



BibleMAX First Steps

Introduction

This introduction to the *BibleMAX First Steps* curriculum will help you to understand the environment young children need, how they learn, what they can learn and how the lessons have been written to utilize these things.

INTRODUCTION

Young children are always learning! In fact, they learn more during these first few years than they will throughout the rest of their lives. But they don't always learn in the same way as adults do. The following will help you to understand the environment young children need, how they learn, what they can learn and how the lessons have been written to utilize these things.

A LOVING ENVIRONMENT

Young children are very responsive to the environment. If they sense tension or confusion, they will become uneasy and restless and will not settle down. On the other hand, if young children feel they are in a loving, safe environment, they will relax. They will feel secure enough to reach out for new experiences.

There are two elements to a good environment. Firstly, the room needs to be prepared for young children, with harmful items taken out of the way and interesting, safe, age-appropriate toys provided. This will help the children to feel at home in a familiar environment. The facilities do not need to be fancy, but children respond positively to beauty and order. The time spent creatively preparing the space for them will be repaid in happy, contented children who are ready to learn.

Secondly, the caregivers must truly love the children and be willing to interact with them, not just run the program. Adults of all ages and both genders have something to offer – from playing with the children to telling the story and organizing the craft. Teenagers are favourite playmates who can run with the children to use up some of that excess energy. Grandmothers and grandfathers are indispensable for giving quiet one-on-one time to an anxious child and for sharing wisdom with younger leaders.

As children settle into a loving environment, they are also being introduced to their loving Heavenly Father. Our love opens their heart to God's love, which is foundational to everything else.

HOW THEY LEARN

Observation and imitation

Young children are always watching us. They love to follow us around and copy everything we do – from sweeping the floor, to dancing to music, to stamping our foot when we are frustrated!

Modelling desirable skills and behaviour is one of the most effective ways to teach young children. They have a great desire to be like us and so they are motivated to do what we do. We need to realize that everything we do is being watched. We cannot be perfect models for the children, but we can be honest ones who admit when we do something wrong and show the children how to put things right again.

Children also have a chance to observe people through the stories we tell them. Biblical characters can be good examples of how to act – or how not to act! As we help them to enter into the lives of the people in the Bible, they will identify with them and learn from their experiences.

Experimentation

Children use all of their senses as they learn. Their insatiable curiosity causes them to investigate just about everything that crosses their path. As they pull apart a flower, squeeze play dough through their fingers, build with blocks or role play they are learning about the world around them. In fact, many activities which we call "play" are actually learning experiences for them. These experiences are essential for their growth and development.

As young children play with others, they are also learning important interpersonal skills. They learn to share, take turns and to be kind. These are hard lessons to learn and only come through trial and error. They often require adult involvement to help them work out the appropriate ways to act. We need to be patient and realise that not all difficult behaviour is disobedience – sometimes it is exploring the possibilities and testing our reactions so that they will know what is acceptable.

These lessons contain many suggested activities to help the children explore the stories and concepts you are teaching them. You may not have the exact materials suggested in the lessons. That is not a



problem. Use your imagination! The key is to realise that play is an important part of learning for young children. The more different ways we provide for the children to explore an idea, the better they will really understand what we are teaching and build it into their worldview.

Repetition

Young children rarely learn something from one exposure to it. They need to hear an idea or practice a skill over and over again, in many different contexts. Therefore, don't rush through things. These lessons are designed to stay with the same story for two weeks and the same theme and memory verse for several months. This repetition ensures that the children become very familiar with what you are teaching.

They also benefit from looking at the same ideas in different ways – in the playtime, the story, the memory verse and the craft. These are all valuable ways to re-enforce the lesson.

Thinking together

Young children need help to process their experiences if they are to gain the most benefit from them. Thinking together helps the children think about what they are doing by working together with you to solve a problem, clarify an idea or investigate new possibilities.

This process begins as you enter into a child's conversation. It is helpful to echo the child's comments back to them to assure them that you are hearing and understanding what they are saying. They will often then expand on their comments, giving you further insight into their thinking. Avoid questions that can be easily answered with "Yes" and "No". Instead ask questions which will help them to think of new possibilities and connections. The goal is to expand their thinking and to help them relate what they are doing to other ideas such as the Bible story or concept. Ideas for conversation are given with each activity suggested.

WHAT THEY CAN LEARN

As young children explore their world, we need to bring God into everything. For instance, as they wonder at the beauty of a flower, they need to learn that God made that flower. As they hear the thunder, they need to know that God is powerful and He controls nature. As they learn what is right and wrong, they need to know that it is God who is our final authority and He has told us what is best for us. As they are hurt, they need to be assured that God cares and wants them to come to Him with their problems. As they experience love, they need to feel that God loves them the most of all. Through all of this, they will begin to build a strong, multi-faceted picture of God as a real person who wants to be intimately involved in their lives.

They also need to learn that they are God's greatest creation. God made each one of us special and we are a truly wonderful, priceless person who was made to reflect the God's greatness. However, they will soon learn that sin is an all-pervasive reality in this world. They will encounter the adverse affects of someone else's sin and they will sin themselves. Then the obvious question will arise in their minds: If the world is made and cared for by God, why do bad things happen? This is the time to start to explain to them that although God made a beautiful world, people have chosen to rebel against God and do what is wrong, bringing hurt and pain into the world. This sin separates us from each other and God and spoils God's world.

If children have come to trust in God's love and if they have come to realize the seriousness of sin which separates them from Him, they will be open to learning about God's good news of salvation. Jesus was not just a kind person who did amazing things during his time on earth. He was God's plan to provide forgiveness for all and restore our relationship with Himself. A young child's understanding of the gospel is simple but real. They can understand that they do wrong things, they disobey, they sin. They can understand that there are consequences to their actions. And they can also understand the joy of forgiveness and restored relationships.

These lessons have been designed to focus on these key themes or teaching points. Over time, we can teach them the basics of the gospel through the stories we teach, the activities we provide and the way we interact with them. God is also at work in their hearts, calling them to himself. Young children should never be pressured, but when they are ready, they will often come to you with questions, leading to an acknowledgement of their need and an acceptance of God's salvation. Even if they don't reach this point



at this early age, the foundation has been laid for the future.

On the second page of each unit, the teaching points that will be brought out in the unit are listed. A creative way to present and review them is also suggested. In order to help the children remember and identify these basic points, each point has been associated with a symbol (e.g. red heart = love; black cloud = sin). These symbols are consistent throughout the units.

At the beginning of each lesson, the teaching points for that lesson are listed. In the Bible story, usually in the Application section, there is a suggestion on how to tie these points into the lesson.

Teaching Points and Symbols

What I need to know

WHO GOD IS

- There is only one true and living God. (*purple number 1*)
- He is the ruler of everything. (*yellow crown*)
- He is the creator of everything. (*green tree*)
- He is all-powerful – he can do anything. (*orange lightning bolt*)
- He never does anything wrong. (*white circle*)
- He is love - He loves me and wants to have a relationship with me. (*red heart*)
- He gave us the Bible to tell us about himself and what he is doing. (*grey book*)

WHO I AM

- I am God's special creation. (*brown person*)
- God loves and cares for me. (*red heart*)
- God knows what is best for me - He tells me what is right and wrong. (*green arrow*)
- When I choose to do what I want to do, not what is right, it is called sin. (*black cloud*)
- Sin has consequences - it separates me from God and hurts other people. (*grey sad face*)
- God still loves me and made a way to take away my sin. (*yellow happy face*)

WHO JESUS IS AND WHAT HE HAS DONE

- Jesus is God's only Son. (*manger and/or purple number 1*)
- He came to earth as a human being. (*brown person*)
- He showed us that he was God by doing things only God could do. (*orange lightning bolt*)
- He showed us that God loves us. (*red heart*)
- He loves me so much that he died to take away my sin. (*red cross*)
- He came back to life to show God's power over sin. (*white circle*)
- Because of what Jesus has done, I can become a part of God's family. (*blue house*)

Being a part of God's family

WHAT I NEED TO DO

- Believe in Jesus and what He has done (*red cross*)
- Admit that I am a sinner and be sorry for my sins – repent (*black cloud*)
- Ask God to forgive my sin because of what Jesus did on the cross (*white circle*)
- Ask him into my life to help me do what is right (*brown person on top of yellow crown*)
- Love and trust God with my whole heart (*red heart*)
- Listen to God and follow him (*green arrow*)



WHAT GOD WILL DO

- Forgive my sins (*white circle*)
- Make me His child - a part of his family (*blue house*)
- Give me the Holy Spirit to live in me and help me (*brown person on top of yellow crown*)
- Speak to me through the Bible (*grey book*)
- Listen and answer when I pray (*praying hands*)
- Some day take me to heaven to live with Him (*blue house*)

WEEKLY LESSON

Each lesson is designed to be taught over two weeks. The first week you should focus on introducing the children to the story. In the teaching time, focus on the details of the story and use the first craft suggested. The second week, the focus is on the application. Review the story and emphasise the application during the teaching time and with the second craft.

Preparation

Take a moment early in the week to look over the lesson, choose your activities and work out what materials you will need. Don't leave it to the last minute to discover you don't have a key part of the craft or a needed visual aid for the story. Also, don't neglect to allow God to teach you through the Bible passages. You can only pass onto the children what you have learned yourself. The "Personal Preparation" section has been written to help you reflect on the lesson from an adult perspective.

Once you have collected all the necessary materials, get everything ready and organized so that you can find what you need easily in class. Also take enough time to practice the story, memory verse and songs so that you can lead confidently.

Lesson Components

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

These activities encourage the children to explore. Each lesson provides you with some specific suggestions applicable to the theme of the lesson. Choose what activities you will use and gather the necessary materials.

- *Individual activities* - these give children an opportunity to explore on their own. The teachers need to be down on the children's level playing with them, building relationships and looking for opportunities to link what the children are doing with the lesson.
- *Group activities* – these bring the children together, help them to work out some of their wiggles and focus their attention on you, the teacher. They should also prepare the children for the lesson.

BIBLE CONTENT

This includes the Bible story and the memory verse. Some groups will do all of this in a large group. Others may prefer to do some things together (e.g. group activity, songs, memory verse) and some things in small groups (Bible story and Interaction activity).

Decide on your visual aids and practice telling the story with them. There are often interruptions to storytelling with young children. You need to be familiar enough with the story and visuals to be able to improvise and start and stop with no hesitations. You will cover the written lesson in two weeks. The first week you need to focus on the story itself and the second week you should review the story and focus on the application.

Each lesson will give you ideas on how to tie the teaching points into the story being told. These ideas will build over the course of the whole unit.

Activities are also suggested to help in teaching the memory verses. Feel free to use your creativity to

expand on these and vary them as the children become more familiar with the verses.

INTERACTION

There are activities to encourage the children to interact with the lesson. Adapt the suggestions to fit your situation and available materials. Remember, these activities are an important part of the learning process, not just a way to keep the children busy. The first week the activity will help the children remember and understand the story. The second week's activity will help the children to apply the lesson.

DURING THE WEEK

Pray for the children. Contact them during the week. Involve the parents. The stronger the link between church and home, the greater the re-enforcement the children will receive at home and the more likely your teaching will mould their attitudes and actions.

The Parents' Sheets have been designed to let them know what is being taught in the class and give some ideas on how to continue to teach the concepts at home. If you are able to give the children a colouring sheet for each lesson that is also helpful. The parents can use these to prompt further discussions with their children about what they are learning in your class.

The "Time to Reflect" questions will help you to evaluate your class and how the children are learning. Don't be afraid to modify how you are doing things in response to the children's needs and reactions.

CONCLUSION

Working with young children is often hard work – especially if you commit yourself to providing the enriching activities and personal interaction that are most beneficial to them. There may be times when you wonder if it is worth it. But if you are patient, you will begin to see them grow "in wisdom, and in stature and in favour with God and people" (Luke 2:52).

So, get down on the floor with these young children. Play with them and enter into their conversations. Listen to them and laugh with them (It's OK to have fun together!). Enjoy their wonder as they discover the world around them. Love and encourage them. And as you do all this, introduce them to the God who made this world and who loves them and wants to be a part of their lives.