

TIPS FOR GUIDING BEHAVIOR

PREVENTION IS THE PREFERRED STRATEGY

When it comes to classroom management, I'd rather prevent a problem than deal with a problem. That, over the years, has become my stance. In other words, if it is at all possible to prevent a behavior issue, that's the route I'd prefer to take.

I believe that most children want to please the adults in their lives. However, consistently we hear that classroom management is one of the top issues faced by kids ministry leaders today. I think we have to look at the root of the problem—Why is the child acting out? What is it that would cause him to consistently misbehave?

THE WHYS OF POOR BEHAVIOR

Understanding the “why” behind misbehavior can help us know the systems to put in place that allow kids to be successful and thus prevent the poor behavior. This strategy takes time, effort, and energy, but it's worth it! Again, I'd rather work to prevent poor behavior than to deal with it. Consider some of these “whys” for poor behavior:

- **Need for more attention**—There are a variety of reasons that some children need more attention than others. At times they will do whatever it takes to get it. Giving extra attention to these children can prevent outbursts and actions that fill their needs in negative ways.
- **Masking insecurity**—The class clown may prefer to be laughed with than laughed at. Be careful not to create situations where this child chooses to hide his lack of knowledge (or maybe even his lack of ability to share knowledge) by acting out. Remember, look past the actions and look for the cause.
- **Find it hard to manage their anger**—Kids who “blow up” and are quick to “fight” may not have the skills to avoid these outbursts. Watch for opportunities to head off the poor behavior and give a child the chance to cool down and self-correct.
- **Looking for ways to be in control**—Some kids feel more secure when they are in control. They want to be the teacher and look for ways to fulfill that desire, even if it means disrupting the leader's plans. Remember that the very thing that irritates you most about these children may be the very thing God wants to use for their success. Look past the arrogance of their behavior and choose to foster their leadership potential.
- **Full of energy**—Most kids I know are full of energy. It's the way God created them and is part of His plan to help them develop. Unfortunately, many teachers ignore that fact and attempt to suppress their energy instead of joining God in His plan. It's been said that a child has an approximate one-minute attention span for every year old she is. Asking a four-year-old to sit still and listen for ten minutes goes against how she was created. Don't fight it; join it! Look for opportunities to include movement in your sessions. Move away from the tables and chairs and let the kids move!
- **Boredom**—When a child gets bored (or thinks he's bored) he starts looking for something to do. Most of the time it doesn't include the session's teaching aim. Some kids get bored easier than others and teachers need to be ready. Plan sessions that consider the children, their preferences, and their abilities. More often than not, behavior issues can be connected to the sessions we plan or fail to plan (ouch!).

MAKE BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS UNDERSTOOD

Often, kids don't live up to our expectations because they don't know what we expect. Make sure your behavior expectations are understood. If you have kids who don't understand their behavior is wrong, they won't know how to prevent poor behavior. Don't make a mile-long list of rules, but share that respect for each other is mandatory. That really covers most issues.

At the end of the day, behavior is all about knowing and understanding the kids you teach. Read and discover general characteristics, try to learn as much as you can about the kids you will be teaching, then put systems in place that will allow for success. Consider the why and then create a solution.

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