



Gospel Light's baby beginnings[®]

teacher's guide

18 to 36 months

- Teacher's Home Pages for Easy At-Home Preparation
- 12 Monthly Bible Themes
- Two Years of Parent Newsletters



GUIDE TODDLERS' FIRST STEPS TOWARD KNOWING AND LOVING JESUS.



INCLUDES TRAINING
CD WITH REPRODUCIBLE
RESOURCES



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Gospel Light

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How to Use the Baby Beginnings Curriculum

If You Are the Children's Pastor or Nursery Coordinator

- Prior to the start of each month, send home the appropriate month's overview (first two pages of each month's section) to each caregiver in the nursery.
- If you have a regular, consistent staff for the month, include the activity pages for the month as well and encourage your staff to plan together which activities they will prepare and provide each week of the month. (For example, one person would be prepared to lead a God's Wonders activity each week while another person would be prepared to lead an Active Play activity each week.)
- If you have a rotating staff, select several of the activities yourself. Collect any needed supplies and place them in the appropriate rooms along with the page of instructions (highlight or mark the activity). Alert the staff to look for these items when they arrive to serve.

If You Are the Toddler/2s Classroom Coordinator or Teacher

- Each teacher in the classroom needs a copy of the monthly overview and activities. (Print out copies from the CD-ROM that comes with the *Baby Beginnings Teacher's Guide—18 to 36 Months*.)
- Teachers plan together which activities they will prepare and provide each week of the month. (For example, one person would be prepared to lead a God's Wonders activity each week while another person would be prepared to lead an Active Play activity each week.)

Note: Consider creating for each room a box for each month that contains the supplies for the month's learning activities as described in the *Baby Beginnings Teacher's Guides*. At the beginning of the month, the box is placed in the appropriate rooms for use by teachers.

For Parents

- Distribute a copy of the reproducible *I Love to Sing!* CD to each family.
- At the beginning of each month, send home (or ask your children's pastor to send home) both the appropriate month's *I Love to Look!* Bible Story Picture Card and *Parent's Home Page*. *Parent's Home Pages* are available on the CD-ROM that comes with this book, as well as in *Nursery Smart Pages*. Purchase one set of *I Love to Look!* Bible Story Pictures for each family.

Teaching Toddlers

Somewhere between infancy and the preschool years, is the wonderful world of the toddler. God has made each child unique, and it is important to get to know each one, and their families, personally. Teachers should develop good communication with each family and learn about each child's strengths, challenges and needs. However, there are some characteristics that describe most typically developing toddlers. Taking these characteristics into account will make your teaching much more effective.

- Toddlers are active. They love to move and explore. They learn about the world by using all of their senses, by manipulating objects and by imitating the actions of others. Learning activities should involve things to look at, listen to, touch, smell and do.
- Toddlers live in the here and now. Make the most of "teachable moments" by connecting the curriculum learning aims to what a child is doing at the moment. Such guided conversations can help toddlers begin to understand spiritual concepts. For example, when a child offers a toy or comfort to another child, a teacher can say, "That was a very loving thing to do. Jesus wants us to love each other."
- Toddlers need close supervision. Their drive to explore may lead them to wander, climb, or do things they are not ready for. Some may still be putting fingers and objects in their mouths. It is important that everything in the toddler's environment is safe, too large to choke on and non-toxic.
- Toddlers want autonomy! They often use the word "no," even when they mean "yes." They may cry when their will is thwarted. Good teachers understand these feelings, while still setting and enforcing limits.
- Toddlers have difficulty waiting. It is important to have things ready for snack or other activities in order to minimize

waiting. It is helpful to have more than one of a favored toy available.

- Toddlers' vocabularies are limited, but expanding rapidly. They understand more than they can articulate. A rich language environment is important, including adults who speak often and respectfully with them, and who listen and respond to what they say. Reading short, illustrated stories to toddlers will help expand their vocabularies.
- Toddlers have a short attention span. They will stay with an activity as long as they are interested. It is best to let them move to another activity when they are ready. When doing a group activity such as singing or moving to music, it is important to let toddlers join and leave the group as they choose. Stories work best when read to one or two toddlers at a time.
- Toddlers' concepts of God, Jesus, church, the Bible and prayer are very formative. They need adults who will demonstrate God's love and then connect that love to the name of Jesus. The concepts and stories in this curriculum have been chosen because they can be tied to children's own experiences. For example, when they see things that God has made and are told that God made them, toddlers' concepts of God begin to take shape.
- Toddlers have a short memory. Just because you said something once, do not expect toddlers to remember it later. Repetition of learning concepts, and classroom rules, is important.

Let the example of Jesus be your guide in relating to toddlers. The Bible tells us that He welcomed them even though He was very busy. He took them in His arms and blessed them. You can demonstrate the love of Jesus for His precious children with your loving words, your smile, and your touch.

Loving and Guiding Toddlers

The heart of good teaching is relationships. It is important for teachers to form a relationship with each child in their class as well as with the child's family. Children respond more readily to guidance from those they love, and families are more open to input about their children if they know the teacher knows, understands and loves their children.

To build strong relationships with children and families, you can:

- **Pray** regularly for each child and family.
- **Give** parents a form to fill out requesting information about the child and family (see registration forms in *Nursery Smart Pages*).
- **Greet** each child and parent by name when they enter the classroom.
- **Express** your joy that they have come.
- **Ask** how their weekend is going to get an idea of how the child might be feeling.
- **Remember** the names of siblings and others important to the child and make reference to them.
- **Join** a child in a favorite activity.
- **Notice** and comment on pro-social behaviors. ("Thank you for sharing the play dough. That was kind.")
- **Assist** children when you sense they need help.
- **Comfort** children who are distressed.
- **Give** appropriate physical affection as you sense a child wants or needs it.
- **Follow** the child's lead in warming up to the classroom environment.
- **Tell** parents how the child's time in the classroom was spent, giving details that show you know their child. Be sure to tell parents about any event that might be upsetting to a child (getting hurt or frightened).

- **Call** or send notes to families when their children are absent.

Creating an age-appropriate environment will prevent many behavior problems from happening. To do this, you can:

- Make sure all toys, furniture and equipment are safe and child-sized.
- Store things that children should not touch out of their reach.
- Provide duplicates of popular toys.
- Carefully supervise all children at all times.
- Have enough adults available to respond quickly to children's needs.
- Avoid making children wait longer than necessary.
- Keep a consistent routine (the same activities in the same order), but be flexible with the time taken for each.
- Help children with transitions from one activity to another by giving them some warning and helping them do what you are asking (clean up toys, throw away trash, etc.).



To guide children's behavior in a way that is helpful, teachers must have realistic expectations of toddler behavior. These include:

- High levels of activity. Toddlers need space to move both indoors and out.
- Short attention spans. Toddlers need the freedom to change activities frequently on their own schedule.

Loving and Guiding Toddlers

- Short memory. Toddlers need frequent reminders of what is expected of them.
- Low tolerance for frustration. Toddlers may cry or lash out when they cannot have what they want.
- Self-centeredness. Toddlers have difficulty understanding the feelings and needs of others.
- Resistance to limits. Toddlers resist, but need, limits on their behavior.
- Limited ability to express themselves through language. Vocabulary is developing rapidly, but many children express themselves physically, especially when they are upset.
- Accidents and mistakes. Toddlers may spill their juice, wet themselves or break things.
- Expression of empathy. ("I know you want the toy, but Maria is having a turn.")
- Demonstration of appropriate behavior. ("We don't throw sand. Put it in the bucket like this.")
- Redirection to another activity. ("Jason is using the red truck. Let's see if we can find one for you.")
- Removal from a situation when inappropriate behavior persists. (A child who persists in throwing sand after reminding and demonstration should be removed from the sand area and encouraged to find another activity.)

If there is a child whose behavior consistently exceeds limits or harms others, ask teachers to observe the child and be ready to prevent or stop inappropriate behavior and to demonstrate appropriate behavior.

If the interventions above are not sufficient, the child's parents should be consulted.

Appropriate guidelines for toddlers include:

- Children should use gentle touches and kind words. They should not be allowed to hurt others with their bodies or their words. ("We say kind words." "I can't let you hurt our friends at church.")
- Children should use toys and materials appropriately. ("We need to roll the ball.")
- Children should be seated while eating and drinking. ("Here is the place for you to sit while you eat.")
- Children should walk when running might be dangerous. ("We need to walk when we're inside.")
- Children should obey their teachers' instructions. ("I need you to listen and do what I say. Thank you.")

Helpful teacher interventions when toddlers exceed limits include:

- Staying close enough to intervene when a child uses aggressive behaviors.
- Frequent reminders of what is expected. ("Touch your friend gently.")

Teachers should never:

- Use any type of physical punishment, including a slap on the hand.
- Shake a child.
- Raise their voices in anger.
- Deny food or beverage as a punishment.
- Deny physical activity as a punishment.
- Restrain a child, except for safety reasons.
- Use "time out" as a punishment. Children may need to be removed from an area until they calm down. The purpose should be to help the child.



Loving and Guiding Toddlers

- Use God as a way to control children's behavior (by saying things such as, "God doesn't like it when you do that").

Speaking with parents about their child's behavior will be easier if you have already built a good relationship with the family. However, you should not be surprised if parents respond defensively. Parents believe that their child's behavior reflects on their parenting abilities. The following ideas can make talking to parents go more smoothly:

- Pray for guidance before speaking to the parents.
- Consult a more experienced teacher or children's ministry staff person.
- Talk to parents in private, not when others are around to hear.
- Tell parents positive things about their child.
- Tell parents you have observed some behaviors that concern you.
- State the nature and frequency of the behaviors.
- Avoid using any labels ("hyper"), suggesting a diagnosis (ADHD), or making a value judgment ("aggressive").
- Ask parents if they have noticed the same behaviors at home. If they have, ask them how they handle it.

- Incorporate parents' suggestions, if appropriate.
- Invite the parents to observe in the classroom.
- Provide parenting classes for all families.

Special circumstances: Toddler behavior may be outside the norm in circumstances of family stress, such as divorce, moving, the birth of a new sibling or any other significant change in the family's life. Behavior should improve with time and loving support. Toddlers with identified developmental delays, allergies or other special needs may require extra support or alternate strategies to be successful in your classroom. This should be discussed with the parents, and teachers may need specialized training.

Remember that God made each child unique, with a unique temperament, personality and timetable of development. We have only a few glimpses in the Bible of Jesus' interactions with children. It is clear that children were important to Him. He made time for them while adults waited, He rebuked those who tried to keep them away, He took them in His arms and blessed them. The most important thing we can do for the toddlers in our care is bless them with our words and actions as Jesus would. They can begin to know the love of Jesus through our love. Love must be at the heart of our relationships with toddlers.



Why Use Curriculum?

"These kids simply need to be fed, changed and played with . . . what can they possibly learn about God? Why would we need curriculum for them?"

First of all, our goal in using curriculum is not to get a child to spout theological concepts! Instead, our goal is to individually (one-on-one) teach each child through natural learning processes what he or she can begin to learn about God. Curriculum is designed to help you, the teacher, use the time you spend at church with little ones to build spiritual foundations.

Secondly, using curriculum also benefits you, the teacher, as much as the child. Singing and talking about Jesus is a powerful reminder that what you are doing is not just custodial care, but ministry in its truest sense. The same is true for parents. Just as young children need to hear about Jesus, their parents need to begin talking comfortably about Him with their child. The model the church provides of how we care for and "teach" children is intended to help parents catch on to the fact that they can and should do the same things at home.

Curriculum provides you with ideas and words that help make your natural teaching effective. Since the best kind of teaching for toddlers is primarily one-on-one, don't expect that these young children will sit in a circle or have a group time, or even remain interested in what you are doing for very long. But as you sit on the floor talking and playing with two or three children, make frequent use of the conversation ideas and songs suggested in your curriculum. Look for teachable moments—times when you can talk about the child's actions and connect them to the monthly theme. "Jocelyn, you used your hands to roll the red ball. God made your hands."

In every session, plan to provide several of the learning activities. Play portions of the CD, repeating the same songs frequently. The sounds, words, actions and most of all, the feelings that are created in this casual setting will flow into a natural pattern of teaching and learning that will eventually build a young child's understanding of God, Jesus and the loving comfort found in the people around him or her at church. And using a curriculum with monthly themes helps provide continuity to the activities in the nursery, especially when teachers change frequently.

In a large classroom where there are many children and adults in the same room, designate certain learning activities for each adult to provide for children throughout the session. For example, one teacher may position him- or herself on the floor with large cardboard blocks, building and talking about them with interested children. Another adult may sit near an open area of the room with a container of rhythm instruments, playing them and singing songs with children in that area of the room. However, as the session progresses, adults need to be ready to move to "where the action is." Flexibility is key.

A child's learning takes place all the time, as a natural part of living. So the teaching in your classroom is accomplished by your every look, word and act while you are in the presence of children. Your teaching is ministry just as surely as teaching a theology class for adults would be. This curriculum helps you to focus your playing, talking, caregiving, singing and finger plays in ways that familiarize a child with God's name and His love. Awareness of God's love for each child takes your time in the nursery far beyond the level of just singing "Itsy-Bitsy Spider" again!