

Tips for Teaching Handwashing In Preschool Classrooms

General Tips:

-  Make handwashing a focus for the entire center---toddlers through school-age.
-  Expect and teach parents to assist their child with handwashing as they entire the center and/or classroom.
-  Teach and re-teach...repeat handwashing lessons throughout the year using a variety of strategies.
-  Teach children (and adults) to use a paper towel when turning off the faucet.

Specific Teaching Strategies:

-  Videotape a child (or children) demonstrating the correct handwashing sequence. Show the video & talk about what they are doing! Let children borrow the video so they can watch it at home with their families.
-  Take photos of a child demonstrating the correct handwashing sequence. Use the photos to make a class book that can be read all year long.
-  Use Boardmaker pictures to develop a handwashing sequence chart.
-  Use Boardmaker pictures to develop “cue cards” that are attached to the sand table, water table, playdough, etc. as reminders that these are centers where children must wash their hands prior to and after playing. Variation: Make a table “stop sign”—Stop on one side—handwashing picture on the other side to place on tables where playdough or sensory tubs are being used.
-  Purchase an “octopus inker” soap. Stamp the ink on children’s hands in hard to wash places like between fingers and on their wrist. Then have children wash their hands and see if the ink is gone.
-  Ask children to rub Vaseline on their hands and then sprinkle on ground cinnamon as pretend germs or dirt. Ask children to wash their hands---use cold water first—then warm water. Have children experience the effectiveness of warm water and use this activity to stress washing for an extended period of time. It takes quite a lot of scrubbing to wash off Vaseline. CAUTION: Some children may be allergic to cinnamon; please be aware of allergies prior to using this activity in your classroom.
-  Use verbal cues:
 - For turning off the faucet with a paper towel: “Do the paper towel trick”
 - For washing: “Scrub inside, outside, in-between” Or “Make soap mittens”
 - For a reminder not to touch the walls, etc. after their hands are washed: ask children to fold their hands as they walk to the next area, use the cue “Hug-a-hug-a keep them clean.”
-  To keep children from re-contaminating their hands on the way to meals or snacks, have children carry a paper towel to the snack table. When they get their, ask them to hold the towel in one hand and using one hand only ask them to use their thumb to squirrel the towel

into a small ball inside their fingers and then throw it away in a bucket on the table. Hint: This is also great fine motor development!



Use 2 slices of bread (without preservatives). First have children take their moist, dirty hands and pass the slice of bread around the table from child to child—place the bread in a Ziploc bag. Second have children wash and dry their hands—pass the second slice of bread around the table from child-to-child and place this slice in a second Ziploc bag. See which slice of bread molds first. Use as an object lesson for the importance of handwashing.



Ask children to sing the ABC song as they wash their hands to make sure that they are washing long enough or use one of the following handwashing songs:

(Tune: Row, Row, Row Your Boat)

Wash, wash, wash your hands

Play the handy game!

Scrub and rub, scrub and rub, the germs go down the drain!

(Tune: Where is Thumbkin)

Top and bottoms, Tops and bottoms

In between, In between

Don't forget the thumb, Don't forget the thumb

Scrub, scrub, scrub

Scrub, scrub, scrub

The following activities were compiled by the Eau Claire 4 Tomorrow, 4-year kindergarten teachers. Permission is granted to reproduce this information at no charge for use in educational settings...kindly credit the Eau Claire 4 Tomorrow (EC4T) teachers, Eau Claire Area School District, Eau Claire, Wisconsin.