



Discipline in the Early Childhood Sunday School Class

A preschool teacher spends a significant part of the class time minimizing disruptive behavior. This is a natural part of the job of teaching preschoolers.

Too often we blame the children when we can't maintain order. However, other factors—environment, schedule, and staff—can contribute to misbehavior. Evaluate your unique situation and plan ways to prevent disruptive behavior.

The Learning Environment

Overcrowding

The preschooler needs adequate space in which to learn. Thirty-five square feet per child is ideal. If you have less than 20 square feet per child, the room is working against you.

Inappropriate Furnishings

Furnishings the children are not to touch encourage misbehavior (i.e., piano, daycare equipment that is not shared, Royal Rangers and Missionettes equipment, open supply shelves).

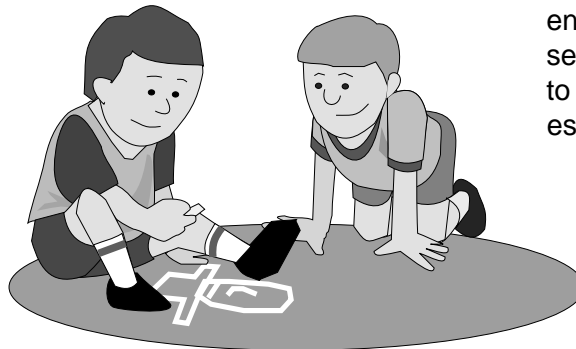
Inadequate Furnishings

The adage, "Bored children are bad children" is true in many situations. The room should be

equipped with furnishings that allow for large and small muscle development.

Inadequate Ventilation

Many preschool programs extend through the morning worship service, making the total morning nearly three hours long. Continuous air exchange will minimize disruptive behavior and the spread of airborne contagions.



The Schedule

Opening Activities

Radiant Life curriculum recommends pre-session activities rather than an opening assembly in order to involve the student immediately when he arrives. Waiting until everyone arrives to begin learning can mean losing

the class as friends pair up and become rowdy.

Modular Scheduling

It is not easy to rotate preschoolers at 20-minute intervals among several small classrooms set up with interest centers. This results in crying children who resist the transitions.

If some of the walls cannot be removed, close off a hall and allow children to flow freely among several classrooms. Each room is equipped with a teacher, and the department superintendent serves as a "floater," overseeing and encouraging children to become involved in the interest centers.

Lack of Variety

Vary your use of individual, small group, and large group activities. The art and puzzle centers provide individual activities; the book, block, housekeeping, and nature centers provide for small group activities. Worship time is a large group activity that can be followed by the Bible story told to small groups.

Lack of Consistency

When you have found a good schedule, stick to it. Preschoolers love consistency and knowing what is going to happen next.

The Staff

Poor Planning

Plan more activities than you think you will need, but avoid rushing the children through the activities.

Late Arrival

Arrive 20 to 30 minutes before the class is scheduled to begin. Be ready to direct the first child who arrives to a learning activity.

Poor Relationships

Use the pre-session and choosing time to build individual relationships with the children.

Use the child's name as you talk to him, and guide the conversation toward the Bible truth.

"Not With It"

Develop a sense of knowing what is happening in all parts of the room. Eye contact is an effective control for many preschoolers. A child will often check to see if anyone is watching before creating a disruption.

Poor Proximity

If you sense a situation has the potential of becoming disruptive, move toward it. The child might redirect the activity on his

own. If he does not, you are there to do so.

Loud Voice Level

Keep your voice level soft. Preschoolers are used to tuning out yelling, but they like to listen to a whisper.

Ratio

When there is an inadequate number of teachers, those present will spend a disproportionate amount of time merely maintaining control. Two-year-olds need a 1 to 4 ratio; 3- to 5-year-olds, a 1 to 5 or 1 to 6 ratio.

Questions for Further Study—

1. What factors can contribute to disorder in the preschool classroom?

2. List some ways you can improve your early childhood classrooms to facilitate discipline.



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