

# PHILOSOPHY FOR CHILDREN: AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE

The aim of this guide is to assist you in implementing a Philosophy for Children approach in your classroom. This guide covers some of the recommendations of philosopher and educator Matthew Lipman, who was the main theorist behind Philosophy for Children. This educational practice encourages children to engage in critical thinking through open but guided discussions.

The following is a summary of Dr. Lipman’s recommendations, which will help you lead enriching discussions with your students.

<b>Before you begin</b>
<b>1. Set up a space that is conducive to discussion</b>
<p>Have students sit in a circle to encourage discussion. This type of setup allows the activity leader to be in the circle with participants, which changes the way knowledge is traditionally transferred from teacher to student. It also allows students to see each other when speaking.</p> <p>Students should sit on chairs instead of on the floor if possible. Also, students shouldn’t be holding anything (accessories, paper, etc.) because this could be distracting, especially during the first few discussions.</p>
<b>2. Briefly explain the notion of philosophy (optional)</b>
<p>Philosophy involves asking ourselves questions about the world around us. It means having a clearer vision of ourselves and of the world. This vision is enriched by listening to what other participants have to say.</p> <p>It’s important for children to understand they will be taking part in an activity that differs from the ones they are familiar with. In philosophy, there’s no single right answer. Everyone’s ideas are important because they allow us to collectively reflect on an issue that concerns and interests us. Each student has a right to speak and be heard. The teacher’s role is to help participants think about the issue, not to decide which idea is right and which is wrong.</p>
<b>3. Explain the rules for the discussion activity</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is no evaluation or grade for the discussion activity.</li><li>• The teacher leads the discussion by asking questions and providing each student with an opportunity to speak.</li><li>• Listen to others. Give them the same attention you’d like to receive when it’s your turn to speak.</li></ul>

- Be respectful of other students' opinions, even if you don't agree with them.
- Don't laugh at other students or their ideas. Instead, try to understand their point of view.
- Don't try to be "right."
- Each student must explain their opinion.

## During the activity

### 1. Avoid sharing your personal opinion about a subject

You must remain impartial, even if this can be difficult at times. Avoid giving your opinion or answering your original question. The instructor's role is more like that of a mediator than of a traditional teacher. The instructor should try to ask questions that don't lead participants to a specific answer. Rather, the instructor asks students to explain their ideas, provide reasons and examples, make comparisons, draw distinctions, or establish connections with what other students have said.

Above all, the teacher must ask students questions and give each student an opportunity to speak. The teacher should clarify certain concepts in as neutral a manner as possible or redirect the discussion if it strays too far from the original topic.

### 2. Rely on students' interventions to restart the conversation

If the discussion starts to peter out, ask the group to express their opinion on what a student has said. Ask whether they agree or want to add something. Or, you can reformulate what a student has said in general terms to make it less personal. Ask the students to think about whether they agree or disagree with the idea.

### 3. Refocus the conversation when it becomes too anecdotal

Children love to share their experiences, often providing painstaking detail that isn't always relevant to the topic at hand. It's important to return the conversation to the original question or subtopics raised by the children's stories, which can help advance the discussion.

To do this, you can summarize the story and reformulate it in a couple of sentences. Then, get the conversation going again with a new question. You can also repeat the original question.

### 4. Ask students who don't usually speak up in class to give their opinion

Some students tend not to speak up in class, but not necessarily for the reasons we might think. For example, a student might feel that their opinion isn't as important as those of other students who speak more often.

A few minutes into the discussion you can tell the class that you want to hear from everyone, especially from students who haven't spoken yet. However, don't force them to speak. You can simply give priority to students who haven't spoken much (or at all).

## 5. Keep written notes of the discussions

It's not necessary to write down everything that was said, but you can make a note of the main discussion topics or opinions provided by students. This can be useful for summarizing the discussion for students at the end of the activity so they can clearly see how they arrived at their conclusions. These notes will also be useful for future discussions on related topics.

