

Characteristics of Sparkies

Physical

- Though Sparks-aged children grow rapidly and in uneven spurts, they all have similar physical strength. This similarity, however, doesn't mean all Sparkies excel equally in athletic skills. As with all children, some Sparkies may be exceptional runners, while others may be good at throwing straight. Though God gives children a variety of gifts, His ultimate desire is for these gifts to complement one another in group interaction. Because Sparkies often differ from one another in skills, the game director should plan a variety of games to provide opportunities for these skills to develop.
- Though Sparkies are full of energy, they tire easily. Keeping this in mind, the game director should follow more intense games with less intense ones to avoid overexertion.
- Because Sparkies are full of energy, they have difficulty sitting still for long periods of time. During Green Meadow (Large Group) Time, a song with motions or an exercise led by the Sparky puppet gives Sparkies opportunities to stretch their muscles.

Mental

- Sparkies are learning to read and write, so whoever is teaching should try to write words on flipcharts or a blackboard. Praise and encourage Sparkies as they develop their communication skills.
- Sparkies are literal minded, and do not understand symbolism. All those working in Sparks should avoid using expressions such as "Bread of Life" which Sparkies will assume is literal bread they can eat. Using the number "4" for "for" will also cause confusion. Sparkies may also have trouble understanding spiritual truths illustrated through magic tricks or object lessons. When encouraging Sparkies to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior, avoid imprecise expressions such as "ask Jesus into your heart." Sparkies may think you mean their literal heart. Use basic concepts and simple words.
- Because Sparkies have a limited concept of time, send fliers home with them and contact parents often to keep them informed of upcoming activities.
- Active imagination is a hallmark of Sparks-age kids, so the Green Meadow (Large Group) Time speaker can use the Sparky puppet to create interest (being careful to never have Sparky tell a Bible truth). Select Bible stories with lots of visual excitement.
- Because Sparkies believe what they are told, be careful when making promises and guard your words to speak only the truth.

Social

- Encourage Sparkies to bring their friends to club. Because Sparkies like to play with their friends, provide outings for additional interaction.
- Help self-centered Sparkies develop team spirit during Game Time. Emphasize the importance of caring for others. Green Jewel Activities will help.
- Listen to what your Sparkies have to say and make them feel that what they have to say is important.
- Because Sparkies need adult approval, find something good about each child in your group and compliment him or her each week.

Emotional

- Sparkies enjoy excitement, so plan Game Time, interaction with the Sparky puppet, special activities for Awards Time, etc.
- Because Sparkies are self-conscious and sensitive to failure, teach them how to handle failure appropriately. Never ridicule a child.
- Sparkies are quick to sympathize with others, so help them recognize and meet the needs of others.
- Often Sparkies have fears, so strive to make club a secure and happy place.

Spiritual

- Sparkies typically are able to understand the gospel and their need of salvation, so encourage them to accept Christ as their Savior. Instead of pressuring Sparkies to make this decision, rely on the Holy Spirit to lead them to the place of faith in Christ.
- Strengthen a Sparkie's natural trust by increasing their knowledge of God through memory work and Bible lessons during Green Meadow (Large Group) Time. Teach Sparkies how to trust God every day.
- Sparkies can experience real worship. Song leaders should select songs of praise to God and be sure Sparkies understand the words of songs.

Sparks-age Characteristics	Teaching Tips
1. Gender roles are becoming differentiated.	Show girls how to be “ladies” and boys how to become “gentlemen.”
2. Physically active.	Plan songs and lessons so they include movement.
3. Have short attention span.	Do not expect children to listen quietly for more than 15-20 minutes at a time. Keep teaching groups small (20-25). Alternate quiet and active times.
4. Need to be shown as well as told.	Accompany storytelling with actions (when possible). Example: when you tell children someone is tall, hold up your hand to show what you mean.
5. Learn best from first-hand experiences.	Provide activities that will allow firsthand experiences with real objects. A piece of fruit is a better teaching tool than a picture of a piece of fruit.
6. Do not grasp the concept of time.	Telling children that something happened a long time ago could mean last week or yesterday to them.
7. View the world as revolving around them.	Teach them to share and take turns. This may take some time.
8. Do not understand concept of distance.	You may tell a child about a faraway place, but even using a map will have little or no meaning to a Sparkie.
9. Express themselves literally.	Do not use figures of speech or complicated analogies. Say what you mean. Sparks-aged children do not make applications from analogies.
10. Understand rules and want to be good.	Give directions that are game-like and fun rather than command-like and orderly. Be one step ahead of them. Avoid making children wait. Set realistic goals for behavior. Let them know what you expect.
11. Need to be treated with respect.	Do not talk down to children. Use a natural tone of voice. Be as courteous to a child as you would to an adult.
12. Enjoy repetition.	Be willing to repeat activities or stories.