

## HOW TO . . . USE PUPPETS

**Value:** Puppets can be a great asset to any children’s ministry program. They are often used to help teach a Biblical truth in a manner which the audience can easily identify with and understand. Children respond to puppets, despite their mood or circumstances.

**Purpose:** Develop a purpose for your puppet ministry which will serve as a guiding tool for your scripts, lessons, songs, stories, and general interaction.

**Philosophy:** Each puppet ministry philosophy will probably be a little different. You need to decide *why* you have a puppet ministry and what you want to accomplish with it.

**Ideas for use:** Puppets can be used in a variety of ways. The following is a list of some ideas:

1. “Sing” a special music number
2. Help lead songs during song time
3. Teach a Bible verse for the theme of the day
4. Humor
5. Question and Answer time
6. Tell a story
7. Act out a skit dealing with a particular theme

*Do not have extremely lengthy puppet scripts and stories. It can bore the kids and cause them to be distracted by something else*

**Tips and Tricks:** Becoming a “Master Puppeteer” does take some work, but with a little effort puppets can play “big” in your ministry. Here are some helpful ideas for you to consider and practice when you are working with puppets:

1. Puppet care
  - a. Do not lay them on the floor.
  - b. Keep food and drink away from the puppets.
  - c. Treat the puppets with care. They are easy to damage.
  - d. Always put the puppets away when you are done using them.
  - e. Store the puppets properly. Do not just throw them in a box.
2. Hand movement
  - a. As you move your hand, you should keep your hand flat and only move your thumb.
  - b. Moving your other fingers results in “flipping the lid,” which is when the puppet’s head moves back and forth instead of just his mouth.
  - c. One way to help prevent “flipping the lid” is to cross your middle finger over your index finger and then move your thumb
  - d. Open the mouth wide enough to emphasize the words you are saying
  - e. Make sure you speak loudly from behind the stage so the audience can hear you.
3. Arm position
  - a. The arm used to manipulate the puppet should be held straight in the air, locked in position by your head.
  - b. Your hand should be slightly angled downward so the puppet can have eye contact with the audience.
4. Lip synchronization
  - a. Start each word with the puppet’s mouth closed.
  - b. Be sure to speak each syllable.
  - c. Practice saying your name and counting to fifty.

5. Your eyes
  - a. Keep your eye on the puppet you are manipulating. This will help you make any adjustments necessary.
  - b. Do not be a distraction to other puppeteers.
  - c. Pay attention to what is taking place.
6. Entrances and Exits
  - a. Entrances and exits should be a gentle stepping motion, not an elevator motion.
  - b. Make the puppets appear life-like and natural.
7. Eye contact
  - a. The puppet should make eye contact with the audience as well as with the puppet(s) to whom he is speaking
  - b. Do not get caught having your puppet talking to the ceiling or to the floor.
8. Proper height
  - a. Your puppet's "belly button" should be at the height of the curtain bar for your stage.
  - b. It is easy to be too high and have your arm show, or to be too low and have your puppet shrink.
9. Proper spacing
  - a. When working with several puppets at one time, you want to be sure to space the puppets out: you do not want them to be too close, nor do you want them to be too far apart.
  - b. Make sure that you do not lean on the stage; it could fall over.
10. Puppet's posture
  - a. Keep his back straight
  - b. Be careful about his leaning forward, back, or to the side.
11. Puppet's movement
  - a. Remember—*Transfer your life into the life of the puppet*
  - b. A puppet's movements can make him seem realistic
  - c. Caution: Do not overdue the movements
  - d. Practice the following:
    - 1) Walking—gentle bounce
    - 2) Running—quicker bounce
    - 3) Skating—a gentle glide from side to side
    - 4) Jumping—a short run, a jump and gliding motion with a little lean forward on the landing, then a gentle stop
12. Rod arm movement
  - a. Rod arms are useful in helping the puppet come alive.
  - b. The key here is to practice using one rod at a time until you feel comfortable using two.
13. **Practice, Practice, Practice, Practice, Practice, Practice**

**Odds and Ends:** Miscellaneous information

1. Character Puppets:
  - a. Choose a voice that you will use for that puppet all of the time.
  - b. Choose a name for the puppets that will be easy for the kids to remember.
  - c. Be creative in developing the character's character. Will he be smart, slow, old, young, talk with an accent, etc.?
2. Puppet Stages:
  - a. Puppet stages can be very expensive to purchase, but you can make your own for very minimal costs.
  - b. There are some material that can be purchased to give you plans for making a puppet stage to suit your needs.
3. Proper Care:
  - a. If at all possible, keep your puppets off the floor; this will help them keep clean and prevent them from being stepped on or sat upon.

- b. Keep food away from your puppets and make sure your hands are clean when you are using your puppets
- c. Always be cautious when handling puppets. Treat them with care.
- d. Storage ideas:
  - 1) Store them in a flat storage box, which is easy to stack and transport.
  - 2) Store them in a plastic storage bin. I wrap them in a plastic bag and then place them in the bin. (Labeling the box also helps you know where each of your puppets goes.)
  - 3) Construct a puppet rack with a 1" x 6" block and a dowel rod. You can place the puppets on the rod and cover them with a bag to keep them clean.
  - 4) Store them in a packing trunk.
4. For the shorter puppeteer, kneeling pads are a nice thing to have. Large pieces of foam stacked up works very well, and it is also comfortable.
5. Puppet Resources:
  - a. One Way Street, Inc., P.O. Box 5077, Englewood, CO 80155-5077, Orders: 1-800-569-4537; Customer Service: 303-790-1188; Web: [www.onewaystreet.com](http://www.onewaystreet.com)
  - b. Puppet Productions, P.O. Box 1066, DeSoto, TX 75123-1066, 1-800-854-2151
  - c. Christian Book Distributors, P.O. Box 7000, Peabody, MA 01961-7000, 1-800-247-4784; Web: [www.Christianbook.com](http://www.Christianbook.com)
  - d. Axtell Expressions, Inc., 230 Glencrest Circle, Ventura, CA 93003-1305, 805642-7282; Web: [www.axtell.com](http://www.axtell.com)
  - e. The Train Depot, 5015 Tampa West Boulevard, Tampa, FL 33634-2423, 1-800-229-KIDS

Some of the material comes from *A Puppet Training Manual* by David and Elaine Cole, 1994 by Children's Outreach, 210 Tracy Road, New Whiteland, IN 46184-1024 ISBN 1-883426-03-0.