

25 Ways to Obtain Children's Attention in a School Setting

By Leah Davies, M.Ed.

There are countless times when educators need their students' undivided attention. The following methods are best taught during the first weeks of school. These ideas can assist teachers in providing an ordered and safe learning environment for everyone.

1. Hold up your hand and say, "Give Me Five." The children put their hands in the air and shout "five!" As they count down to one, they get progressively quieter until "one" is said in a whisper. Or, after saying, "Give me five," everyone puts their hand in the air and counts loudly using their fingers from 1 to 5.

2. Teach the children that the five fingers on their right hand stand for the five things they must do when you hold up your hand. Say, "Give me five," and wait until all the children hold up their hand. Then lead them in saying the five things together.

(1) Eyes -- look

(2) Ears -- listen

(3) Mouth -- closed

(4) Hands -- still

(5) Feet -- quiet

Later when you say, "Give me five," the children are to think of these five things and hold up their hand to show they are ready to listen.

3. Clap or tap in a pattern, for example, clap slowly twice and then clap fast three times. The students are to stop what they are doing and repeat the pattern. If necessary, do it again until all children have responded and are quiet. You may want to vary the pattern.

4. Shake a shaker, touch a wind chime, ring a bell, play quiet music or use any kind of sound maker as a signal for students to be attentive.

5. Raise your hand and stand still until the students are quiet. Or, raise your right hand and put the index finger of your left hand on your lips. The children are to do the same. Another idea is to hold up three fingers which is a silent signal for "Stop, look, listen." Then wait until all the children have their three fingers up and are quiet.

6. Say, in a normal tone of voice, "Clap once if you can hear me." Those listening will quiet down and clap one time. Then say, "Clap twice if you can hear me." More children respond with two claps. Finally say, "Clap three times if you can hear

me." By this time you should have the attention of your students.

7. When you say, "Voices," teach the children to respond with a quiet, "Shhh..." Use it if the children are too loud. If you want their attention, say, "Voices" again and they respond with a quieter, "Shhh..." Say it a third time very quietly, "Voices." All students should be quiet and ready to listen.

8. Tell your students that they will be playing, "The Still Waters Game" often, and that they will know the game has begun when you say, "1, 2, 3, 3, 2, 1 still waters has begun." Ask them to freeze like an ice cube and remain silent when they hear that sentence. Time the children to see how long they can remain still. The goal is to beat their best time. Hold your fist in the air and each time you see someone move or talk, put a finger up. Once you have all five fingers up, check your watch and tell the class how long they were able to remain still.

9. Practice having the children stop, look at the teacher and listen when the lights are flicked off and on.

10. Teach the difference between being silly and serious. Tell them that there is room for both of these behaviors. Then practice by saying, "Act silly!" Let them be silly. Then say, "Now, act serious." Model this often at the beginning of the year so when you say, "I need to have serious behavior," they respond accordingly and are attentive.

11. Use a count down or count up system. Say, "You have until five to be ready for..... 1, 2, 3, 4, 5." Start a count down at whatever number you think the students need to be ready. For example, start with 5, 10 or 15 depending on the activity to be put away.

12. Say, "Boys and Girls..." and then write numbers as a countdown on the board from 5-4-3-2-1. The idea is that there is a consequence if you reach one before receiving everyone's attention. For example, a child talking may have to move or lose some free time, or use some other outcome for the whole class. Another idea is to hold up your hand and count silently to five on your fingers as you look at a watch. Teach the students if they do not become quiet by the count of five, their recess time will be cut by the amount of time it takes them to become quiet.

13. Use an old fashioned desk bell that you can tap. One tap means the class is getting too loud. Two taps mean that they need to stop what they are doing and listen.

14. Use a target word for a day or week. Have the students pick one that is related to what they are studying. For example, pioneer, Ohio, or fossils. When you say the word, the children stop, look and wait for directions. Or, the children could respond with a definition or short response to the target word; for example, if you said, "Ohio," the students would respond, "The buckeye state." Other call backs could include

"spaghetti" -- "meatballs," or "Abraham" -- "Lincoln." Let the students suggest new words to be used.

15. Use a piece of poster board to make a noise level monitor. On the left side label it 1, 2, 3, and on the right side, list the type of noise acceptable for each. For example:

1 - No talking

2 - Whispering

3 - Normal talking

Use a large clip to indicate the acceptable noise level at any given time.

16. Say "1, 2, 3, eyes on me" and the children say back, "1, 2, 3, eyes on you," with their faces turned toward you and looking at your eyes. Or, say "1, 2, 3, Look at me" in a sing song voice. Another teacher-child response idea is for the teacher to say, "Hey, oh," and the children reply "Oh, hey." Or, the teacher says, "Freeze, please." And after giving instructions, the children say, "Melt."

17. Use, "Teacher Says," like "Simon Says." For example, "Teacher says, touch your nose," "Clap once," or "Teacher says, look at me."

18. Say in a robotic voice, "Miss Moore to Class - Come in class" and smile! This method can be used with individual

students as well. Or, use a special phrase when something is really important; for example, say, "Mrs. Brown's class..." instead of saying, "Boys and girls."

19. Buy a large rain stick at a science store. When you turn it over, it sounds like rain falling. When the children hear the sound, they are to stop what they are doing and listen.

20. For an assembly of the student body shout the school name and have the children respond with the name of the school mascot, i.e. the administrator shouts, "Memorial" and the children respond with, "Bulldog!" After they shout the mascot name they are to be silent.

21. Let your voice get quieter and quieter as a signal for the children to be quiet. Talk softer or not at all until they are still. Or say softly, "Tootsie Roll, Lollipop, we've been talking, now let's stop."

22. Teach young children the following chant:

- Teacher says; "1, 2." Children say: "Eyes on you."
- Teacher: "3, 4." Children: "Crisscross on the floor."
- Teacher: "5, 6." Children: "No more tricks."
- Teacher: "7, 8." Children: "Sit up straight."
- Teacher, "9, 10." Children, "Let's begin!"

23. Sing the following words to the Frere Jacques tune: "Are you listening? Are you listening? Everyone! Everyone! If you

are listening, if you are listening, look at me, look at me." Other ways to end the song are: "Snap your fingers" or "Pat your head."

24. Sit in your chair and start singing one song after another with no pauses. The children all join in the singing and come to group time. You can do the same thing with poetry. Start reciting poems that the children know and they will repeat them with you as they join the group.

25. Use motions like circling your hands quickly, then slow down and clap. You can also do the motions to a song like the "Itsy, Bitsy Spider." When all of the children are copying the gestures silently, sing the song through.

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