders

 Be sensitive to the wide variety in reading abilities; to avoid embarrassing weaker readers, ask for volunteers to read aloud; give individual, quiet help to those who are having difficulty reading silently; include weaker readers in a group of good readers to help them cope.

 Nurture each child’s strengths and continue to provide learning experiences that appeal to different kinds of intelligences (word smart, number smart, picture smart, music smart, and so on.

 Build on the desire to collect and categorize things by going on nature “treasure hunts,” by setting up display tables, by being “detectives” and finding out information, by making lists, and so on.

 Emphasize that Bible stories are *true* stories from God’s Word; help them to begin to develop a simple chronology of what happened when in the Bible; occasionally have volunteers read directly from simple passages in the Bible.

 Continue to avoid most analogies and figures of speech to explain religious truths; however, basic religious symbols—such as the cross and the elements of the sacraments—may be explained to the children.

**Social Characteristics**

Children at this age

 are gradually moving from being totally self-centered to being others-centered; are developing acceptable ways of functioning within a group.

 take a more active role in worship services (singing, praying, listening) and have a stronger sense of church as God’s family.

 are making friends and are discovering what it means to be kind to each other.

 value rules and expect them to be followed; have a developing sense of justice and fair play.

 enjoy showing off their new abilities; need to know that their abilities and gifts are valued.

Tips for Leaders

 Give children opportunities to work together in groups; vary the make-up of the groups (kids will often pick the same partners if you give them the choice).

 Take time to remind the children that they are a valuable part of the church, that the church cares for them, that they can contribute to the worship service by singing, praying, etc.

 Try to model fairness in the way you deal with the children; from time to time remind children ofrules your group has agreed to observe.

 Invite the kids to help you with tasks, such as cleaning up the room or passing out materials; give them small responsibilities and praise their efforts.

**Spiritual Characteristics**

Children at this age

 are capable of understanding basic salvation concepts and making a commitment to Jesus (but may do so simply out of a desire to please you or parents).

 often express opinions and feelings about God and church; enjoy asking a great many “why” and “how” questions.

 often include prayer in their daily routines; prayers frequently self-centered but are sincere and offered in faith.

 often still see issues in black and white. However, they are aware of the struggle between good and evil in the world and sometimes also in their own lives.

Tips for Leaders

 Provide opportunities for children to express—in their own age-appropriate way—their commitment to Christ, but avoid any sense of manipulation.

 Pay close attention to the questions the children ask; help them discover the answer rather than tell it to them.

 Involve the children in different kinds of prayer experiences; guide them to include thanks/praise and requests for others in their prayers.

 Challenge children to widen their understanding of the world; help children process their fears and guilt feelings about not living up to God’s expectations.

**The World of Fourth - Sixth Graders**

Once you get to know the children in your group, you’ll be amazed at how different they are! No two are alike, that’s for sure. Still, most children in this age group are beginning to establish a sense of identity, of who they are. And some of this identity comes through joining groups of one kind or another.

**Intellectual Characteristics**

Children at this age

 are proficient readers, though reading ability varies considerably; are learning how to read and study the Bible, with an emphasis on learning the facts; memorizing is easier now than later.

 love to gather and classify facts and dig into a subject; have a growing sense of time and space, cause and effect; can deal with timelines and maps; are often interested in historical stories or heroes of the past.

 are still “concrete thinkers” and are unable to reason with these facts in anadult way—to do logical analysis, to “think about thinking;” it’s easier for them to talk about *things* than about *ideas*.

 tend to have thinking that is anchored in personal experience (“You said it was impossible; well, I know someone who did it”); their thinking also colored by emotion and by a sense of fair play.

 are identifying their preferences for certain learning styles; you may recognize budding artists or writers or musicians in your group; some children in this age group have a fairly strong sense of what they’re good at and may be somewhat self-conscious when asked to do things they don’t do well.

 still love to learn by doing—participating in games, dramas, role plays, group projects, art projects, service projects, etc.

 often have a strong interest in nature, the environment, animals.

Tips for Leaders

 Continue to be sensitive to children who struggle with reading; ask for volunteers to read aloud or assign shorter/simpler pieces to weaker readers.

 Read some of the books your kids are reading, watch some of the movies/TV shows they enjoy so you can refer to these for examples and illustrations.

 Recognize each child’s strengths; structure your sessions so they give each child a chance to do something he or she really enjoys and does well; at the same time, encourage kids to be try activities that may challenge them a bit (music, art, drama, dance, role play); let the group know that you have strengths and weaknesses of your own, and learn to laugh at your own attempts to try something at which one of the children excels. This can help set the stage for accepting everyone’s best efforts.

 Recognize that while these children can concentrate for longer periods of time and become involved in a topic, they also have a great need for movement. Shift activities frequently or add physical activity to the learning time so kids don’t become antsy.

 Respect the mental boundaries of this age-group by staying away from theological arguments and analysis but encourage their mental growth by asking *why* they feel as they do or have a certain opinion, by taking them into the nonliteral world of parables, by moving them into the discussion of ideas as well as things, and by using the anecdotal lives of heroes—including biblical heroes—to teach more abstract concepts such as faithfulness, love, covenant, and so on.

Take advantage of nice-weather days and occasionally go outside to work on an activity.

**Social Characteristics**

Children at this age

 are developing a sense of individual value and worth; are forming a sense of personal identity that includes statements about what they believe; need a sense of individual value and encouragement for their efforts in work and learning; can be very sensitive to criticism.

may place impossible expectations on themselves, tearing up stories they’ve written or pictures they’ve drawn because they don’t think they’re good enough.

are spending more and more time with their peers; form clubs or groups with children of their own gender; opinions of friends may be more important to them than opinions of parents; group identity is stronger now than at any other time in their childhood.

 are becoming more responsible and caring towards each other and adults.

 are developing a communal sense about God’s family, the church; often want to be part of the church or children’s group within the church.

 are quick to sense when one child is favored or given special privileges; respect a leader who is fair.

Tips for Leaders

 Encourage and support the children’s efforts in work and in learning; make sure they know that their work is acceptable and you are not looking for “perfection;” (when they become self-critical, it’s hard for them to participate because they feel can’t do anything right).

 Encourage group work of all sorts; stress cooperation, not competition; avoid formation of cliques by assigning children to small groups.

 Give children responsibility for working effectively with others in groups and for working independently on some projects; let them know that you trust them.

 Tell some of the “faith stories” that come out of your local congregation; encourage participation in such church activities as children’s choir, special programs and events; help kids develop a sense of belonging to the community of believers.

 Work to avoid favoritism.

**Spiritual Characteristics**

Children at this age

 are developing a conscience—a personal sense of right and wrong that often expresses itself in judgments of what’s “unfair” or unjust; may be critical of adults who appear to be insincere in their faith.

 may be able to deal—in a limited way—with moral questions in terms of motives as well as consequences; are beginning to think about questions of ethics and morality in the context of love, loyalty, promises, and so on.

 may show an increasing concern about people who are hungry, homeless, or poor.

 are often open to learning about other cultures; becoming more accepting of differences in others.

 understand why we pray; may make up spontaneous prayers and litanies.

 are more inclined to look inward than younger children; may ask questions and wonder about making a commitment to Christ.

Tips for Leaders

 When discussing moral/ethical issues, try getting into areas of motivation/intentions of those involved; give guidance in making ethical decisions and encourage children to recognize the authority of Scripture; examples from life are useful in helping children develop morally.

 Offer some service projects that children can do as a group.

 Watch for opportunities to point out the contributions of different cultures to music, worship, prayer, and so on.

 Watch for questions and statements that indicate an interest in making a commitment; while never forcing commitment, do what you can to help the children explore their faith and grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.