

GUIDELINES FOR DISCIPLINE

Children who need redirecting are often seen as an interruption and bother in our teaching time. It is important to instead remember them as an *opportunity*, knowing that God desires to use this moment to continue to mold them . . . and to teach us!

Many of our classroom problems can be avoided by careful planning. An unprepared teacher is more on edge, less exciting, and communicates that this class isn't very important. No wonder, then, that the children agree! Know what you want to do, for how long, and have all your materials ready to go. Unprepared teachers open the door to misbehavior.

Be on time! Whoever is in the class first, "wins"! If the children beat you to class, they will have already determined their behavior and standards for the hour. You need to be ready with activities to channel their energy the minute they walk in the door.

Teachers who push the attention span of children are also asking for restless behavior. If one or two are restless, deal with them. If more than two are restless, take a look at the class time you have planned. Perhaps you need to build in more activity, less talk and answer time, and more opportunities for the children to be actively involved.

There are many "under the table" ways to approach the restlessness that usually precedes disruption:

1. Be sure your classroom is arranged so that you can "reach" every child. Do not stand or sit where you have poor eye contact. Move about as the hour progresses, so you may be close to each child during the hour. Have the children move from chairs on the floor to chairs and tables for the various activities.
2. Remove any distractions. Have children place unnecessary supplies under their table or on a special supply table. Leave the area in front of them free from clutter to help focus their attention.
3. When a child is becoming restless, casually move toward him. Do not lunge or threaten. A soft hand on the shoulder or loving touch of the arm may be all the redirection he needs.
4. Drop a child's name in the middle of a sentence, or ask him a question, but be careful not to embarrass him or put him on the spot. Keep your tone light.
5. Shift speeds—speed up or slow down what you are doing, may be all it takes to bring the child's attention back.
6. Shift activity. Frankly, some things we do simply "bomb." If the general restlessness is growing, it is time to move to something else. Always have activities in your "back pocket" for such moments!

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GUIDELINES FOR DISCIPLINE, continued

Sometimes, these approaches are not enough. If a child's restlessness is bothering more than just you, it may be time to move to a more direct approach. "First I learn to love my teacher, then I learn to love my teacher's God." In any disturbance, it is important to first pray that God will help you to show His love and care in the midst of confrontation.

Tell the child what you would like him to do, and give him a good reason. Simply redirect his *actions*. Many such children are eager to "help" if it is time to pass out materials or hold something for everyone to see. He needs a good reason for changing his activity, not just "we don't do that in church."

Talk to the child individually about what he did, and ask why you would not find that behavior acceptable. Ask what he should have done instead.

Develop a set of consequences, but ones that meet the misbehavior; e.g., sequence for misuse of materials is losing the privilege of using them.

For a repeat offender, the Sunday school staff is available to assist you. We may be aware of that child's special needs. Do as much as you can to build a relationship with the child: calling him, visiting him at home, making a point to learn about him and make him feel loved.