

Group Management Hints

Adapted originally from “Safety,” Salt Marsh Manual: An Educator’s Guide.

If you have apprehensions about leading a group of children away from the four-walled constraints of a classroom, relax! There are several techniques you can use to help keep the group’s attention and maintain the feeling of freedom and open exploration. Try the following:

- When you stop to look at something, gather the group in a semicircle with everyone facing inward.
- Speak loudly and clearly, facing the group. The wind will carry your voice away from anyone behind your back.
- Make eye contact with the students. You, not the students, should face the sun.
- Focus on something specific when you stop. Vague discussions will lose the group’s interest.
- Talk with, not at, the group.
- Stimulate imagination and excitement while delivering factual information about the organism.
- Be versatile. Recognize the magic of the moment. Use unexpected experiences to illustrate ecological concepts--or just enjoy it!
- Keep it simple. Demonstrate as an activity is being explained.
- Encourage thinking and group interaction by asking questions. Leave room for imagination.
- Consider assigning tasks to all students to get them involved.
- Bring an “emergency” supply pack with first-aid kit, pencil sharpener, tissues, and extra plastic baggies.
- Enthusiasm is contagious! It is a greater catalyst than knowing all the names. If you are not getting excited about it, will your students? Get down on your hands and knees to look at the plants or invertebrates. Study an animal by “being it” (move as it does, sound like it, or try to look like it), especially if you do not get to see the animal. Point silently at a feature you want to draw attention to.
- Keep the group together with creative ways of moving from one spot to another. For example, run like a mouse, wiggle like a snake, or fly like a shorebird.
- Remember, as the leader, you set the tone for the experience.

