

Behavior Management

Key Principles

1. Children are Foolish by Nature

“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child,” Proverbs 22:15, NIV, 1985

Therefore, we can expect foolish behavior from children in the classroom.

2. Responding to Foolish Behavior is an Important Part of Our Teaching

Since we can expect foolish behavior, we can plan how to use foolishness to train children in biblical truths we hope they will learn from our lessons. Foolish behavior fills the pages of the Bible; and it often fills the lives of our children. Why? Because foolish behavior is the outworking of foolish, sinful hearts. We enjoy good behavior from our children because it makes our jobs as teachers easier and more effective.

But, it is important to remember that our primary objective in all our teaching is to help the children learn about the Creator God, see their sinful, use their foolish behavior and our teaching as opportunities to point out their rebellious hearts, understand the consequences of their sin; and turn to Jesus as their Lord and Savior. We can use their foolish behavior and our teaching as opportunities to point out foolish behavior, its consequences and our need for a Savior. As you prepare your lesson, ask yourself: What foolish behavior do I see the people in this story exhibiting? What wise behavior? Do any of these behaviors look like the heart issues or actions of the children in my class? What questions could I ask them to help them see these issues/actions and apply them to their lives? How could I point the children to their own heart issues and their own need of a Savior through this story and the issues/actions highlighted, as well as, of course, through any foolish classroom behaviors?

3. Training and Turning of Hearts and Actions

As we address foolish behavior in our classroom, it is important to think about how we change. Any kind of training takes time, even more so the training of behaviors overflowing from sinful hearts. Since children are by nature foolish, then we need to help train them in wise behavior, encourage them to turn away from it. We need to make sure they understand how they are to act (through learning classroom rules as well as through learning biblical truths in our lessons); as well as lead them to, see their sinful hearts, ask God for forgiveness and the Holy Spirit’s help to change both their hearts and their actions. We need to be praying for the children during the week to this end. How important it is that we remember that changed behavior does not necessarily mean changed hearts! Changed hearts are a work of the Holy Spirit alone! We also should pray that God would make us gentle, wise and consistent in our training of the children.

4. Train and Turn Only with Great Compassion, Gentleness and Graciousness

Behavioral problems, especially with “repeat offenders”, can be very frustrating. It is very, very important that we only train and turn with compassion, gentleness and mercy. Not only can this often help a situation more quickly resolve (cf. Proverbs 15:1 “A gentle answer turns away wrath and a harsh word stirs up anger.”), but when we act and speak from a heart of compassion, gentleness and graciousness, we reflect our merciful and loving Father to the children. Pray that God would fill your heart with His mercy and love as you deal with any behavior issues. Then of course there’s the work that God will do in our heart and lives as we ask Him to cultivate this attitude in ourselves.

Be aware of growing frustration on your part. If you feel that you cannot speak or act towards a child with the right attitude, it would be better to leave the situation to another teacher.

5. An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Correction

out of temptation's way

When you become familiar with the children in your classroom, you will become aware of the things that typically tempt them. You may prevent many mishaps by looking over your lesson plans and classroom for situations, objects, etc. that will tend to draw out misbehavior and adjusting them accordingly. Do you have a group of especially wiggling children? Look for ways to add in more movement. Do you have some very competitive children? Change the games to be group cooperation games rather than team vs. team. Are there things in the room that regularly distract? Find a place to put them away.

working as a team

When one teacher is leading the teaching, the other teacher(s) should be actively looking for ways to facilitate focus and learning. This includes everything from noticing if the lead teacher needs a dry erase marker and bringing it to him, hold visuals, etc. to sitting next to a wiggly child, to quietly pulling aside a child who has a behavioral issue. Whenever possible, avoid the lead teacher interrupting his teaching to deal up with these issues. It will be distracting the other students and be more embarrassing to the student who is struggling.

6. The Child that Will Not be Trained and Turned

Sometimes a child refuses to change in a particular situation. Sometimes there is a pattern of behavior and heart issues that becomes apparent. In these cases, you need to be speaking to the parents about what you observe. Usually this can be done after the session during sign-out time. In extremely rare cases, you may need to call the hall monitor to page the parents immediately. Be sensitive as to whether this is a conversation that should take place in the child's presence or not. As a guideline, one time issues may be best addressed with the child present, while patterns may be best addressed without the child. If in doubt, speak to the parents privately and they can decide whether to discuss the matter further with the child present. decide whether to discuss the matter further with the child present.

General Guidelines for Behavior Issues: Children of Visitors

How Visitors Are Different

Visitors are not familiar with the class rules and may come from non-Christian families. So much of our training and turning is based on knowledge of our families, our rules and the relationship we have with the children. Since little if any of these elements are in place with visitors, they must be treated differently. On the other hand, we do not want to let visitor's bad behavior set the tone for our class, be left unaddressed, and certainly not allow harm to either children or teachers. Sometimes this makes for a tricky balance.

Special Principles for Behavior Issues of Visitors

1. Forbear as long as possible with behavioral issues of visitors
2. Use positive reinforcement as much and as long as possible
3. Try to give cues to a visiting child through a whispered comment rather than removing them for a conversation
4. Contact the parents through the hall monitor if the situation escalates and/or becomes unmanageable

Common Scenarios with Visitors

Lack of cooperation in the group

Give them two or three choices of things they can do, such as: sitting quietly, helping you, or taking part in the activity. Your goal to help the visitor be obedient in a comfortable way (given their new setting), while maintaining focus to stay on the group activity.

Disrespectful behavior or speech

Instead of taking the child aside, have a teacher come along side the child and whisper to them: "That sounded pretty unkind/disrespectful, etc. Please don't say that/do that, etc." If behavior persists, then give the child a warning that they will not be able to stay in the class if they keep on doing that. Call the parents via the hall monitor and page system, if situation escalates to an unmanageable distraction.

If they change behavior, praise them, especially in front of their parents at the end of the session.

In Praise Factory: Older and younger children from the same family want to stay together

Let the children stay together! Put them, if possible, in the group of the younger child. If the children visit consistently for three or four weeks, consider transitioning them to their own groups. You can do this best by speaking to the parents privately at the end of a session, asking them how their children are enjoying the program. If they are still feeling pretty new, leave them together. If they seem to be happy and settled, tell the parents that you would love the children to be with their own age group so that they can establish closer friends with the other children their age. If parents are happy for this to happen, ask them if they would speak to their children about this. If the children seem ready after this conversation with their parents, then go ahead and split them. If not, wait a few more weeks and reassess. It works best to put the older child in the younger child's group, since frequently the younger child's transition is more difficult and the older child will want to be with their age group sooner.

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