



Tips for Making the Small Group Dinosaur Treatment Program Developmentally Appropriate

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Tip #1: Tailor Sessions as Needed

Tailor sessions according to children's interests, attention span, and developmental abilities. Each therapy session provides a content theme (e.g., feelings or steps of problem solving) to be discussed with the children in the group, as well as suggested scripts using the puppets, role plays and video vignettes. Each session also includes three or four ideas for small group practice activities.

It is better to cover less material in a particular session, and do it well, than to rush through new content and lose the attention and understanding of the children. For some groups, breaking the session down to simplify the content or show fewer vignettes or talk about an important issue for a child will be needed. We do not recommend skipping content, as the sessions are carefully sequenced and build upon each other; rather some groups may take 22 2-hour sessions to cover the same material while others can complete it in 18 2-hour sessions.

Tip #2: Ensure Meaningful Small Group Discussions

Make the group discussions and role-plays relevant to the family background, culture, community and issues important to the children in your group. Sometimes therapists ask for scripts for each of the sessions. While we have provided some sample scripts, in general we prefer not to do this because we want therapists to feel they can be flexible and creative in the ways they present the core material to the children. For example, if bullying on the playground is an issue with one of the children in your group, then this issue will provide key thematic material for problem solving and friendship role-plays. If some of the children in your group have experienced some trauma (e.g., divorce or abuse) or loss (e.g., death of a family member) then content related to feelings of fear and sadness as well as ways to cope with these feelings will be important to weave into group discussions. On an individual child basis, topics such as divorce, moves, death of a parent, or medical issues (e.g., need to take insulin or wear a hearing aid or glasses) can be discussed and role-played by the puppets. Children can help the puppets identify the feelings associated with any of these problems and can help to role-play positive coping and problem solving strategies.

Tip #3: Maintain Order of Program

Do the sessions and small group activities in the order outlined in the manual. It is important to start with school rules and school study skills at the beginning of the school year because these units set the stage for appropriate classroom behavior. The feelings unit is next and provides the basis for all other programs. It is key to establish a feelings vocabulary before working on problem solving.

Try to use one or more of the small group activities recommended for each session. These activities have been chosen to complement and reinforce the group discussions and video vignettes shown. If you do choose to use an activity that is not recommended for the session, make sure that you



children have all the necessary background for the session (e.g., if the small group activity requires identification of 10 feelings, make sure your children have already learned these feeling words). In addition, look ahead to make sure the activity is not more appropriate for an upcoming session.



Tip #4: Adjust Emphasis of Content According to Age of Children

For preschool and kindergarten children the emphases of the content in each unit will be on more basic skills (e.g. class rules, feeling identification, or simple solutions). Pacing may be slower and emphasis is placed on practice and hands on activities.

For school age children the emphases will be on more advanced concepts including evaluation of solutions, anger management strategies, self-management approaches, and school study skills such as ways to concentrate, work hard, check work, and the importance of trying again when mistakes are made. Older students will also be introduced to simple cognitive strategies such as “self talk” and will be encouraged to share more examples from their own lives.



Tip #5: Plan for Variety and Novelty in Presentation

Vary your group discussion time presentation. For example, one session may center around showing 5-6 vignettes and role-playing scenes based on these vignettes. Another session may begin with a problem presented by the puppet that the children then help to solve and reenact. Other sessions on similar content might involve a group game (pass the hat), visualization, or presenting a play. Presenting the same content in multiple ways will ensure that all children have a chance to absorb and practice the new concepts. Small group activities should also be varied to include a mix of puppet plays, art activities, writing assignments, word searches or mazes, puzzles, bingos and so forth.



Tip #6: Selecting and Using Video Vignettes

Choose video vignettes for discussion that are relevant for the group. Prepare children for what they are about to see on the video vignette before it starts. Challenge them to look for a particular incident on the tape (e.g., “Okay detectives, show me a quiet thumb’s up when you see the girl following the teacher’s directions”). Then focus the group by saying: “ready, set, action” to signal start of vignette. Pause tape frequently to ask questions and to praise children who are attending. Whenever possible, after showing a vignette have children practice the skill demonstrated on the video (or role-play an alternative better response). This will help children move from watching to actual practice. In general, 6–8 vignettes per group with mediated discussions and role plays will be enough. Vignettes not shown can be shown in subsequent sessions. Distracted children can help by using the remote control or pressing the button to start the vignette.



Tip #7: Show Cue Cards of Key Concepts Being Taught in your Group Discussion

While showing video vignettes or discussing a topic in circle time, show the cue cards to highlight the key point. Children can be selected to hold these cards and show them around the circle. Pair the word on the cue card with the picture and encourage children to read the word. In addition, you can post the cue cards (e.g., quiet hand up, walking feet, hands to self, inside voice) in strategic areas. For example, put the “hands to self” cue card in front of a wiggly child’s carpet square, or during practice times, put the “sharing” cue card in the play area. The Wally relaxing or Tiny Turtle cue cards can be hung in the Time Out or Calm Down area.

Tip #8: Use Prosocial Children as Models During Circle Time

Call on a child who will be able to model appropriate responses before calling on children with fewer social skills.

**Tip #9: Modeling and Preparation for Small Group Activities is Key**

Always describe and demonstrate the small group activity before the children go to their small group table. Seeing the puppets model how to do an activity will assure a successful small group activity .

**Tip #10: Selecting Small Group Activities According to Children's Learning Needs**

Some of the small group activities focus on pre-reading and pre-writing skills and are less complex. Other activities have more emphases on reading, writing and language skills. Choose activities according to each child's developmental abilities and your goals for them.

**Tip #11: Adjusting Small Group Activity so that Every Child is Successful**

For children with poor fine motor ability, adjust games to make the activity successful. This can be done by putting puzzles on felt boards, adding velcro game pieces to keep them from slipping, limiting the number of pieces of a puzzle, setting up a child's materials on a tray, using large pencils or chalk to write, providing special loop scissors, pre-cutting shapes for an activity, or taping down paper so it won't move.



For children with learning problems, simplify the small group activity or use a different activity from the same unit so that the child can be successful. For example, if a child is unable to write, you can transcribe his responses to the problem on the paper, or write a word or letter down for him to copy. Alternatively, you can encourage the child to draw a picture of his solution.

Use buddies. Children with special needs or younger children can be paired up with more skilled, older or more verbal "buddies" who can help them. Buddies play with the assigned child doing a pre-planned activity. Praise buddies for their friendly interactions with the designated child. Buddies can also be paired with a child who is learning disabled or has motor difficulties in the same way to help with an activity.

For children with English as a second language, use picture cue cards with every new concept taught, simplify your language and frequently model the behavior being taught.

Tip #12: Using the Wally Problem Solving Detective Books

Read these small books to children and limit story telling to two or three problems per session. For preschool children or children who can't read, shorten the stories at first and then gradually increase the length. These books can also be used as prompts for mini "plays" where children act out the solutions with small hand puppets. Read stories several times to increase children's mastery of the stories. Older children can read the stories to younger children and can write their own stories about problems that are encountered by Wally, Molly, Tiny, Oscar and their friends.



Promotion Activities



Tip # 13: Coach Children During Small Group Activities

During small group activities comment on how children are using friendly behaviors such as sharing, helping, taking turns, asking politely, waiting and so forth. When problems occur, encourage children to use Wally's Problem Solving detective kit to search for possible solutions. See coaching guidelines in Part 5.



Tip # 14: Use Developmentally Appropriate Group Management Strategies

Use positive and proactive group management strategies including lots of praise and encouragement as well as strategies designed to prevent problems such as redirection, warnings, reminders and so forth. **We recommend that therapists complete the Incredible Years Teacher Classroom Management DVD Series as part of the preparation for delivering this program.**



Tip #15: Involve Parents in Children's Dinosaur Homework and Review it Each Week

Be sure to send home letters to parents describing each of the dinosaur school sessions and how they can reinforce newly learned skills at home. Parent involvement is key to helping children use new skills beyond the therapy sessions. (See Parent letters in Home Activities manual.)

Children this age love the home activities, and it provides an opportunity for parents to be involved. It also provides support for developing these skills at home. Emphasize to parents that the point of the home activities is to spend positive time with their child reviewing the concepts. Parents should not worry about "right" and "wrong" answers, and should limit the amount of time spent on the assignments (unless the child is asking to work more). If children do not complete the home activities at home, provide time and support to do it before or after the group session. It can be helpful to meet with parents to practice how to do the homework with their children so they can be successful.



Tip #16: Send Letters to Teachers and Call Periodically

The manual also includes sample letters for each of the program components. These letters can be sent to the children's teachers to let them know what the children are learning and to suggest ways teachers can reinforce these skills at school. We also recommend a minimum of two phone calls to the teacher during the course of the therapy to coordinate behavior plans.