

Healthy and Happy: Dynamic Health Activities for Young Children

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Abstract: This presentation will provide PreK-Grade 2 health education, physical education, and classroom teachers with a variety of hands-on, multi-sensory experiences utilizing the developmental characteristics and needs of young children. The elements of play so essential in young children's learning domains will be implemented in making this session participatory and informal in nature.

Introduction

Learning experiences for PreK-Grade 2 children can be exciting and challenging. In early childhood, daily routines are established, some of which develop into life-long habits. Therefore, through early exposure to positive health practices, children can be guided toward healthful living. As health educators, we need to be aware of the importance of early health experiences and how to guide/work with classroom teachers in providing relevant and appropriate experiences for young children. Seven broad areas of health and representative activities will be addressed in this session for this age-group: Being Myself, Body Systems, Care of Self and Illness Prevention, Safety, Health Promotion, Relationships, and Special Situations.

Strategies for Appropriate and Active Learning Sessions for Young Children

A variety of methods and experiences are necessary with young children to provide meaningful and entertaining learning opportunities. These opportunities become personally relevant when children are actively involved not only physically, but emotionally and socially, in the learning process. "Hands on" activities fulfill the goal of active learning and emphasize exploration and discovery of health concepts. These activities are generally initiated and directed by the teacher with thought given to the activity, situation, and developmental levels of the children. A multi-sensory approach is utilized in many of the "hands on" activities to ensure learning and comprehension. A variety of mediums should be explored through the use of sight, touch, smell, taste, and hearing.

Activities should be well-planned, thoroughly introduced, and positively reinforced. Young children display a curiosity for new experiences; however, they may have short attention spans and not possess certain academic skills. With play being such an important part of their lives and learning, they also possess a desire or need for movement. It is important that children experience positive and successful learning situations since each child has a fragile yet developing self-worth. Appropriate early health educational experiences are essential to this process. Therefore, we, as health educators, need to be involved in this process.

SESSION AGENDA

The Ways Young Children Learn

Group Participation Activity: Rhythm Chant with brainstorming on teaching strategies with young children

“Young children learn in ways that are primarily fun. ‘Where is your nose?’ What sound does a doggie make?’ Life is a constant pop quiz for young kids and they don’t get F’s for pointing to their eyes instead of their noses or saying ‘Moo’ instead of ‘Woof.’ They’re more likely to get a laugh, a gentle correction, and encouragement to try again. There’s very little work involved in keeping curiosity alive in children.”

Madeline Levine, Teach Your Children Well. (p. 60)

Seven Essential Life Skills

1. focus and self-control
2. perspective-taking
3. communicating
4. making connections
5. critical thinking
6. taking on challenges
7. self-directed learning

“We don’t need expensive programs, materials, or equipment to promote these skills. We can promote them in everyday ways through the everyday fun things we do with children.”

Ellen Galinsky, *Mind in the Making*, p. 2

Selected Strategies Particularly Geared Towards Helping Young Children Learn

Part One - Use of Trigger Words and Actions

“Freeze” is an action concept which says to young children – Stop, Look, and Listen

Classroom Rules in Action* – “repeat words” and (actions) simultaneously after the teacher

“We are kind to our friends” – (cross arms and pat shoulders)

“We take care of our things” – (alternate pounding fists on top of each other)

“We listen and obey our teachers” – (cup our hands on our ears)

“Hooray” – (give thumbs up)

*These classroom rules are said and acted out the beginning of each class period and used when necessary to re-focus a child’s behavior and attention.

Video – young children doing classroom rules in action

Part Two - Interactive Story Telling

Using the book, *Wiggle*, by Doreen Cronin for physical activity/body systems identification

Video – young children participating in the story read by the teacher

Literacy – Criteria for Evaluating Children’s Books on Health

Subject matter – Does it “encourage” a child to be healthy?

Message – Is the text simple and easily understood by Pre-K children?

Characters – Are the characters approximately the same age as the children in your class?

Illustrations – Do they enhance the text and are appropriate for young learners?

In General – Does it reflect the developmental level of a 3-5 year old?

Preschool Literacy – Selected books with health concepts reviewed

Stand Tall, Mary Lou Melon by Patty Brown (self-esteem)

Have You Filled A Bucket Today? by Carol McCloud (helping others)

The Little Engine That Could by Wally Piper (Attitudes and Trying)

Alexander The Terrible by Judith Viorst (emotions and moods, relationships)

The Recess Queen by Alexis O’Neill and Laura Hulishka-Beth (bullying)

Criteria for Internet and App Selection

Use same guidelines for selecting children’s story books

Be aware of reviews – many have written text and inappropriately labeled as health-related

Activities are for older children with high level thinking skills involved

Unconventional Health Websites Besides Common Health Agencies We Know

eHow Mom

Health Lesson plans for Preschoolers

http://www.ehow.com/info_8082235_health-lesson-plans-preschoolers.html

A to Z Teacher Stuff

Preschool Health Lesson Plans

http://www.atozteacherstuff.com/Lesson_Plans/Health/_Preschool/index.shtml

First-School.ws

Health and Nutrition: Preschool Activities and Crafts

<http://www.first-school.ws/theme/nutrition.htm>

Electronic Media Resources

Video – Life Lessons for Kids – Cover Your Cough – YouTube

Hoopla KidzTV

Kids TV 123

Part Three - Interactive Play

Play is the work of childhood, it involves the total child; totally committed.

Seven Areas of Healthful Instruction with Young Children PreK-Grade 2 with (accompanying activities)

Being Myself (Mirror in the Box, Line Up, Faces)

Body Systems (Body Portraits, Five Senses through Popcorn)

Care of Self and Illness Prevention (Sneeze, Germ Bug)

Safety (Red Light Green Light, Walking to and in the Park)

Health Promotion (Clean Up Our Yard)

Relationships (Help Your Neighbor, Bareback Fuzzies)

Special Situations (Good/Bad Choices, Glove Puppets)

Conclusion

“Everybody longs to be loved. And the greatest thing we can do is let somebody know that they are loved and capable of loving.” Fred Rogers

