

Teachers Notes - Little Lamb



...Class Planner...

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Date	Workbook / Activity	Notes	Resources needed
	Adventurer's Camp		

Adventurers Club - Class List

[illegible]

Discipline in children's ministry settings

by Stephen Grunlan

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Have you noticed increased discipline problems in some of our children's ministries, especially in ministries that draw the most children from outside our church? In this day of increasing single-parent families, blended families, and dual-income families, the rising discipline problems at home carry over into the church. How do we handle discipline problems in children's ministry settings?

Preventing discipline problems

The most effective approach would be to prevent discipline problems before they occur. Following are some specific steps:

Be well prepared in three areas.

Teaching the lesson is the first area. If teachers are stumbling around or reading from a quarterly because they are not prepared, the students will lose interest and discipline problems will arise. On the other hand, if teachers are well prepared and can confidently present their lesson in an interesting manner, they are more likely to hold their students' attention.

The second area in which teachers need to be well prepared is with their material and supplies. For example, if teachers are fumbling around looking for craft materials for a craft project, students will begin to act up. However, if they have the supplies all ready and laid out in advance, the students can immediately become involved in the project. Any time teachers look for materials or supplies rather than focussing on the students, the potential for discipline problems arises.

The third area in which teachers need to be well prepared is with the equipment they are going to use. If teachers are trying to figure out how to work a VCR or how to plug in an overhead projector, they are not dealing with their students, and the students are free to fool around. All equipment should be checked out before class begins, and teachers need to be certain of how to operate the equipment. Anything that distracts teachers from their students opens the possibility for discipline problems. Being well prepared allows teachers to give their students full attention.

Have adequate staff.

The ideal staffing ratio is 5 students to 1 teacher.

This ratio gives leaders enough staff to prevent or curtail most discipline problems. When dealing with a larger group of 20 or more students, an additional helper should be available who does not carry the responsibility for any child but remains free to help with equipment, supplies, and other things needed by those working with the children. In our week-night children's ministry, we have a ratio of 1 leader for each 5 children plus a helper in each group.

Encourage and reward good behaviour.

Many times children use bad behaviour as an attempt to get attention, so when we focus on the troublemaker, we are actually rewarding negative behaviour. Therefore we should make good behaviour the way to get attention. Many teachers ignore good behaviour but respond to disruptive behaviour, thereby giving the disruptive child attention.

A more effective approach involves looking out for good behaviour and praising the child. Teachers need to reward positive behaviour. Last year one of our teachers made a kindness wall. She made paper bricks, and every time she caught a child being kind or doing something good, she would let the child write their name on a brick and add it to the wall.

Teachers need to be generous with sincere praise, with the operative word being *sincere*. While flattering adults comes fairly easily, children can see right through insincere praise or manipulation. For encouragement and rewards to work, praise must be sincere.

Lay out the rules in advance.

Teachers need to make sure everybody understands the rules in advance. Also, rules should state the behaviour we want, not the behaviour we do not want. When rules state what we do not want, they emphasize the negative. When rules state what we want, they emphasize the positive. Rather than saying students should not talk during the lesson, we should say students should be quiet during the lesson.

We also need to communicate our expectations. When students know what we expect, they are more likely to live up to those expectations. Also, if a mistake is made, we should start out too strict rather than too lenient because loosening rules is easier than tightening them later. When we tighten the rules, we are taking something away; when we loosen them, we are giving something away. Tightening rules makes us the bad guys; loosening them makes us the good guys.

Control the environment.

Have as few rows as possible. In fact, when you can, have everyone in the front row. The closer to the front students sit the fewer discipline problems arise. Also, when possible, assign seating and separate potential troublemakers. When setting up the classroom, face students away from distractions. For example, if possible, do not face them toward a window. Keep the

room bright. When it comes to temperature, cooler is better than warmer.

Set the example.

The teacher needs to set the example. If we want students to be on time, we need to be on time. Teachers need to lead the way in courtesy. Teachers need to demonstrate self-control. Teachers need to exercise patience. Teachers need to be enthusiastic. If we are not enthusiastic, why should our students be interested? Teachers lead the way with their voice and actions.

Pray.

Teachers need to ask God for help in preparation and presentation. We need to ask God to help us communicate His love and grace to our students. We need to ask God to help us be the teachers we need to be. We also need to pray for our students. While we should pray about discipline problems, more importantly we should pray that our students will come to Christ and grow in their faith. We should pray for each student by name and for each student's special needs.

Handling discipline problems

Nip problems in the bud.

The best way to deal with a discipline problem is to nip it in the bud. We will look at three techniques for nipping discipline problems in the bud. The first is to make a change. Move from lecture to discussion or question and answer. Use an audio-visual aid. Have the students engage in a learning activity. Any change a teacher can make will distract the students and may eliminate the discipline problem.

The second technique is to use the name of the student who begins to be disruptive. If the student's name is Frank, the teacher might say, "As we learned last week, Frank, Noah took two of each kind of animal into the ark." Many of the students will not even notice you used Frank's name, but he will. We are all sensitive to our name.

The third technique is to redirect the student or students beginning to act out. Ask them a question. Ask them to look up a verse in the Bible. Have them act out a scene from the story. Anything a teacher can do to redirect the student may stop the unwanted behavior. Making a change may be enough to nip problem behavior in the bud.

Steps in disciplining.

When discipline becomes necessary, follow these steps. First, explain to the child the behavior you expect. Again, emphasize what you want, not what you do not want. Second, explain the consequences of disobedience. If the child continues the problem behavior, the third step should result in the implementation of the consequences. When this does not work, the fourth step is to send the child to a supervisor or their parent. Never send children on their

own to a supervisor or parent. Always have an adult take them.

Dos and don'ts of disciplining.

First, do stay calm. If the teacher gets upset or irritated, it only escalates the situation. Also, when a teacher loses control, the child is in control. Second, do be consistent. A teacher should not be more strict when they are in a bad mood and more lenient when they are in a good mood. Rules must be consistent across students and situations. Consistency is key to effective discipline. Third, do be fair. Children have a strong sense of fair play. Nothing will undermine a teacher's authority quicker than playing favorites or not being fair. Fourth, do handle the situation positively. Once more, deal with what you want, not with what you do not want. Emphasize the positive. Fifth, do ask for God's help. As believers we have the additional resource of God's help. We need to use it.

Sixth, don't threaten. Threats do not work and make a teacher look weak. When a problem becomes evident, take action. Correct, explain, or administer consequences. Seventh, don't call children names or belittle them. Never ridicule children. Treat children with respect even when disciplining them. Eighth, don't touch or hold a child unless it is absolutely necessary to prevent harm to another child. Ninth, don't use any form of physical discipline. We live in a lawsuit-conscious age, and we need to practice the utmost care in how we deal with children.

Finally, we need to love the children to whom we minister, communicating that love in word and action. When children genuinely feel loved and accepted, fewer discipline problems will arise. Teachers need to have the same love and patience with their students that God has with us.

Adventurer Pledge

Because Jesus loves me,
I can always do my best.

The Adventurer Law

Be Obedient

Be Attentive

Be Pure

Be Helpful

Be True

Be Cheerful

Be Kind

Be Thoughtful

Be Respectful

Be Reverent

