

Using the Puppets

The Wally, Molly, Dina Dinosaur and Tiny Turtle puppets will help you “teach” the concepts. Young children are enthralled with puppets and will be eager to help them solve problems and practice showing them the positive behaviors so that the puppets can learn them by watching them. Child will often talk about sensitive or painful issues with a puppet more easily than with an adult. Don’t worry that you are not a trained puppeteer, the children won’t notice—the important thing is to have fun and be playful with the puppets. Remember, the puppets become “real” to the children and can be very effective models. While the life-size Wally, Molly, and Dina puppets are ideal for use with this program, smaller, less expensive puppets can also be used. Any puppet that is consistently used by the teacher during Dinosaur School can become very special to the children. Here are some suggestions for puppet use:

- **Each puppet has a name, age, personality, and individual family situation.**
 - Wally and Molly are brother and sister.
 - Wally:* Wally is older and is good at problem-solving but somewhat impulsive, so he tends to get into trouble at home with his sister and at school with his peer group and teachers.
 - Molly:* Molly is very mannerly and thoughtful except for some interactions with her brother. At times she can be anxious and fearful.
 - Dina Dinosaur:* Dina is the school director, and she helps children establish rules when necessary and reinforces special accomplishments. She helps teach the children learn how to survive in school so they can be successful.
 - Tiny Turtle:* He is learning disabled, inattentive, slow and highly distractible. He gets into trouble at school with teachers and other children. He teaches the children how to handle their anger.
 - Other Puppets:* Other puppets who are friends of Wally and Molly occasionally visit the children. These puppets may have personalities or family situations that reflect the children in the group. For example, Freddy Feelings the puppet who is hot-tempered, shy, adopted and living with one parent or grandparents, or has just moved into town and doesn’t have any friends yet. Ethnically diverse, life-size puppets are also available and may be substituted for Wally and Molly to match the class’s ethnic or racial composition.
- Any child puppet can be used in any lesson that has a child puppet role. For example, if the lesson specifies that Wally has a problem, a different child puppet can present the same problem (or a developmentally appropriate variation on the lesson topic).
- Each puppet is always used by the same teacher. Changes in voice or mannerisms are distracting and sometimes distressful to children.
- Puppets look at the video vignettes, raise a quiet hand, and take turns. They are models for the children. Puppets occasionally make mistakes, as the children do, but when a puppet talks about a mistake or misbehavior, it is important to emphasize how the puppet copes successfully, stays calm, problem-solves and makes a plan to use the solution. Children will become distressed if Wally or Molly get into trouble but do not resolve the issue. Remember that the puppets are modeling positive behaviors and thoughts the majority of the time.
- When a puppet will not be with the group for a few sessions, good-byes and reunions should take place.

- Puppets receive reinforcement (praise, stickers, prizes) just like the other children in the group.
- Puppets do not set limits or enforce discipline—this is the teacher’s role.
- Wally, Molly, and Dina (or other teacher puppets) are used only by teachers. Children are given smaller hand puppets to use for their own role plays and practices.
- Routines or rituals should be established for puppets joining and leaving the circle time. For example, children may sing a good morning song in order for Dina to come out or knock three times on Dina’s box. In the beginning they should introduce themselves, tell the children something about their families and greet each child individually. Usually we recommend that Wally be present to start circle time discussions and that Dina arrive later to introduce the video vignettes. These standard routines for opening and closing circle time add to the predictability, stability and feeling of safety during circle group time.

Sing — Dina wake up, Dina wake up, Dina wake up, wake up,
wake up, wake up
Or, Dina go to sleep, etc.

- Puppets change their clothes each week to make their characters more real (e.g., wear heavy clothes in winter, dress in similar ways to the children).
- Puppets model primarily positive behaviors. Occasionally they tell children about a mistake they made or model something inappropriate and ask the children for solutions. After discussion the puppets model the appropriate response to show how it is done.