

Facing the Sea of Blank Stares

“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45).

- When a child doesn't understand what you're saying, where does the misunderstanding lie?
- Why is it sometimes so hard to be understood?

▼ Training Session

You're mid-lesson and you see it: a sea of blank stares. You've lost the kids. Now what?

First, seek to understand. Check in with your kids by asking, “Where did I lose you?” “How can I help you understand?” or “How would you explain in your own words what I just said?” Usually, kids can give you an idea of where they got lost.

For many children (and adults), concepts like faith, hope, love, perseverance, heaven, integrity, and the Holy Spirit are hard to grasp. Making abstract concepts clear and plain is challenging, and even the best teacher can stumble.

So do what Jesus did. Connect abstract principles with practical stories and tangible, everyday objects: seeds to explain faith, coins to teach trust and serving, and fish to talk about provision.

Link the abstract with the concrete. Show a real gift as you explain God's gift of eternal life. Shower your class with Silly String as you explain joy in worship.

Also, be sure the lesson and activities are age-appropriate.

First-graders simply aren't designed to learn the same ideas and points as fifth-graders are. Study the age group you teach. Know their capabilities and limitations.

One great place to start is with “Age-Level Insights” in *Children's Ministry Magazine*. Check out a child development book. Or simply spend more time hanging out with kids in the age group you teach.

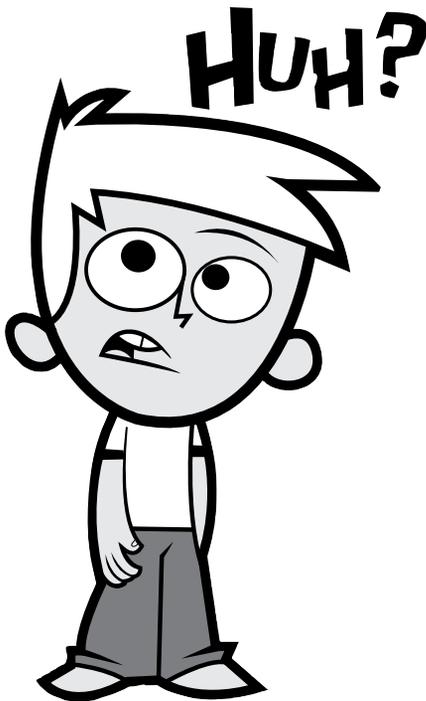
A more challenging source of blank stares is when kids simply don't *want* to learn. They'd rather talk—or yawn—and refuse to engage with you or the lesson.

And try as you might, you can't *make* a student understand—or even want to try.

But you *can* help students find an ounce of motivation. Here are a couple ways:

- **Focus on the fun in learning.** Ask kids what would help them enjoy class time. Note their suggestions and work them into your lesson.
- **Make learning relevant.** Kids check out when there's a lack of connection between the lesson and their lives. Kids (and, again, adults) always ask the question, “So what does this have to do with me?” Answer that question up front.

Blank stares aren't the end of your lesson; they're an invitation to tweak your lesson and reconnect!





Take this training deeper as you think over these questions:

- How can you better gauge whether kids understand?
- What's the hidden curriculum kids learn when you are flexible enough to adjust your approach because of their confusion?

▼ Journal

Flexibility is patience practiced! Write down the things you do to relax, and brainstorm a way to use just one of those to diffuse your classroom frustrations. Then place your hand on each one and pray that God will bear fruit in your flexible, teachable attitude.

**Some you win,
some get rained
out, but you have
to suit up for
them all!**

▼ Application

Write down a list of questions you can ask yourself and your students next time you find yourself teaching to a sea of blank faces. Keep this list of questions handy as you teach. Post it on a wall, fold it into your teacher guide, or stick it in your pocket.