

HOW TO. . .correct and handle discipline problems

Discipline is positive. It is not a bunch of DON'T, DON'T, DON'Ts.

Discipline comes from the same root as disciple. It has two primary meanings: TEACH & TRAIN

Our Kids' Bible Clubhouse job is not to get kids to obey. It is to get them to want to obey. To enjoy obeying. To realize that their Clubhouse goes smoother when they are polite to each other. We want them to be part-owners of the Clubhouse, and that allowing disruption helps to wreck their own Club.

When problems arise there are 3 places to throw suspicion.

Reason #1 = The Teacher

Reason #2 = The Circumstances

Reason #3 = The Child himself

The teacher is the first culprit to suspect

Believe it or not, you and I are the major cause for our disciplinary problems. That's right, whatever goes wrong is probably due to one of these 9 reasons:

1. Poor instructions
2. Stupid rules, "The next person who speaks will be sent home."
In a tiny little voice, "Teacher, may I please go to the bathroom."
3. If you have helpers, instruct them to sit among the kids, never in the back of the room [*ok in the back row*], never two leaders within 5' of each other. Have enough helpers so that someone could tap each child on the shoulder without getting out of his seat.
4. No instructions at all, or rules with no consequences.
*Leaders don't know what steps we'll take if a kid violates a rule.
Kids don't know either, and there will always be kids who want to know where the edge is.*
5. Poor preparation or not knowing how to anticipate trouble
6. We forget to make instructions clear, "After I dismiss you, we're going to line up for snacks."
Skip the underlined words, and you can expect a dozen kids to jump up immediately and race for the front of the line.
7. We mumble, "Raise your hand if you can tell me the name of the man in the story and you'll get a Pez candy."
*Skip the underlined words and everyone might holler out the name at once, then. . . .
I buy PEZ in a 10 lb bag on-line. It will sets me back about \$30 every three years but in the long run it is cheap and special at the same time. And it lasts me a long, long time.*
8. Too many rules & inconsistent follow through.
9. No explanation for what may seem like a silly rule.
"Everyone fold your hands, bow your heads, and close your eyes. [pause] We're waiting for every eyes to be closed. We're waiting. It is time to talk to God and everyone needs to be ready to pray. We're waiting for just a few more to stop looking around. Everyone, please bow your heads and close your eyes. This is the time we talk to God. It is a very special time of quietness. God is listening." And on, and on, and on. . .

I witnessed this particular drivel go on for almost two full minutes, meanwhile quite a number of kids who had immediately closed their eyes were now peeking around to see who the offenders were. Some began to whisper questions to each other about the "peekers." Snickers began. More peeking began, yet the leader kept on with her quiet attack against the non-compliant kids who were having a ball irritating her.

Hint: just start praying. Your helpers should tap any offenders on the shoulder—get their attention—insist that they be quiet—and remove them from the class as soon as the prayer has ended if they continue in stubbornness.

9. Please make sure the kids know why you have certain rules. It might not be obvious to the newcomers.

- *I know of a teacher of a large class who had the kids make up the rules for their Clubhouse. Personally, I have generally no "rules" in a class of 20+ kids where I only have the help of 1 or 2 teens. Kids intrinsically know that the rules would be the same as in every school classroom, with the exception that you might have "only 4 on the couch," or "don't go into any bedrooms," and "nobody in the rocking chair" if you're meeting in someone's house.*

PRACTICE ALL 21 OF THESE POINTS

GREAT PREPARATION destroys 98.7% of your disciple problems *[a little known fact I just made up]*.

1. Are you well-prayed? All week long? The day of the Clubhouse? With your staff on the day of the Clubhouse?
2. Is your lesson well prepared? Have you been thinking about it all week long, or is it something you jammed together quickly the night before? Have you thought about what changes your lesson just might make in the hearts of each kid *[individually]*?
3. Were you early? Did you talk to kids one-on-one?
4. Can you keep the meeting going smoothly for an entire hour? Does every staff member know what is expected of him? Is there a lot of confusion, things forgotten, or little mistakes? There should never be more than 30 seconds of “lag time” while you’re trying to think of the next thing on the schedule.
You shouldn’t have to go to the back of the room to get the song you forgot to bring to the front, or shuffle through a pile of papers to find the quiz you’re going to give, or go out to the car to get the prize you promised, or wait 45 seconds for the one who is going to teach the verse to pick up her materials and get to the front of the room, or whistle for the person who is supposed to lead a game.
5. Have you been in gentle control or are there constant disruption and calling out of turn? Have your helpers been able to handle all the disturbances easily? Corrections should generally not come from the one who is up front. That is the duty of the helpers. You can also train your older children to correct the younger ones.
6. Do the kids know the drill for misbehaving: 1st time = warning, 2nd = no refreshments, 3rd = escort home *[or sit in another room, sit in back, call parents, no privileges, black mark, or?]*
7. Thank the cooperative *[or quiet]* ones and apologize to them for the disruptive ones. *“For those who have been helpful and polite, I’m sorry I must apologize for the kids who have been rude to you. Perhaps their parents have not taught them to be polite. I just wanted to thank you for listening hard and paying close attention.”*
This is an example of rebuking *[the offenders]* by praising the cooperative. It is a very powerful tool. Master it!
“Some of you kids have disappointed me today. Not long ago I was bragging on you to the pastor [or my wife, or my cousin] about how cooperative you are. Can you help me like that again by being very thoughtful
8. Sometimes a 5-second pause is more effective than a “stern voice, glaring eyes, and hands on hips,” or picking up a stick with a nail in it.
The only sound will be those who were whispering to each other.
This also works in the middle of a prayer when you know there are distracted kids fooling around. Stop in the middle of your prayer for 5 full seconds. Often [almost always] only the offenders will look up at you. Look at them. Just point to them with your bony finger indicating “Stop it! or I’ll smack you into the middle of next week!” Continue praying. The reverent ones don’t even know that you’ve threatened anyone.
9. KNOW THEIR NAMES! Nothing gets a kid’s attention like his name.
10. Laughing is okay, but never let them giggle together quietly.
11. Look into their eyes as though they were the only one listening to the story. Sometimes I get almost nose to nose with the ones on the front row.
12. Be fair. Don’t let the little ones “get away” with disobedience if you are going to correct the big ones for the same crime.
13. Don’t see too much. Ignore things that are not distracting other kids. A bored kid on the back row might not disturb the rest of the Clubhouse, but a kid on the front row may need to receive a gentle touch on the shoulder.
14. If you hug a kid after correction, it must be clear that you are not trying to get back in his favor or apologize for bawling him out. You are not sorry for correcting him although you may be sorry that he acted in such a way that you had to punish him.

15. Admit it when you have been wrong. You nabbed the wrong kid, made a silly rule, or weren't clear. Kids can be quite sneaky. Sometimes we correct the wrong child. The boy who knew you punished the wrong kid may have a tough time trusting you if he knows you knew you were wrong but wouldn't admit it.
16. Don't be shocked if he says something just to shock you, or he'll do it again.
17. Commend good behavior often. Look for "good behavior" in the rambunctious kids. If you have to correct a kid during Clubhouse, make a point to tell him *[after Clubhouse]* that you noticed he did a much better job after he had been corrected.
18. I separated two friends who distract each other, for a month *[older boys]*. Last week they came to me and asked if they could sit next to each other. I said yes. To be honest, I don't know how many weeks it has been. They were great!
RATS! I forgot to tell them that I really did notice how well they behaved and that I was proud of them even though BT, a much younger boy, sat next to them and was a real nuisance. I'll tell them next week, I promise.
19. Give your "troublemaker" some job to do. Once when three kids were playing "keep-away-from-Doc" after club, I got the biggest of the bunch on my side by yelling, "Hey Mark, help me get those two guys out of the room." He grabbed one and I grabbed the other, and in thirty seconds all four of us were outside. I even got to thank Mark for giving me a hand as I locked up the room.
20. Be patient. There is a lot to learn about getting kids to enjoy obeying.
21. The Quiet Seat is not for the "quietest" one. It is for the child in the kid in the second row, third seat from the end IF he/she was reasonably quiet and polite. The seat is chosen randomly. *For what it's worth. I never use a quiet seat prize, except rarely when I'm a guest speaker. I've taped a Snickers bar under that seat—but not two days in a row. If I've got a real trouble maker, I might award the Quiet Seat Prize halfway through the class, hold up a second Snickers and say, "This one will be given away at the end of the class." If there has been a dramatic turn around with the trouble maker, he gets it."*

The circumstances are the second culprit to suspect

- A. Noise and distractions may wreck their attention span. If you're meeting in a home, clear out of your meeting room all the toys and anything that will capture their attention. Close the windows, adjust the thermometer.
- B. Close the shades if they let sun shine into kids faces.
- C. Sweaty, cold, or thirsty kids can't concentrate as well.
- D. Same thing with the kid who has just been bullied right before Clubhouse.
- E. Regulars must get into the habit of going to the bathroom prior to Clubhouse, but newbies are given a little leniency. With just 10 or 15 minutes to go I deny the privilege unless I know their eyeballs are really starting to float. One of my fifth grade boys raised his hand and asked if he could go to the bathroom. I virtually always say, "No" to a fifth grader. But I said, "In the last two years you've never asked that question. Yes, you may go." When two girls say, "We have to go," permission is never granted.
- F. Make the room comfortable. Not too many on the couch. Only one on a chair. Rug squares on a wood floor. Lean against the wall. *But one of the best Kids' Bible Clubhouses I ever visited was so crowded that a kid who came late had to squeeze through the front door and slide down the wall with his back against the wall. The Clubhouse was perhaps the most fun, smoothly run, and one of the best ones I ever visited and I've visited hundreds.*

The Child himself might, of course, be the culprit

- A. A kid's home life might be rotten. He's sad, or angry, or lonely, or forgotten, or confused, or dejected, or he just wants attention from somebody. Barbara was one of those in a "blended family" with 7 kids *[the middle 4 kids in 3 grades]* and she got ignored. I asked her why she came. She said, "To cause trouble." Bad attention was better than no attention. She was honest and I loved her though I reprimanded her often.

- B. Hungry or sleepy or sick kids don't obey as well.
- C. As a rule, I've found that brothers and sisters who sit together get distracted more easily. Whether this fits under child or circumstances is moot. Maybe separate them.
- D. Kids who are hard of hearing, or forgot their glasses may not follow all your instructions. The youngest kids may not have understood all rules. Kids from very poor homes often don't pay close attention. A kid with a bruised back may fidget more than you expect him to.
- E. The younger the kid, the shorter the attention span. Try standing up to stretch when you sing just before the Bible lesson. Have a "Holler-Out-the-Answer" time in the middle of Clubhouse. Stand up, then sit down, just to get blood moving.
Confession Time: I often forget to plan to let kids stretch.
- F. Often try to have something [*besides your face*] for them to look at. Picture, poster, photo, object, Bible, etc.
- G. The "gang spirit" is powerful at the elementary level. Since kids follow the leader, be the leader they want to follow. Get the kids who are leaders on your side so that the bad kids will feel out of place when they mess around. By the way, a club idea is neater than a regular old weekly meeting. ***I often challenge my kids, "If you are really good, maybe someday God will let you become a Junior Church teacher!"***
- H. During late elementary, many problems stem from the fact that he is unsaved and you talk about right & wrong & sin every week. This age is the most "religious" age of all. He knows much about real, even hardcore, sin. He may have gotten into it himself no matter how nice he seems. Kids at this age get into profanity, theft, rebellious attitudes, as well as confirmation classes. They memorize Scripture. Their repentance is sincere, and some even become acolytes in the adult worship services at their churches.
A kid's first introduction to porn is very often in late elementary. Fill this moral vacuum in his heart with the love of God.
In a couple years the early teen will make several of the most important decisions of his life. Give the 4-6th graders many opportunities to choose to follow Jesus: habits, attitudes, church attendance, money, and a whole-hearted dedication to follow Christ. Tell them of good and bad decisions you made as his age.
I tell kids in my Junior Church kids that when I was their age I made several very important promises to God and I never broke them.
I would not use any dirty language.
I would be a missionary if He could use me.
I would marry a godly Christian girl.
- I. I have also shared some of the sins I have also committed.
- J. Bring him to Jesus, a real man, the only Savior, a good friend, a helper in tough times, and someone Who is always ready to listen. Make sure the child understands salvation and can explain it back to you clearly.
The result = the saved kid now has the power of the Holy Spirit to live inside and help him resist sin.
- K. One year at camp we had a kid named David McNutt. I caught him in five different fistfights before supper the first day of overnight camp. I thought, "We're going to get this kid saved and send him home tomorrow." Wonder of wonders! He trusted Jesus as his Savior the first evening . . . and stayed for three [*fistfight free*] weeks of camp. Wow! The power of the Spirit's working in his life. Blessings on you David, wherever you are.
- L. Learn the difference between disobedience due to forgetfulness or thoughtlessness, and disobedience due to a hard spot in a kid's heart.

"Rebellion is knowing to do right and choosing to do wrong."

- M. Older elementary kids are in the process of deciding:
- whether to study and how hard to study at school
 - what kind of friends to avoid
 - how to spend money
 - whether to avoid trouble or become trouble makers
 - if honesty is really the best policy
 - He's asking, "What girlfriends aren't good for me?"
 - to use or not to choose profanity, porn
 - which TV sitcoms are "ok"
 - what's wrong with R-rated DVDs, jokes, role models
 - What kind of standards to set for friends, morals, dating, morality, etc.
 - whether to be godly like Dad, or be nasty like Mom