

How to Teach When You Have Irregular Attendance



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In Canada, modern living offers many options. Because of this, attendance at worship and church school is often irregular. Occasional attendance may be because of one or several of these factors:

- families travel on weekends
- parents share custody of children; children spend time with individual parents on weekends
- children are involved in extra activities on Sunday morning—sports, music, sleep-overs
- fewer families value regular involvement in religion
- parent's schedules do not allow for regular attendance

How do church school teachers work with the reality of irregular attendance?

1. Be positive.

- When irregular-attending children enter your classroom, assume they want to be with the class, but circumstances have kept them away.
- Greet these children warmly, but do not make them the centre of attention by saying things like,
 "I'm so happy to see you. It has been four weeks since you were last here."
- During an informal part of your class, spend time with children who have been irregular in attendance. Review important parts of lessons they have missed. Do this in an easy-going, brief way.

2. Be practical in your planning.

- Remember, all the children in your class have been away from you and their class for seven days. Spend a little time at the beginning of each lesson bringing everyone up to date. Say to the children, "For the past few weeks we have been thinking about the Ten Commandments. These are the laws God gave to help us live in a caring way. Today we will. . . ."
- If your class has been gathering items—art, stories, puppets—around a specific theme, do a walking tour to bring everyone up to date. For instance, set out drawings from previous weeks in classroom corners. Say to the children, "Let's walk and talk. This will help us see what we have been doing lately and what we will do today."
- Set up learning centres with ongoing activities that children can use for several weeks. Invite regular-attending children to choose a centre that they have not tried before. Guide children who have been absent to the centre that provides the most comprehensive learning for lessons they have missed.

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- Set up large take-home envelopes for each child. In the envelope put art work, letters to parents, unused leaflets and news items from the church. At the end of each month, ask the children to check their envelope for take-home items.
 - Even though a lesson may be part of a larger unit, attempt to have each lesson stand on its own.
For instance, you may be studying a unit on the Ten Commandments but your lesson for a particular Sunday is, "You shall not steal." Review some of the previous commandments, but keep a strong focus on, "You shall not steal." The children who attend occasionally will at least have a strong sense of this particular commandment.
 - Plan and use meaningful opening and closing rituals. Rituals may include a special greeting, a song, or music playing as children enter or leave. The repetition of the rituals fosters unity and cohesion in the class. It also eases the discomfort of children who have been absent for a few weeks. They will think to themselves, "Oh, I remember this."