



Effective Children's Programs

Since a majority of BCPOS interpretive programs are for children 12 years and younger, you are bound to lead a children's program in the near future! Working with children can be one of the most rewarding experiences an interpreter can have. There are lots of different styles, techniques and philosophies about children's interpretation. Be willing to try new ideas. Here are ten tips for a successful children's program:

1. As with all groups, tell children the parameters of your program: time table, distance, terrain, and a general idea of what they will be doing. It is also a good idea to let them know what you expect of them: "The best way to enjoy the hike is..." or "I'll pass out the dipping nets after I demonstrate how to use one."
2. When first meeting the group, assess their level of understanding and interest. For example, you can assess a group by asking questions such as, "Have you been talking about animal homes in class?" or "What mammals would you expect to find here at a wetland area?"
3. Try to relate what you are saying to something they might be familiar with. Show how the pattern of leaves on a stem resembles the pattern of houses on a street. Also, use prediction to encourage involvement. "How do you think the bird built this nest?" Get two or three guesses. Verbally reward the children for thinking. "I can tell you're really thinking, Tom! But the nest is even deeper than that!"
4. Ask questions, but in a manner they can understand. If you ask preschool children, "How does the snake feel?" they are likely to answer, "Fine." You need to ask, "Does the snake feel warm or cold, smooth or rough?" To encourage and reinforce participation, respond positively to all answers provided to your questions, whether correct or not. For example, "You're right, alligators do like to live around water, but probably not at Walden Ponds because it's not warm enough much of the time in Colorado. What other animals might live near this pond?"
5. Get children involved at each stop. Usually, it is better to ask "how" questions rather than "why" with children. For example, ask "How many deer tracks can you see here?" Also, encourage children to ask you questions. (With K-3rd graders you may need to explain that questions begin with "how" or "why," not "Once when my brother and me...")
6. Compliment everyone who follows directions! If you can, learn children's names (nametags help with this)—they will pay better attention if you do. Call on children directly, but don't focus on just a few who constantly raise their hands. Sometimes ask questions directly to a child who looks interested but may not be getting a chance to share. Children always notice if they are left out.
7. Focus their looking. It is hard for a child just "to look." Try saying, "Help me find where a spider lives," or "If you look closely in these bushes, we might see where a rabbit would hide."
8. When outdoors, give children some discovery time of their own. You can go from student to student to see what they are discovering! Let them be their own leader for a brief period of time.
9. Be positive when relating to kids. Praise good behavior rather than criticizing bad behavior. "Thank you for doing..." And remember to praise often.
10. Finally, make it your primary goal to help kids feel positive about the outdoors. If something scares them (like touching a bug), don't force them to do that. They can just look instead. Help them leave with excitement about spending time outdoors!