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Top Ten Helpful Hints to First Year Teachers

By Barbara Snyder M.A. Education

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1. Become familiar with the school site and district office facilities and resources.

Your school site and the district office media center can be valuable resources to tap into. Most school sites have storage areas or closets with shared grade level curriculum resources and materials. The administrator or a veteran teacher would be the person to point you in the right direction. Depending on the size of the school district, a district library or media center will have materials available for checkout. Many districts have a new teacher orientation day to provide information about materials, procedures, insurance coverage, staff development and other key topics.

2. Set the tone for the year with detailed planning for the first day and week.

Spend an extensive amount of time on planning the first day and week of school. Make an impression and establish a positive tone for how your classroom will run. Describe in detail how you want your classroom procedures (homework, materials, line up, emergency, school/classroom rules) to work. Make sure students understand what your expectations are and why things need to be done in the manner that you describe. Particularly with the upper grades, much of the description and discussion can be done as a team-building exercise, seeking student input and comments. The primary students would also benefit from participation in setting up classroom expectations. Have a plan in mind before hand so that students can be focused to develop something that is workable and acceptable to you and has buy in from the students.

3. Develop a detailed description for student behavior expectations

The most important area to emphasize to students is that you have high expectations for their behavior. There are many models to explore, but your own personal model should blend with the school rules for pupil behavior. It needs to be a system that is fair and manageable. Don't put in consequences for poor behavior that can not be followed up with action. Talk to your colleagues or site administrator.

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4. Talk to your colleagues.

The veteran teachers at your site can be one of the most valuable contacts that a new teacher can make. They want to help the new teachers. If you have questions or problems with discipline, lesson planning, parent involvement, ask for advice or suggestions. Don't reinvent the wheel. Many site administrators have already selected teachers that serve as informal mentors to aid the first year teachers.

5. Use the internet for lesson plan ideas.

Look at the many curriculum and lesson planning ideas that you can find by doing a search on the internet. Most classrooms now have access to the web. Teachers can now do all their research in the

comfort of their own classroom and can find more ideas and plans than there is time to deliver.

6. Take advantage of all first year teacher inservices.

Staff development is a crucial component of "No Child Left Behind". Most districts have developed appropriate staff development workshops to meet the intent of the law and to provide the details that are missing from the teacher manuals. Veteran teachers who present sample lessons or time saving tips can be a life saver for first year teachers.

7. Begin parent contacts from the first day of school.

Send some kind of a communication to parents the first day. Describe your plans and goals for the school year and solicit their help and expertise. Parents can be presenters, volunteers, and field trip chaperones. They love getting involved. Start the first week by phoning each parent (do 5 a day) and introducing yourself.

8. Send a regular newsletter home

Whether it be a weekly report or a monthly newsletter, establish a vehicle for regular communication with parents. Parents are busy folks, too. They may also need frequent reminders about upcoming events. Have students write a letter to their parents as an end of the day activity for example. There is no such thing as too much communication.

9. Get involved in at least one curriculum committee.

As a first year teacher, you may say to yourself that you haven't got time to do one more thing. However, it is strongly advised that you begin to get involved in a curriculum committee at the district level. Join a group. They are always looking for members. They usually meet only once a month after school. You should find an area that interests you the most and sign up. Even if you can't make a meeting every month, this will help you begin to see the input and influence that teachers can have on curriculum decisions.

10 Realize that the first year is the toughest.

As a first year teacher, there will be days and sleepless nights when you will wonder if you took the correct path. If you love teaching kids, hang in there. Each year will get easier because you will gain new insights and experience as each year passes. Being a teacher is a tough job. Don't try to go it alone. A support system made up of family and colleagues will get you through the tough times so that you can reflect back on the rewarding times and know that you can and do make a difference.

About the Author Barbara Snyder is a retired California Distinguished School Principal and Coordinator For Human Resources. She has a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction. She holds elementary education, secondary, community college, and administrative credentials. She is currently the publisher of <http://EducationResourcesNetwork.com>, co-publisher of Strictly Business Magazine, <http://www.sbmag.org>.

Signing With Your Baby: Helpful Hints

By Monica Beyer

Signing With Your Baby: Helpful Hints by Monica Beyer

While there aren't any solid rules regarding signing with your baby, I've had enough experience signing with my own child that I can pass along some helpful hints.

Be consistent. Use the sign the same way every time for the same action or object. This will help your baby become familiar with the sign and she will be able to sign it back to you sooner.

Be happy. Frowning and bored voices will not make a baby eager to sign.

Be open to interpretation. Babies will not always make a sign correctly the first time they sign it, just like they won't speak a word correctly the first time they speak it. Keep signing the word the correct way and your baby will soon grow more accurate.

Be open to suggestion. Sometimes a baby will create a sign for herself. Feel free to continue using it, and applaud her creativity.

Be praising. Act excited when the baby uses a sign correctly, and let your baby know how wonderful you think he is.

Be expressive. Use your face and body in addition to your hands. You can also say the word as you sign it.

Be patient. Babies can take weeks or even months before they make their first sign.

Most importantly, don't think of signing as a skill that has to be mastered. Instead, think of it as what it is intended to be – a bridge of communication before your baby can talk!

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Monica Beyer is the mother of two sons and has been signing with her younger son for over 1 year. Visit her website at <http://www.signingbaby.com> or email her at monica@signingbaby.com



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