

Lead on ... Session Two Encouragement

Aim: To think about how everyone can be an encourager, no matter what our age.

Preparation: prepared booklet (see conclusion); puppets

Warm Up Activity: Seat children in a circle. (With group maximum of about eight – split into two groups if there are more). Give each one a pencil or pen. Explain that today we are going to think about how we can all encourage others. Give each child a long narrow strip of paper, (about 15 by 60 cm). Ask each child to write his/her name along the very bottom of the width (short edge!) of the paper. Then instruct children to pass paper to the child sitting on their right. Each child then is asked to write a few words (in small writing as strip of paper must have space for every child to write on) - saying something you like about the child whose name is at the bottom. (Make them aware that we are not only talking about what people look like but more importantly we also want to think about things like, being kind, generous, brave, thoughtful, etc) Then instruct children to carefully fold over a small piece of the paper so that what they wrote is hidden and to pass the paper onto the next person. The process continues – with each child writing a kind comment about the child whose name is at the bottom of the paper – until the paper has circulated back to the original person. When children have their own pieces of paper back in their hands, they are asked to open it and read what the others have said about them. Give children a couple of minutes to savour the comments and then ask them how they feel when they read good things about themselves. Explain that today the group will be discussing how important encouragement is and that we all need it.

(With pre-readers create and present a puppet show for them with two characters talking about the children in this group – making sure that each child is mentioned by name – affirming some positive attribute about them. Do take time to think this out carefully beforehand so that you can make a clear, positive and sincere comment on each child – to leave any child out would defeat the purpose of the activity; as at least one child would feel very discouraged if they weren't noticed!)

Sing 'Thank you Lord for this fine day.' Encouraging children to create new verses of things we can say thank you to God for.
Mention that we all like it when people notice what we do and say thank you. God likes us to say thank you too!

Looking at the Bible: Explain that today we are going to look at the importance of encouraging one another. *(Ensure that children understand what 'encourage' means!)*

Tell story of Barnabas, the encourager. (See blue box on p.13 –14 of 'Lead on...' notes. *The younger the children the simpler and less detailed the story needs to be.*

Discussion: Have written in large words: 'Let us encourage one another.' Hebrews 10:25.

Read these words together and discuss why they think the Bible tells us this.
Ask children how they feel when somebody says something kind to them that makes them feel encouraged. If the sense of joy/ warmth in our hearts is not mentioned by children, use words to describe this yourself. Then explain that the word 'encourage' comes from the French language; that 'coeur' is the French word for 'heart'. So when we encourage people we 'give them heart'.
Ask children why they think encouragement is important.

Activity: Ask children to break into small groups of about three and to create their own short skit giving examples of 'how not to encourage' / 'how to encourage'. (Creating the same situation each time but with different endings.) Use these to discuss how the characters felt. (Help children to realize that both the encourager and the encouraged person feel better when we look for the good in a situation. (As a leader ensure that you set the example by encouraging them in their attempts!)

(If children are shy – try letting them use puppets to create their story!)

Conclusion:

Discuss ways in which we can encourage people we know. E.g. giving them a smile, saying thank you, telling them how we feel when they do something kind, sending a card, an e-mail or phoning them to say we are thinking of them. Help children to recognise that we are never too young to be encouragers!

Provide each child with a sheet of paper or small booklet with each day of the week written upon it. Ask them to draw in a smiley face for each time when they remembered to give encouragement this week and to bring these back next week.

Ask each child to bring a matchbox with as many different things in it as they can fit in!