

Getting Started Hints for Your First Day

Beginnings are always important. Here are some tips to help you make your first day of the catechetical year a good experience.

Room in a Box

If you are in shared space and without regular access to your room, a "Room in a Box" can be most beneficial. Use a plastic container to store all the supplies and materials needed to set up your room and prayer space. Have extra writing paper, construction paper, scissors, pencils, pens, and markers for new arrivals each week. Include facial tissues, wipe ups, spray cleaner, and paper towels for messy projects and even messier kids. Ask permission for storage someplace convenient within the building. Be respectful of the other teacher's seating chart, desk configuration, and items on the blackboard.

Mark Your Calendars

Keep a yearly calendar and a liturgical calendar handy. Review key dates for which you'd like to do something special. For example, plan a food drive at Thanksgiving. Schedule projects well in advance and get approval from your DRE.

Who's There?

Learn as much as you can before the first session about the children who will be in your room. Do you have any children with special needs, allergies, or unusual family arrangements to which you will want to be sensitive? Your DRE has all this information if it has not already been made available to you.

Gratitude List

A great way to start each session is to have the children list one thing in their life for which they are grateful. Accept offbeat or silly responses without comment, because over time your modeling and the leadership of other children will set a positive, prayerful tone.

Be Good Stewards

On the first day explain to the group the rules of how to treat one another, how to relate to you, and how to care for the space. Take a moment to explain in general how each session will flow and what will be expected of them, for example, participation during a session, or helping set up the prayer space.

Developing Rules with the Group

The purpose of having clear rules is to help everyone feel safe and free to use the time together well. Involving the children in developing the rules can be a great lesson in itself. One method is to use the "Think-Pair-Share" technique. **Think**—each child thinks of no more than three things that they would need to feel safe and comfortable in the group. **Pair**—each child then shares with a partner. One partner reads all of his or her ideas first, then the next partner reads his or her ideas. After listening to each other, they can add new ideas to their lists. **Share**—Each set of partners shares their ideas with the rest of the group. (It would be a good idea to have a scribe or scribes writing the ideas down on the board, a flip chart, an overhead, or large poster board.) From these ideas the group can hone the list to what everyone agrees upon—ideally no more than six rules. You might find it useful to have these rules written, in some manner, where they can be signed by all and seen in each session.

Map It Out

Get a sense of the geography of your group. Ask children their names, where they live, what schools they attend, and something about themselves. The children may not know each other, and this is a great way of making new friends in the neighborhood.