



## TIPS FOR MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR GROUP TIME

1. **RULE ONE: HAVE FUN!!!!** Remember, if you are having fun with the book and activity, so will your students.
2. **Establish greeting and closing routines.** Open every session with the same song, finger play, or other greeting. Children love the routine and consistency that serves as a signal that your activity is about to begin. (A list of songs and finger plays is available on the United Way website.)
3. **Acknowledge each child by name**, for example “Good morning Ashley how are you?” You may want to spend a few minutes talking to the children about their week. Some very important things have happened to them since they last saw you, and they want to share these things with that special person in their life: **YOU**.
4. **A quick review of group rules can help** to set the tone for the rest of the session.

**For Pre-K, most classes are using the “I Care Cat” rules.** Ask the children to repeat the following rules with you:

We listen to each other (point to ear)  
Hands are for helping, not hurting (show hands)  
We care about each other’s feelings.  
We are responsible for what we say and do.

If you use hand gestures with the rules, you can often re-direct a misbehavior simply by using the hand signal with the off task child.

**For Kindergarten children, consider using “safe” language:**

“It is my job to keep you safe. It’s your job to help me. We keep ourselves, our feelings, and our things safe.”

If a child is interrupting, simply remind the child, “It hurts Sasha’s feelings when you interrupt. Please keep Sasha’s feelings safe by listening when it’s her turn to talk.”

If a child is tipping the chair, remind the child to “Please keep yourself safe. The chair needs to stay on the floor.”

5. **Call attention to how you are following the rules.** When you are listening, let the children know. “See, I am listening to Josef. That’s our rule. We listen to each other.” By offering a continual model, you are showing the child what the rule looks like in action.
6. **Remember to stay calm.** Use a quiet, calm voice even if you feel the chaos rising! Children tend to get quieter as you become quieter. Whispering can sometimes get the group’s attention.

7. **Verbally acknowledge specific, positive behaviors.** A good rule of thumb is to use 10 positive comments to every 1 negative. Use the child's name and make eye contact as you offer praise.
8. **Ignore negative behaviors when it's safe to do so.** Instead, give positive feedback to an opposite, appropriate behavior. If Tanya is listening and Jon is not, praise Tanya for being a good listener while ignoring Jon's inappropriate behavior. If good behavior is ignored and negative behavior gets attention, you will see an increase in negative behaviors. The opposite is also true.
9. **Praise success in steps.** The very busy interrupter needs praise for even beginning to listen.
10. **Avoid taking away praise with a negative comment,** such as "You listened so well today. Why can't you do that every time?" Research shows that we tend to hear the negative and forget the positive.
11. **Look to the environment as a possible solution** to disruptive behaviors. If you know two children constantly pick on each other, help another child to sit between them. Be sure children are facing the book and not other distractions. If children seem particularly wiggly, stop reading and do a stretching or other seated movement activity. Use finger plays to regain attention.

(Open and shut fingers while saying :)

Open shut them,  
Open shut them,  
Give a quiet clap.  
Open shut them,  
Open shut them,  
Put them in your lap.

Children will join in as you say the words and will imitate you when you open and shut your hands. When you finish and the children are quiet, remind them of the rules or simply move on with the story or activity.
12. **You do not have to read every page of every book** nor read the entire book if the children seem particularly restless or bored. Feel free to intersperse reading with drawing and writing activities if the children seem restless. As time progresses, attention spans will grow!
13. **Encourage children to resolve their own conflicts.** For example, if Tomi and Javon and squabbling, remind the children to "use their words" and ask them what they can do to resolve the issue. Remind them to make good choices and that it's their job to keep each other's bodies and feelings safe.
14. **If behavior does not improve after a few redirections, give the child a choice.** Instead of "You must leave the group" try, "You have a choice. You may stay with the ReadingPals and follow our rules or you may go back to your class. What would you like to choose?" If behavior does not improve, you may want to say "Your behavior shows me that you chose to leave the group. I will see you next week." Let the teacher know that the child is returning to the class activities. Remember, if a child leaves the group for the day, he/she is welcomed back to the next session without mention of the previous incident. Never threaten a child with expulsion from ReadingPals: Children are always given a chance to try again next time!

15. Finally, always remember **RULE ONE: HAVE FUN!!!!**