



Friendly Baptist Church
Children's Ministry

DISCIPLINE POLICY

"He who refuses correction despises his own soul, but he who listens to reproof gets understanding." Proverbs 15:32

Discipline situations are not problems but opportunities to engage students in life lessons and to help them understand that bad decisions bring consequences. Being in a class is a privilege that is earned by following the rules. Use the following process to address discipline situations.

WARNING

When a student is disruptive, disobeys or shows disrespect, give him a warning. The best practice is to pull him aside one-on-one away from the eyes of his peers. Get on his level (as eye-to-eye as possible). Express that you care about him and want him to be in class today but explain that your class has rules. Clearly explain what the student did that broke these rules. Explain that this is his warning and that if he continues to make bad choices that you will take him to the children's minister (or children's ministry office). Being in class is a privilege he earns by following the rules. At the end of this conversation, you might even have him repeat back to you in his own words what you have discussed.

TAKING A STUDENT TO LEADERSHIP

If a student disobeys after the warning, take him to the children's minister. Don't give him a reminder or another warning. Let him see that if you say it, you mean it. Follow through with your warning as soon as he disobeys. Never send a student to the person who is set aside to enforce discipline. A leader should always walk him there.

SECOND CONVERSATION

The children's minister or children's ministry leader in charge over discipline will have a conversation such as this with your student:

"We want you to be in class but our classes have rules and for you to be in class you have to follow those rules. Right now I'm going to give you choice: Either you can stay here which means you will sit in a chair— there will be no snack, no craft, no activities for you to do. You will have no fun. You will remain with us until your parents arrive and then we will have a conversation with your parents about how you have behaved today. Or, if you are willing to obey and show your teachers how good you can be, then I'll give you one more chance to go back into your class. But, at any time today, if you disobey or disrupt your class again, then your teachers will immediately bring you back to me and you will stay here the rest of the time until your parents arrive."

AFTER A STUDENT RETURNS TO CLASS

If the leader brings a student back to your class, it is very important that you follow through with what he has been told. If he does anything else that is wrong, immediately take him back to the leader and he will remain there the rest of the day. The situation will be discussed with the parents and steps will be taken with them to help him learn how to make responsible choices.

TIPS TO KNOW

- Discipline should always be done in love and must always be consistent.
- As a teacher, do not assign consequences (i.e., put someone in time out, threaten to take their snack away...). Following this process allows you to focus on teaching and the leadership to focus on helping the student learn important life lessons through discipline.
- Never discuss consequences with a student that you don't have the authority to give or would be unwilling to assign (i.e., if you can't obey, we'll send you home...)
- You should never raise your voice to a student. If you feel frustrated or are red in the face, you have waited too long to begin the discipline process.
- You should never by-pass this process to directly contact parents. If a conversation needs to happen with the parents, it should come through the children's leadership.
- Immediately send a student to the leadership for discipline offenses that are extreme or create potential harm to others (i.e., cussing out a teacher, hitting another student, threatening someone with scissors...)
- The next time a student comes to your class after a discipline situation, express to him how glad you are he is there.

THE PRIMARY DISCIPLINARIAN

Anytime children are at church or on a church event, the primary person in charge (usually the children's minister) is to oversee discipline. If you have multiple teachers or leaders all enforcing discipline, you will have a lot of inconsistencies. For example, at children's camp one leader might assign extra clean-up while another leader simply gives a warning and another leader... etc.

Kids need structure. They need consistency. And they need love. Having one person oversee the discipline process creates consistency and also ensures that kids won't "get away" with multiple discipline issues under multiple leaders without any of them knowing that there have been previous offenses.

The person assigned to this task also needs to be someone who will be around the kids a great deal. They can't just be an "enforcer" but someone the kids see in a leadership role teaching, having fun, etc.

CLASSROOM RULES

There is a security for students when rules are established. Be up-front with children about your expectations so they will know what they can and cannot do. Establish classroom rules and then stick with the rules. You can have fun with the rules too. In Kid's Church, every week we would go over the rules towards the beginning. For example:

- "Everybody say 'G' (and make a 'G' with your arms). Give God Your Attention – Be a good listener."
- "Everybody say 'O' (and make an 'O' with your arms). Only Use Good Words – Use your words to help and encourage."
- "Everybody say 'O' (and make an 'O' with your arms). Obey Your Leaders – Have instant obedience when a leader gives you instructions."
- "Everybody say 'D' (and make a 'D' with your arms). Do NOT Be a Space Invader – Keep your hands and your feet to yourself."

Most of the time the rules were an acrostic, forming a significant words for the month. Every month we would introduce a new variation. One month we used a pirate/ship theme and the rules were:

- "Everybody say, 'ARRRR!' (and make an 'R' with your arms and squint one eye.) Respect God – Keep God first!"
- "Everybody say, 'ARRRR!' (again make an 'R' with your arms and squint one eye.) Respect Others – Keep your hands and your feet to yourself and only use kind words."
- "Everybody say, 'ARRRR!' (louder) (again make an 'R' with your arms and squint one eye.) Respect Yourself – Treat others the way you want to be treated. You are important and valuable and so is the person next to you."

Furthermore, always be specific with kids when dealing with discipline issues. If a student has misbehaved, get on their level, eye-to-eye and get the student to look you in the eyes. Explain what they did and why it was wrong. Tell them you love them and that you want them to be in your class, but to do that, they have to keep the rules. Also, it is always best to have conversations like this away from the eyes of their peers.

It is also very important to take care of discipline issues when they arise. Don't let a child get into a pattern of condoned or ignored misbehavior. If so, it will take longer to help them understand where the line is drawn for unacceptable behavior. Be clear and consistent from the beginning.

And never make empty "threats." Only say it if you mean it. In other words, if you say, "This is your last warning. If you do that again, I'm sending you to [the name of the person in charge]." The next time they do it again, without hesitation, you must be good to your word. If you are not, by your actions, you have already expressed to every child in the room that they can't depend on your words to tell them when you mean what you say and when you don't. Do you see how this greatly diminishes their personal security and obscures the lines of consistency? It also casts doubt on everything else that you say.

Being true to your word also means that you must never threaten something with which you aren't willing or don't have the authority to follow-through. For example, a sponsor at a camp should never say, "If you do that again, we're going to send you home," because as a sponsor you don't have the authority to say this. Only the children's leader or the person in charge should make this decision. Likewise, the person in charge of your program should be the only person to contact a child's parents in the event of a discipline situation. In part, this a

safeguard for the teachers, because they will never have to “take the heat” for correcting a child, but it also helps to keep the discipline fair and consistent for all. If ten different people are all disciplining to different degrees, it is impossible for two children to do the same thing and not have two different consequences.

Furthermore, as a teacher, you should never physically restrain or raise your voice to a child. If you feel you are coming to the “breaking point” and are red in the face and regretting volunteering or dreading coming to church because “that child” might be there, then you are not putting correct discipline procedures in place early enough. A child who is disruptive should get one warning and then be removed from the class to speak with the leader or children’s minister or ministry leader. And in the event of severe misbehavior (obscene gestures, cussing, the intentional harm of others, etc.), the child should be removed immediately without a warning. Removing a child from class does not mean that he can’t return later, but that’s a decision for the person in charge to make.

If you have child that makes your heart sink because you know the day is going to be a struggle because he is there, then you need to do the exact opposite of what your natural tendency probably is. Look for him. Try to see him before he sees you. Then immediately greet him and give him a high five. Take a specific interest in him. Give him attention before you cries out for it. Also, look for a way to give him responsibility in your class, something that he can begin doing the moment he comes into class. Deepen your relationship with that child. Don’t look at his misbehavior as a discipline “problem” but as an opportunity for you to specifically meet his emotional and spiritual needs. What an honor to impact just one life in this way! Imagine the difference it can make in a life when a child, who might not experience loving discipline or behavior guidelines at home, learns the life-lesson, as a child, that wrong actions carry consequences. Can you imagine how much hurt and pain he will avoid because he learned from you that love disciplines and that love is fair and consistent? That you have loved him with the love of God.

SAMPLE DISCIPLINE PROCEDURE REVIEWED

Below is a review of an effective children’s ministry discipline procedure for students who misbehave or who are continually disrupting.

Step 1—The teacher talks one-on-one with the student who is creating disruptions. He is given one warning and told the next time he will be sent to the person in charge.

A sample conversation might go as follows: “Tom, do you know why I brought you out of class into the hallway? There’s something we need to discuss. What you are doing in class is disrupting and it’s not fair to the others that they can’t learn or enjoy fun activities because you are misbehaving. Tom, I love you and I want you to be in class but we have rules and to be in our class you have to follow those rules. Do you understand? This is your warning. I am going to give you one more chance to obey, but next time you will be taken to [name of the person in charge].”

Step 2—If the child continues disrupting, he should be escorted to the person in charge. The teacher, apart from the hearing of the child, should tell the leader what has happened and what he or she has done. Then the person in charge should have a one-on-one talk with the child.

A sample conversation might go as follows: “Tom, I love you and I want you to be a part of the fun things happening here, but we have rules. You earn the right to be in class by following those rules. Your teacher has told me how you have been behaving, but I know how good you can be and I believe that you can do better than what you have shown your teachers today. So, I’m going to give you a choice: Either you can go back into class and do everything that your

teachers want you to do and obey the way I know you can or you can sit here in this chair. You will not participate in any activities— You will not have snacks and will do nothing but sit here until your parents arrive and then we will have a talk with them about what happened in class. So, what's your choice?"

If they choose to go back to class, which 95% of kids do, tell them, "When we get to your class, I am going to tell your teachers that if you do anything wrong— anything at all that disrupts your class, that they are immediately to bring you back to me. If that happens, then you will stay here. You will not be allowed to go back into class for the rest of the day and we will discuss the matter with your parents when they come to pick you up."

Step 3—The child returns to class with the understanding that he will be brought back for the remainder of the time and you will discuss the situation with his parents if he does anything else that disrupts.

This pattern, if followed, is very effective, and if there are continual issues, it will give you, as the children's minister or program leader, the opportunity to work with the child one-on-one and with his parents concerning his behavior.

However, the key here is that for this pattern to work, it must be followed. If teachers don't follow-through by warning children correctly and sending them to the children's minister when they should, instead of making empty threats or even ignoring situations, or if there is inconsistency between teachers, it will greatly diminish your overall effectiveness not only to have a smooth-running program, but also to affect these children for life in knowing right and wrong.