

Lesson #25: Care well for your teachers and they will come back.

Teaching is a big responsibility and often a tiring one. Many teachers burn out from frustration or lack of support. We try to train our teachers so they will be well prepared. And, we try not to overtax them by asking for a commitment from them that is greater than is reasonable or spiritually good for them. Here are ways we try to care for our teachers....and it helps them be ready to come back again and again.

#1 We Mentor Our Teachers

We try to mentor all new teachers, so that they see a teaching model before they start teaching themselves. This gives us a chance to observe their teaching before they teach to see if they are suited to teach. And, it allows them to try out teaching before committing to a class. As new teachers watch more experienced teachers, they can become familiarized with the curriculum and with effective teaching skills. This brings both greater continuity to the classroom and greater success among new teachers, which in turn helps our children learn.

#2 We Model Teach for Our Teachers

At least once a year, we model-teach in each classroom. We walk the teachers through lesson preparation before class, then have them watch us teach the lesson. Afterwards, we talk about what went well and what could have gone better. This give-and-take of loving criticism fosters an atmosphere of humility and teachability as well as helps us become better teachers. As teachers (and perhaps even more importantly as fellow believers in community together), we think it is important to model soliciting, giving and receiving this kind of healthy criticism. How will we grow if we are not willing to ask others to help us see not only areas in which we do well, but also those in which we need to grow?

#3 We Observe and Encourage Our Teachers

We try to observe teachers at least once a year. The point is not to be the perfection police, but to encourage them. Yes, often this also provides opportunities to give helpful feedback that will make for a better teaching and learning experience. If it causes too much anxiety in the teachers to be observed, we resort back to model teaching.

#4 We Teach Classroom Management Skills As Well As Provide Teacher-friendly Curriculum

We try to carefully choose materials that will help our volunteer teachers understand what to teach and how best to teach it. We also give our teachers tips on how to manage children's behavior in ways that help everyone learn and foster respect for the teacher and for the other students.

#5 We Have Our Teachers Teach in Teams Bigger than They Need

We form teams of teachers that partner together/switch off teaching a particular class of children. A typical team of Sunday School teachers at CHBC commits to one year of teaching. But because they are part of a team of four teachers, with only two teaching any week, they are really teaching twenty-six Sundays rather than all fifty-two Sundays of the year. This allows for teachers to teach a full year without getting burned out and provides built-in substitutes. In our other classroom settings, we have 2 to 6 teachers teaching at a time (depending on class sizes and ages of children). This also allows less experienced teachers to partner and learn from more experienced teachers, making hands-on teacher training a regular part of the classroom experience. It also creates the opportunity for teaching responsibilities within the classroom to rotate from week to week.

#6 We Train Our Teachers

Once a year, we hold training sessions for particular groups of teachers, such as preschool teachers, or elementary school teachers. We also have coordinators who oversee the large number of volunteer teachers who teach in the Praise Factory preschool and elementary school classes. A coordinator helps train new teachers for two, non-consecutive months a year (non-consecutive so that they do not get burned out, themselves!). They also help other teachers prepare and often team teach with them these months. The encouragement, advice and model-teaching of these coordinators often makes the difference in everyone's experience in the classroom. And, often makes the difference in whether a new teacher signs up for other teaching opportunity! Coordinators like these are simply invaluable!

#7 We Give Our Teachers Deacon Support

Each Sunday, our Deacon of Children's Ministry faithfully checks in with our Sunday School teachers and Praise Factory teachers (both preschool and elementary classes). He is on hand to find any needed supplies, extra volunteers or other help a teacher might need. He keeps an eye out for issues that would be important for the rest of the Children's Ministry team to know about, usually communicating these through a weekly e-mail. A deacon volunteers for three years. This long term commitment allows the deacon to gain quite a bit of institutional knowledge as well as becomes a familiar, reliable face to teachers and parents.

#8 We Limit Our Teachers

Out of spiritual care for the teachers, the elders have set limits on how much any one member can spend teaching the children.

First of all, any volunteer who works directly with children must have been in membership for 6 months. This is so they are well-fed, well-adjusted, and well-known before serving. Their spiritual health is a priority.

For approved, child-care volunteers who have been members at least six months:

Childcare teachers:	Volunteer 1 Sunday a month
Sunday School teachers:	Volunteer 1 year at a time, on a team of 4 to allow for substitutes
Worship Service teachers:	Volunteer for 2 nonconsecutive* months a year
Hall monitors:	Volunteer 1 Sunday a month
Children's Ministry Deacon:	Volunteer for 3 years

See more information about these positions and the limits in Appendix B.

#9 We Are Willing to Shut Down Programs or Change Age Limits on Them to Protect Our Teachers

Because we have only one Sunday morning service and one Sunday evening service, the elders are especially careful about how much time members spend away from regular preaching. If we have a consistent, month after month, lack of volunteers, our elders may suggest that we shut down a particular program or change the age limits (such as changing a program for K-4th graders to K-3rd graders, making less volunteers needed to teach the class) for a time.

They have decided that this action is best for the spiritual welfare of the teachers, who too many times are asked to miss yet another service just to keep a program going--to their own spiritual detriment. We want to support our parents, but not at the expense of over-taxing and under-feeding of the rest of the body. Our elders have developed an order of priority of programs, making child care for infants and toddlers during the two Sunday morning and evening services the top priority.

Lesson #25: Questions for You in Your Ministry Setting:

1. What programs does your church/ministry setting have for children?
2. How many teachers are required to teach each session?
3. How do you support your teachers? Mentoring? Modeling? Observing? Training? Teams of teachers? Deacon support? Limit the time they serve? other? What works best? What else would you like to do?
4. What are the typical problems your teachers run into in their classes? How could they be helped with those?
5. Do you have much teacher burn-out? How do you group your teachers to teach? Do you build in a way for them to have a break?
6. How do you get substitutes for your teachers? Do they find them or do you?
7. Do you frequently run short on the number of teachers you need?
8. Do you frequently depend upon a small group of teachers to teach over and over again without giving them a break?
9. Do you have teachers who are not getting an opportunity to be well-fed themselves?
10. If you were to shut down or limit a program/s to better serve your volunteers, which one/s would they be? Why? What programs are most crucial to serve the families in your ministry setting?