



New Ways to Direct a Preschool

By Melodee Simmons, Preschool Representative

“How is your preschool doing?” This is a question I hear often.

A Year of Changes

It has been a long year. If you are like us, it has been a year of change, sometimes daily. Enrollment numbers change, staffing needs change, and finances change. We received notices about changing requirements on ratios, health checks, and who can enter the building. When our state began to require us to wear a mask, we had a police officer come to the center and question me about our adherence to wearing a mask.

So many things happened that we would not have imagined before COVID-19. I am grateful to say we did not have to close even though many centers did close and have not reopened yet.

For a while, we were on what I consider survival mode. Stay open, keep as many teachers getting as many hours as possible, care for the children, and reassure parents that we were doing all we could to care for their child.

Time to Re-evaluate

When the enrollment went up and we were not getting daily notices of changes we needed to make, we decided it was time to reevaluate our activities and plan some fun things. We had so many yearly activities already planned, but most of them had to be modified. It was not permissible now for families to come to parties or help in classes, but we decided we could still have fun.

Generally, parties are for individual classes, and teachers can plan games and activities for their respective classes. Parents wanted the photographer to take pictures of the children. We usually do photos three times a year. After talking to the photographer, I was able to arrange for photography sessions. The photographer would not be within six feet of the children; our teachers would help to pose the children, and it would be done with prepaid packages. Normally, the photographer would come to the preschool and personally sell the photos to the parents.

We usually have volunteer readers who come and read to classes. We are trying to do that virtually, and parents like the idea. Our pre-K graduation is usually a big event with a dinner, performances from the children, and the presentation of awards and diplomas. Last year, we made a quick change to individual child graduations with their family. It was nice, but this year we are planning to do it better. We will still do individual graduation ceremonies with parents signing up for their time. The teacher will videotape the class performing a couple of songs, which will be shown to the parents. We will make a wall display of pictures of the children as babies and now. With parental permission, we will put each ceremony on Facebook for all their family to see. We will hold the graduation in our decorated foyer. This will be for their immediate family only. We are currently making plans on what we will do for the Week of the Young Child.

We make use of Facebook and our electronic communication with parents to keep the parents involved and informed as much as possible. We are getting good at thinking "outside of the box" and looking for new ways to do things. It is better to make a few changes than to say, "We can't do that anymore!"

Think Positive Thoughts

We do not know if our world will ever get back to where we were, but we are determined to work with what we can do. Look at where you are, see where you want to go, and find a way to do it. We still need to offer the children all the experiences we can but in a safe environment.

Melodee Simmons lives in Houston, Texas. She has worked in private and corporate-owned centers, in Christian and secular preschools. Currently, she is the preschool director of Giraffe Kids Learning Center and Development Academy. She has received a national director credential. She attends the Living Word Church of the Nazarene. You may contact Melodee at melodee.simmons@yahoo.com.