Who's the Leader?

Leaders play key roles in every community. Good leaders "take charge" to help people work together on tasks that they couldn't do alone. Preschoolers can begin to develop awareness of roles of leaders in their environment. Simple games, activities, and class discussion can help children learn about what goes into being a leader and being a follower.

Teach games in which every child gets a turn to be a leader.

- After you teach the game "Follow the Leader", let children volunteer to lead. The class can then be divided into two groups, each with its own leader.
- For very young preschoolers, change the rules of "Simon Says" and "Mother May I?" to downplay "tricking" other players. Children can practice giving and carrying out directions as leaders and followers.

Provide authentic opportunities for children to have leadership roles.

- Offer a range of "leader" jobs throughout the week (line leader, song leader, etc.).
- Ask volunteers to assist a new child in class. For example, Winona and Naresh could show Leah around the classroom and take turns helping her during her first week in school.
- Have children act as tour guides during special events. For example, during an Open House, small groups of parents could follow pairs of children through the project displays. Each guide might prepare a sentence or two to say about the displays.

Invite class discussions about leading and following.

- Encourage children to think about what it is like to lead and to follow. For example, you could ask, "What's it like being in front during 'Follow the Leader'? What's easy about it? What's not so easy?" "What is it like being a follower?"
- Use what you observe of their experiences to start thoughtful conversations. "Sometimes the line leader got far ahead of the followers. What do you think about that?" "How was being a tour guide like playing follow the leader? How was it different?"
- Pose possible problems for children to discuss. "When you're the leader, what are some ways to get people to follow you?" "When you're a follower, what could you do if the leader starts to go somewhere that's dangerous, like into the street?" "Are there things a leader or a follower shouldn't do?"

Help children identify people who are leaders in your program or in the wider world.

- Invite those people to come to school to talk about their work. Examples include the program director, a parent-teacher group officer, a bandleader, the fire chief, someone who heads a community group, or an elected official.
- Help the children prepare questions for the guests. Let some of the children be tour guides for the visitors.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.

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8/23