

All About Rules!

Introductory Guide to Philosophy for Children





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Philosophy for Children: An Introductory Guide

This briefing document will assist you in implementing the Philosophy for Children approach. This guide covers some recommendations of philosopher and educator Matthew Lipman, the main theorist behind the Philosophy for Children principle. These educational practices focus on helping children think for themselves through open, but guided, discussions.

You will find below a summary of Dr. Lipman's recommendations to help you lead meaningful discussions with your students.

Before you Begin

1 Set up a space that is conducive to discussion

Have the students sit in a circle to encourage discussion. This type of setup enables the facilitator to join the same circle, which differs from the traditional way knowledge is "transferred" from teacher to student. It also allows students to look at each other when they speak.

2 Briefly explain what is philosophy (optional)

Philosophy involves asking ourselves questions about the world around us, and reflecting together to better understand things. In other words, striving to understand why things are the way they are. It's important that children understand they will be taking part in an activity that is a bit different from what they're used to. There's no **SINGLE** right answer. All ideas are valuable because they help us think together about an issue that affects or interests us. Everyone has a right to speak up and be heard. The teacher's role is to help students think about the issue, not to decide whether an idea is good or bad.



3

Explain the rules pertaining to the discussion activities

- There is no assessment or grade for the discussion activity.
- The teacher leads the discussion by asking questions and giving each student the opportunity to speak up.
- When it's someone's turn to speak, listen to them as you would like to be listened to.
- 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 them.
- Don't try to "be right". The goal is to understand ideas, not to win. This is not a competition.
- When you say something, also say why you think that way.

During the Activity

1

Avoid sharing your personal opinion on a topic

It's important to remain neutral during the discussion and avoid sharing your own point of view. Your role is not to answer the original question, but to help students think for themselves. You should ask open-ended questions that lead students towards specific answers. Ask them to clarify their ideas, give examples or make connections with what others have said. You should step in mostly to make sure everyone has a chance to speak and listens carefully, or redirect the discussion if it moves away from the topic.

2

Build on the students' contributions to keep the discussion going

If discussions fall flat, ask the group to respond to what another student has said by specifying if they agree or if they have anything to add. It's also interesting to rephrase what the students have said in more general terms. For example, instead of saying "Gina said that...", you can say "Some people think that...". This helps focus the discussion on the idea rather than the person and encourages the group to respond to the idea itself.

3 Bring the discussion back on track

Children enjoy sharing their own experiences... often in lengthy details that are not always linked to the subject at hand. It's important to refocus the debate on the original question or underlying concepts raised by the children's stories that can help advance the discussion. To do this, summarize their stories and rephrase them in one or two sentences to keep the discussion going with a new question. You can also repeat the original question.

4 Give a voice to students who are not speaking

Some children tend to not speak up in class, but not necessarily for the reasons we might think. For example, a student might fear that their idea is not as relevant as those of students who speak up more. A few minutes into the discussion, you can say that you would like to hear from everyone, especially those who have not yet spoken. However, you should not force them to speak.

5 Keep a written record of the discussions

It may be relevant to record the main points emerging from the discussions or students' contributions. This can be useful to summarize the activity with the students once it's completed, so they can become aware of their thought process. It can also be interesting for future discussions on related topics.

