

Leader Resources: Children and Discipline

Adapted from Pre-School Sunday School Central
www.psscentral.com

Children are ready to try new things and push the boundaries of their adult authorities. Put that together with the fact that this age group is developing some pretty strong thinking skills, and you've got a mix of energy like no other age group you will ever encounter. On the other hand, there will be a handful of children who are not ready for this level of independence and experimentation, and thus you have a shy child who still longs to be with mommy and daddy constantly. For this reason, different children need to be disciplined differently. What works for one child may not work for everyone. The most important thing you can do is stay calm, assess the situation, and respond in an appropriate manner.

You have put a lot of work into planning your next big Children's Ministry event. The endless hours of preparation, and all the love that went into making this a great time for the kids seems worth it. Until...Johnnie shows up, and all your work has flown out the window. What is a person to do? Maybe your Johnnie goes by a different name. Perhaps you have a Johnnie and a Jill. As much as you love them, and you know that a Sunday School class or church event is where you would have them be, you can't help but ask, "Why me?" You have to know what type of personality you are dealing with in order to handle your wild children. According to experts there are three types of children who act out unreasonably:

1. The purposeful child. This is the really wild child, who knows that by acting unruly he will get attention, and he will keep it up until he does get attention.
2. The stressed child. This is the child who acts wild to compensate for stressors he is feeling in his life, and knows no other way to vent. This child may be having family situations at home, doing bad in school, or just needs to know that someone cares.
3. The spur of the moment child. This child will usually only act up when he is around certain groups of other kids or has had too much sugar in class. This type of child will usually be on good behaviour with only occasional outbursts.

The Behaviour/Teacher Response
Whining and complaining: Inform the child that whining hurts your ears, but you are more than willing to listen to him, if he talks in a calm voice. This not only will help the child learn that you do want to listen, but also reinforcing positive communication.

Name calling: Inform the child that he hurt another person's feelings, and that is wrong. Ask the child why he called someone a name, and explain that you understand he is angry, but you want to help him find a solution.

Blaming others: Explain that you do not care who did it, but that it needs to be fixed promptly. The child is likely afraid of punishment, so address the situation as an opportunity for the child to help fix a problem, and 'fixing' the problem will likely reveal the cause of the problem.

Distracted: (wandering, staring off)
Pick up toys before starting a lesson. Keep a routine that children can follow easily. Keep lessons and activities interesting. Encourage children to look you in the eyes when talking and listening so that you know you have their attention.

Ignoring directions: Assure the child that sometimes he will be able to make decisions, but this is a time when you are making the decisions because you are the teacher. Be sure to give children opportunity to make decisions.

Physical interactions: Explain that you will not tolerate children hurting each other. Take away classroom privileges when this happens. Also try to find out why one child is so angry with another. Do not hesitate to get parents

What Doesn't Work

Losing your temper. This is exactly the type of response that most misbehaved children know they can get from you. By getting angry, you can't help but place every ounce of your attention on that child. You are cornered. Instead, remember from Scripture, "A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control." (*Proverbs 29:11*)

What Works

- Set classroom rules, explain them to the class, and keep them posted where children can easily see them. Explain the consequences for breaking any of the rules, and stick to those consequences.
- One of the best scenarios would be to remove the child from the room, and have another staff member be available to give this child a one-on-one Bible lesson.
- Give the child a 'special' task to accomplish. By redirecting a child's behaviour to an assigned task, you are giving him a responsibility and showing that he is part of the class and can be a positive influence. This is particularly helpful with attention-seeking children.
- Talk to the child's parent(s). There is no reason to just "muddle" through a class or event because it is only a few hours one day a week. You could be missing some key information that his parent(s) can give you as to why his behaviour is unbalanced.
- Give your wild child some out-of-class attention. Send him a card or postcard to let him know that you are praying for him this week. Tell him that you look forward to seeing him in class next week. This will really help build up his self-esteem, which he may be lacking.

MY NOTES: _____

WHEN I AM FRUSTRATED BY A CHILD, I WILL REMAIN CALM BY DOING THE FOLLOWING:

WHEN I NEED ASSISTANCE IN DISCIPLINING A CHILD, I WILL CONTACT:

