

Preschool Gymnastics

Teaching Techniques: Before, During, and After Class

Carol Robuck, Level I KAT
The Gymnastics Bus

Every club has that group of overly excited children that make many preschool teachers frustrated. Here are a few techniques that help keep the class on track and provide a positive learning experience.

Before Class

Leader/Greeter

This team teaching method works great with two or more teachers. The Leader/Greeter welcomes the children as they come in the door. They direct them to their carpet square or hands them their warm-up prop. After the warm-up activity, the Leader/Greeter immediately starts the stretches. It is their job to keep the warm-ups going. They also compliment the children on the good job they're doing, while keeping the focus on the good listeners. Also, their job is to keep the class moving.

Helper

The Helper directs any stray children to their carpet squares. If a child is having a problem, the Helper goes directly to that child and talks to them one on one. The Helper never yells across a class to correct a child unless he or she is in danger. The Helper compliments the children who are doing the exercises correctly and helps correct those who need help. They also take care of any other problems such as roll call, bathroom, tying shoes, etc. Their job is to help keep the children focused on their warm-up.

Many times one person is in charge of the group. Here are some helpful hints to keep their attention. Make sure everything is taken care of before class starts. Keep them busy and moving. If you need to make corrections say: "Can you _____?" or "Let's try _____."

If someone is not listening, point out the children that are doing a good job. Some children try negative behavior to get attention, so keep the focus positive.

During Class

Directing the children in a positive manner works better than reacting to a situation. Tell the children what you want them to do, not what they are doing wrong. If you tell a child what he or she is doing wrong that does not mean that he or she will do the right thing. This takes practice but has rewarding results.

For example:

Instead of – "Johnny, don't throw the balls in the pit," try –"Johnny, let's put the balls in the box."

Finger plays are a great way to keep their attention while they are in line or if the teacher has to make a quick set up.

Always be aware of your tone of voice. It's not always what you say, but how you say it. If a group gets used to being talked to in sharp loud tones, then it can be difficult to get them to respond at first. A short finger play or the use of props are great tools to get the class back on track.

A mimicking game where the teacher simply starts making moves and doesn't say a word until all the children are following is fun. The child that responds first can be the leader on the next activity.

Many times the teacher can walk over to the child that is unruly and stand by him or her and place their hand on his or her shoulder. Many times, this will be enough. If you need to talk to the child, talk one-on-one in low tones. Give them choices and explain the consequences. Let the child make the choice. Hopefully it will be the right one. If the student continues with the undesired behavior, then follow through with the consequences. Be sure the boundaries that you set are reasonable and realistic to begin with.

If discipline is required, explain that you are very sorry that they made that choice. Follow through. It is very important the child understands that it is the behavior that is the problem and not them. The teacher needs to let the child know he or she still likes them, and is anxious to work with him or her as soon as he or she is willing to listen. Never threaten! Think what could happen if the child didn't cooperate.

If there is a conflict between two children, give them a solution and let them work it out.

For example:

The child says, "Johnny is hitting me."

The teacher says, "You need to tell him you don't like that. Johnny, you need to listen. Remember, we need to use our words not our fists" or, "Let's make a space between you and the other children in line."

Circuits

Set-up circuits that are:

1. **Safety conscious.** Check equipment height (keep it low), landing areas, the equipment itself, and make sure the circuit does not have built in danger zones. For example, a tunnel right before a handstand roll so the students get kicked in the face as they come out of the tunnel.
2. **Will keep an even flow of traffic.** If the children are piling up at a station change it.
3. **Have few stations that require spotting.** The teacher can only be one place at a time, however, the teacher needs to be able to direct traffic at more than one station.
4. **Are not too spread out.** The teacher needs to be able to talk to the children not to shout

to them.

5. In an order that blends together. For example, front roll, cartwheel, backroll... NOT... cartwheel, front roll, backroll.

Remember you can always add skills before or after an element to make corrections.

For example, add a tuck jump after a front roll if they are not standing up, or add a few jumps before a dive roll to get the desired results.

6. Appropriate for the age group. If the activities are too long or too difficult or too easy the children will lose interest. A good teacher can tell when they have lost the group and will change the activities.

Ending Class

It is important to end on a positive note. This can be done by having a group activity (you can use props, sing a song, dance to your carpet square, etc.).

There are many fun ending activities. The activity does not have to be long. Their purpose is to finish the class on a fun note with happy children that are anxious to return next week for more gymnastics fun!

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