

(Eight) Tips for Working with Children

A general/overall rule we follow at Nurture: Get everyone actively engaged! Sitting and listening to talking heads is boring! Also:

1. Get to know your students/audience
 - a. Learn everyone's name and something special about them. Kids are much more cooperative when they feel like you've taken a personal interest in them.
 - b. Remember Your Audience

We do our best work when we know who we're doing it for. So who are our program participants? For the Northfield Township Food Pantry, program participants qualify for food stamps and free school lunches for their children. They are likely to be a single parent out of work or perhaps working two jobs. They often have health issues such as hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. Usually they have a lot of responsibility and very little support which is why our job is so important. Our participants' degree of cooking skills will vary greatly, so listening to them and asking questions about how they cook, who they cook for and what they like to eat will provide further insight into who they are and what their food challenges might be.
2. Set expectations
 - a. During the first class, set high expectations. Children are use to being in a structured classroom, and while Nurture is not quite like school, some of the same rules apply. Start off by emphasizing one rule:
 - i. Respect
 1. Respect each other
 - a. Do not talk over one another
 - b. No put downs
 - c. Keep your hands to yourself
 2. Respect the equipment/space
 - a. Use caution with all kitchen equipment
 - b. Clean up after yourself
 3. Respect yourself

- b. Establish a procedure for how you will handle difficult behavior- and stick to it! Consistency is key.
 - i. If a child is engaging in disrespectful behavior, address the child privately. Do not embarrass him/her by publicly reprimanding.
 - ii. Publicly praise the child that is following directions; it will help get everyone on track.
3. Give clear and precise directions
 - a. Keep directions short and concise
 - b. Break directions down and have a pause every two to three steps.

For example:
-“Please wash your hands, put on your aprons, and take a seat so I know you're ready. Once everyone is seated, I will explain what we're going to do next.”
4. While your directions should be stated in simple vocabulary, you do not need to talk in a ‘baby’ voice, or in a condescending manner. Children are able to see thru this tactic and do not appreciate being spoken down to.
5. Allow children to be creative. They will probably do things differently when in the kitchen. As long as they are being safe, allow them freedom to modify with judiciousness. Having said that, they should still follow the recipe. You don't want them preparing foods that are inedible.
6. Avoid the negative. Think of the lifeguard at the pool who screams “don't run!” Rather than telling kids what not to do, ask them what you would like them to do, “can you walk, please?”
 - a. If a child is not being compliant with your request, simply state an explanation. I'm asking you to walk so you don't fall and hurt yourself. If you get hurt, you won't be able to enjoy this gorgeous day at the pool.
 - b. A simple framework:
 - i. Ask to engage in a positive behavior
 - ii. If not complying, explain why his/her chosen behavior needs modification
 - iii. Follow up with a potential consequence if the behavior continues

7. Master the compliment. Many adults praise by saying “good job” or “that’s great”. Try to be more specific when complimenting and always follow up with a question. Examples:
 - a. I really enjoyed the dip you made; how did you make it?
 - b. I love how you set the table, can you show me how you folded the napkins!

Children love to show and tell. When you combine a compliment with an action, you are reinforcing their special skill set and effectively improving self esteem.

8. Listen! There are going to be activities that don’t go over so well. It’s okay! Listen to what the kids have kids to say; their feedback is what makes our program stronger!