



# How to Hold a Crowd in the Palm of Your Hand

by Rev. Brian R. Bopp, "B.Bopp," Children's Pastor and Traveling Children's Evangelist.

The following suggestions have been gleaned from sixteen years of holding crowds in the palm of my hand. From the smallish Sunday School class, to large events of thousands, these principles have worked and worked well. The methods are not new, as there is nothing new under the sun. However, they may be new for those who feel their crowds are getting "out of hand."



## = Authority

Speak with an assumption and attitude that YOU ARE in control of the program. This requires a high level of preparation and direction (see points D & E) but also a God-given ability to lovingly command attention and obedience. This is a somewhat mystical, yet valuable tool for ministry to children.



## = Boundaries

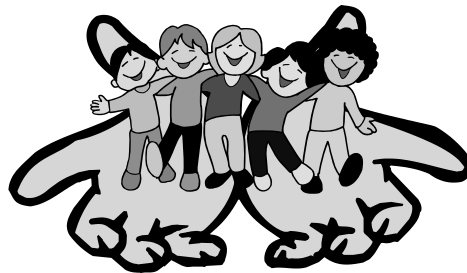
Though our society tends toward NO boundaries, the nature of children is that boundaries make them feel safe. The average child will not voice this, of course, but will certainly prefer an ordered setting over a chaotic one. What should these boundaries be? Here are the ones I have used, which I saw first with Evangelist Barry Jorris.

1. No Talkin'
2. No Walkin'
3. No Goof-Offs

I have used other rules, in

other ways, but will return to these three, which can be communicated quickly and are easy for kids to remember.

The way in which these boundaries are communicated is VERY important, lest they appear as a harsh list of "DON'Ts." Keep in mind, and express to the kids, that the reason WHY we don't talk, or walk, or goof-off, is that we don't want to disturb our NEIGHBOR. This is the applied theology of the Golden Rule, and it makes sense to children to apply it in the group setting. I repeat these rules every night of a multi-day event, with some variation and humor.



Boundaries MUST be used with reinforcement, or they are not boundaries, they're only suggestions. (See point C.)



## = Caring Reminders

THIS IS ESSENTIAL. Once you have expressed your expectations to the crowd (i.e., gone through your list of rules), YOU MUST ENFORCE THEM AT THE FIRST OPPORTUNITY!! This should NOT sound like "AHA!

YOU broke the rules!! OFF with your HEAD!" No display of anger is ever appropriate in this setting. Your admonishment should be a CARING REMINDER of the rule broken. (E.g., "I'm sorry, you must have forgotten rule number one, no talking. Thank you.") This should be delivered with a loving smile, diffusing any embarrassment on the part of the child. By jumping on the FIRST infraction you deliver a more important message to the rest of the crowd, which is; "Hey, this person will ENFORCE his rules. I guess I had better behave."

Another good line I've used when kids talk out of turn is, "Did I give you permission to speak? No. Please remember you must raise your hand for permission next time." OR, when a kid gets up to go out, I respond, "Excuse me, did you have permission to leave? No. You must have forgotten,—'No Walkin'. Please return to your seat."

What about potty breaks? For example, a kid has a hand raised; I call on him. He asks, "May I go to the bathroom?" I say, "Can you hold it?" Most often the child will nod "yes" and not ask again. If he does ask again, or looks desperate, I will allow him to go. It should be clarified from the outset that if they have any emergency, they should raise their hand and an adult will help them out.



### = Dramatic Intensity

No one deserves to be listened to if they deliver the gospel without feeling and intensity. This demands adequate preparation and skillful presentation, whether you're doing puppets, storytelling, drama, object lessons, whatever. An effectively told story can hold the attention of any group, large or small, and span all the generations. Don't allow mediocrity to let your crowd slip away.



### = Effective Time Management

Very simply put, we must command the attention of the crowd from the moment they walk into the room until they leave. This is NOT to say our material must be fast-paced, non-stop, high energy action. It is simply to say that each element of our lesson plan must flow smoothly from one thing to the next. "Dead time" is the proper name for that point when the teacher/leader says;

"Uh... let's see, what does the lesson plan say to do next...??"

"Dead time" is when the attention of the child will shift to something, and if it's not you, it will likely be mischief. Who's fault is that?

YOURS. Don't allow it to happen.

Surely there are others who do this better than I do. This article is for the many who have said these words to me after ministry, "You had us in the palm of your hand." or "I could've heard a pin drop." May the same be said of your ministry.

---

### Questions For Further Study—

1. How can you show your children in a positive way that you are in control?
2. How can you set boundaries without a harsh list of "don'ts"?
3. Name some ways you can reinforce the boundaries you have established for your children.
4. What two elements are necessary to deliver the gospel to children with intensity?
5. What must you strive to eliminate from your schedule?