

SPEAKING TO LARGE GROUPS OF CHILDREN

If you've been asked to stand up in front of a group that is larger than your normal group or class, the following principles may help you to captivate and maintain their attention. (Of course, most of these principles apply to smaller groups as well!).

1. Seating

The physical arrangement of the children will affect their ability to focus and your ability to communicate. Chairs provide slightly more comfort but opens up the possibility of more noise as chairs scrape, chairs are rocked, etc. Sitting on chairs also spreads the children out further from you than if they are seated on the floor and so moves the children at the back 'further from the action'. Floor seating creates more of an 'intimate' setting. Allow only minimal space at the front for your props, etc so that the front row is close to you. An aisle down the centre of the group allows you to move closer to the back at times during the program.

2. Amplification

It is important that all children can hear. However, microphones can become an 'impersonal barrier' so use them when required, but enjoy the opportunity to be more 'friendly' when you are able. Radio microphones (without leads) allow for so much more flexibility. Be aware that a lot of 'in house' PA systems in schools, churches or public venues may not be brilliant quality. There's nothing worse than having your voice projected at a higher pitched tone, or with crackling background, etc. Borrowing a system that you've used before may be the better option

3. Setting

Know your setting and the limitations that may be upon you as a result. Voluntary settings such as a Sunday Schools, Kids Clubs or Christian camps allow more freedom in the way you present your message and in presenting invitations to respond. In the settings where there are mixed groups of children it is important to 'ground' your message e.g. Christians believe, the Bible shows us, etc. Invitations to respond are not appropriate in these settings.

4. Know how to start

From your very first words you need to captivate their attention. Be confident in your opening sentences. You may choose to begin with a song or use an object to illustrate a point, or begin with a story, etc. In most cases there is no need to tell children what is going to happen in the next 'x' minutes -just get into it!



5. Be personal

It is a good idea to let the children know a little bit about yourself -if you are a visitor. Include something like

– “I have 3 children. My eldest son is ‘x’ years of age. Hands up all the boys who are the same age. His name is Ryan. How many ‘Ryans’ are here today?”

6. Begin in the world of the child

Start where the children are at! If it is a Christmas story begin with presents, or Christmas trees or Santa, etc. This helps you to connect with the world of the child and lays a platform from which to move into the world of the Bible and so help to connect the ‘God story’ with the ‘Me story’ of each child. For Easter, bring along a giant Easter Egg -you’ll soon grab their attention. A talk about heaven begins with a ‘Heaven on a stick’ ice cream, and so on.

7. Be Visual

We live in a world where the visual senses are stimulated constantly. Plan your talk around the use of visual materials. This helps to keep the children with you and helps you to keep your talk on track and moving from point to point. Pictures, real objects, banners, etc.

8. Music

There are some great songs which break the ice and help to create an atmosphere of ‘it’s great to be here’. Choose well. Play the song on a CD player which will free you to be involved in leading some fun actions. Make sure any actions you use are ‘good’ actions - nothing too ‘sissy’ which will put the boys right off. Every child loves to sing “Rudolph the Red Nosed reindeer” and while there is no theological truth in the song it does help to set the theme for the day and help the kids to begin to relate to you. Bring along a couple of instruments and choose some volunteers to play e.g. a triangle (which you call a ‘3 cornered resonating cromoshape’) or a bicycle horn (which you call a ‘bagelhorn’). These can simply be played at the end of a line or whenever you point to them.

9. Fun

Because you are speaking with children there needs to be the fun element. Plan to include this through the songs you choose, the involvement of the audience, and through various parts of your talk. Try to have this ‘fun element’ lessen as the program progresses and as you move to the serious aspects of what you are saying.



10. Audience participation

Involving the audience stretches their attention span. There are lots of simple things which can be done while the children are seated in their places which will cause a minimum of disturbance e.g. actions to songs, teach the group to perform simple actions when certain words are mentioned in your story; devising some simple hand actions to reinforce some of the facts from the story; waving their hands in the air when you tell an incorrect fact in a story; etc. Choosing volunteers to come out and open a box, pull a banner, open an envelope, etc keeps the attention high as most children want to be that next volunteer.

11. One teaching point

Determine what is the teaching point which you want to communicate and use your games, introduction, song, prayer, story, etc to reinforce that from different perspectives.

12. Fast moving

If your program keeps changing from introduction to song to game to story with various components, and so on, you'll find the children stay with you. For this reason it is good to plan your talk around a number of incidents or parts, each of which may have a word card or a picture to be revealed. Volunteers can be used to uncover these in turn.

13. Power of story

There is nothing as captivating as a well told story. Using your whole body as a visual aid, plus other props, can help to communicate in a powerful way a message from God for the children.

14. Noise

Large numbers of children can make a lot of noise. Know and use your recognised signals for gaining attention – hand in the air, hands on head. Be careful in the manner in which you ask questions of the group. Discourage any calling out. Only ask those with raised hands. Usually moving on to the next part of your program is enough to regain attention. Try at all costs to avoid stopping the program to address the behavioural needs of a child. Before you begin, encourage the adults on hand to quieten any noise near them, where appropriate and possible.

15. Know how to finish

Just as important as the start – what are your closing words? How will you conclude the presentation? Don't let it drag on for too long.

