

# Discipline in the Classroom

by Lois Truman



It is our God-given privilege to work with children and help them become productive citizens in His kingdom. It is important to see children as special individuals created by God and accept them for who they are. Children who receive no discipline in life are children who are unsure of themselves and often grow up with low self-esteem. The world can be a cruel place; children need the physical and emotional security of rules and limits for their lives. Children need guidance on how to deal positively with adults and also how to successfully interact with their peers.

Too often, behavior problems between children and adults amount to a power struggle for control. A typical reaction with a willful child is for the adult to overpower the child. The false thinking is that the adult has “conquered” the child by forcing him or her to comply with the adult. Just as adults hate to feel powerless, so do children. When children are overpowered, they react in different ways. Power struggles can create distance and hostility. Distance and hostility create resentment, resistance, and/or rebellion. It is important for adults to know how to allow children to have the power to make the correct choices.

Power struggles are just that! A person will choose “fight or flight” when confronted with a challenge. Teachers need to view power struggles as a sign of a child needing to be empowered. Rather than spending energy trying to squelch the child’s spirit, the teacher can turn that energy into a positive tool that empowers both the teacher and the

child. How can teachers avoid power struggles with children? Teachers can create a win/win environment. Some ways for the teacher to avoid power struggles and teach children important life skills are as follows:

- First decide what you will do and then follow through. The key to this (and to any other technique) is to practice kindness and firmness at the same time. Place yourself at the child’s level and use a calm voice with a gentle touch.
- Be consistent with rules and boundaries.
- Say what you mean and mean what you say.

• Use positive timeouts. Instead of using timeout as a punishment, allow the child time to think about what is happening. Let children know what you want to see happen and ask if they can come up with a way they can do it. Describe choices that would create the solution you seek. A child should never be placed in timeout without having further interaction or follow-up from an adult to make sure a resolution has been reached.

• Acknowledge and describe the child’s feelings. “You are feeling upset” or “I can see you are really angry.” Especially with younger children, reframe children’s hurtful words. For example, if Adella has called you a “stupid dummy,” reframe to Adella. “You’re feeling very angry with me. Name-calling needs to stop. I know you are angry.”

• Use distraction for young children and lots of supervision until you believe the problem is gone. If disputes are over an object, hold the object until an agreement is reached.

• Ask *what* and *how* questions only after a child is calm. Ask simple yes and no questions for infants/toddlers.

• Get children involved in cooperation. Present the problem to the class if the children are old enough to use reasoning skills, and let them brainstorm for a solution.

• Restate the problem by repeating the information you know. Continue to seek a solution from the child(ren).

• Use reflective listening.

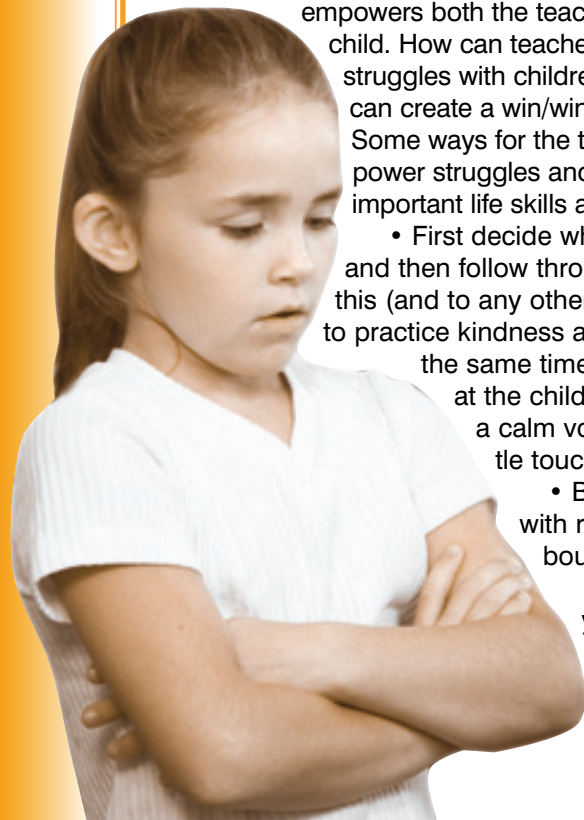
• Use your sense of humor.

• Hugs, hugs, hugs, and prayers for wisdom.

When working with children, the teacher will soon see who the leaders are and who the followers are. Sometimes, these “leaders” tend to test the boundaries. Teachers should always strive to identify and understand the cause of a child’s behavior. Besides being over-tired (the age-old excuse), a child may simply be bored or may not truly understand the expectations of the teacher. Perhaps he is trying to assert himself or receive attention. Researchers Barakat and Clark (1999) state, “True misbehavior occurs when a child chooses to behave inappropriately. Before you take action, ask yourself the following questions:

1. “Is the child really doing something wrong? Is there a real problem, or are you just tired and out of patience?”
2. “Think for a moment. Is the child actually capable of doing what you expect?”
3. “Did the child know at the time that she or he was doing something wrong?”

continued on page 2



The teacher should always get input from the child before jumping to conclusions about what she thinks is the problem. What the teacher sees or thinks is the problem may or may not be the true source of the problem. No one can instantly grasp all aspects of the event. Some things a teacher should consider from the child's perspective are:

- Is it an accident?
- Is it partially justified?
- Is it something the child(ren) can work out on his own?
- Is it getting on the teacher's nerves?

A teacher should remember how it feels to be unjustly blamed for something. Caring enough to get to the root of the issue is a loving Christian characteristic. Every action has a reaction and children sometimes do not know why they do what they do. Teachers can help children clarify their feelings and motives by building a relationship with each child so he is able to take ownership for his actions. If a child throws a temper tantrum, instead of focusing on the behavior of the tantrum (kicking, hitting, throwing, etc.), a teacher should try to understand the real focus of the anger and address that to the child according to his age level. For example, in a toddler class where a child is just becoming verbal, if a peer grabs a toy from his or her hands, the "victim" may begin screaming, crying, and kicking. If the teacher did not see the grabbing action take place, the first thing to say is, "Please use your words and tell me why you are so angry. I want to help you. Can you show me what happened?" As the teacher talks, she is allowing the child to calm down so that he then can point or say the other child's name or tell what happened. The teacher can say to the offending child, "Meghan, look how sad Hunter is. She is crying and upset. Do you know what's wrong with Hunter?" Usually, the object of the anger will surface, and one of the children will indicate what is causing the struggle. (My dolly!) The teacher can remove the disputed object, or work out a plan that is agreeable to both children.

We know children learn more readily from a nurturing person than from a harsh, judgmental person. A teacher should never be disrespectful to a child, regardless of the circumstances. One way a teacher can show respect is to show value for what a person has to say. Granted, teachers will have those children who want to challenge their authority and it is very important during those times for the teacher to remain calm but firm. Sometimes it is better to ignore a disruptive child and proceed with the activity at hand. If a teacher constantly stops to "correct" a child who is not complying with the activity, it sends a message to the rest of the group that what the one child is doing is more important than what they are doing. There will be times that teachers do need to address inappropriate behaviors, especially if the behavior is creating an unsafe environment for the children. However, teachers have a variety of techniques at their fingertips that they should use to discourage undesirable behaviors.

The first thing that must take place is for the teacher to identify the specific behavior that is unacceptable and then focus on that one area. The techniques used should be specifically designed to fit each child's needs in a particular situation. There is not one "fix-all" plan for dealing with inappropriate behavior. In fact, a teacher may have to deal with the same child in different ways throughout the class time, depending on the surrounding circumstances.

That is why this article does not list responses to use for different behaviors; children and the circumstances vary from moment to moment. A good teacher will assess each behavior as it relates to individual children and then will decide the best plan of action to take. Giving in to whining or tantrums, making unrealistic promises, making comparisons with children, shaming or embarrassing children, and failing to listen to the child's side of a story are all unacceptable practices from teachers.

Role modeling positive behavior is the most powerful tool a teacher has. The Golden Rule continues to apply to every situation, and teachers should always treat children in the way they themselves would want to be treated. This really can be done with much prayer and spiritual maturity! Be not weary in well-doing. Teachers should never underestimate the powerful influence they have on children. Children are especially observant of the interaction between adults. Often during playtime, young children can be heard mimicking significant adults in their lives. This is when the truth is revealed. Teachers will see their behaviors and attitudes mirrored in the lives of their students. Teachers absolutely have the power to set the tone for their classroom. Attitude, body language, voice sound, and facial expressions speak more to the young child than any words could say. Teachers truly are open epistles read by each child. When children feel a sense of being valued, incidents of inappropriate behaviors are greatly reduced.

Discipline should be developmentally age appropriate. A child at two needs a different kind of discipline than he will need at five, ten, and fifteen years of age. In fact, each additional year of age allows a child more control of his life. Letting a child control his life in a manner suitable to age is one more way to grow a child's self-esteem. When the emphasis is placed on not letting a child have his way, the dynamics are set up for failure because the contest of who is going to win has begun.

It is in accordance with God's plan to develop a child's high level of self-esteem. Sometimes the idea of building a child's self-esteem is confused with permissiveness. Research has documented the detrimental long-term effects of a permissive parenting style. This particular style of dealing with children is high in warmth, but low in control. All children need a certain amount of control to learn how to respect boundaries. Just as God has set boundaries and limits for our adult lives, we must teach children to respect the boundaries set for their safety and security. Without clear limits, children become confused and insecure. This combination then leads to reluctance toward accepting responsibility and difficulty in controlling impulses. This does not mean a teacher must be harsh and stern to avoid being "too easy," but rather with the control, be flexible and attentive to the child.

In recent years there is a growing trend to use an approach with children that is referred to as "child-centeredness," which means the child's interests and capabilities determine the way learning takes place. The teacher follows the lead of the child rather than the child following the lead of the teacher. This concept is difficult for teachers who feel threatened if they do not have full control of everything happening in their classrooms. These rigid teachers cannot function with spontaneity and therefore miss golden opportunities to allow true learning to take place.

# Resources



There are any number of books by Christian authors to help with classroom control and discipline. Check the local library first; an Internet search will help narrow your search (type in effective discipline, classroom control, or Christian discipline), then visit a local bookstore so that you can skim through the book before purchasing. An engine search on the Internet will offer valuable discipline points designed for secular education that will also apply to the Christian classroom; just remember to season it with the love of Jesus.

## Books

### *Discipline Guide for Children's Ministry*

By Jody Capehart, Gordon West, Becki West

With this book you'll understand and implement classroom-management techniques that work—and that make teaching fun again! From a thorough explanation of age-appropriate concerns . . . to proven strategies for heading off discipline problems before they occur . . . here's a practical book you'll turn to again and again! (Available from [www.pentecostalpublishing.com](http://www.pentecostalpublishing.com).)

## Web Sites

The following sites offer several links for helping with classroom discipline.

<http://www.family.org/> Focus on the Family site—search: discipline; results include articles, books, tapes

<http://www.csrnet.org/csrnet/articles/discipline-in-classroom.html>

<http://mintools.com/discipline.htm>

<http://www.teacherhelp.org/classroommgnt.htm>

## Summer Fun

[http://www.christianadhd.com/books\\_summer.html](http://www.christianadhd.com/books_summer.html)

This site offers several books for summer fun with your children. Share these with parents as well, for those three months that are so short to children and so long for adults.

## Patriotic

Summer is the patriotic season in North America. Celebrate your country's independence holiday in style, giving thanks always to God.

[www.orientaltrading.com](http://www.orientaltrading.com)

[www.mileskimball.com](http://www.mileskimball.com)

[www.patrioticpartysupply.com](http://www.patrioticpartysupply.com)

<http://familycrafts.about.com/od/canadadaycrafts/>  
(Canada Day)

## Web sites

Visit these Web sites for additional helps. You will find decorating and craft ideas, books and supplies, as well as practical thoughts and instruction.

[www.upci.org/wap](http://www.upci.org/wap)

for apostolic curriculum: all age levels, children's church, Spanish curriculum, links to other UPCI sites, Idea Exchange forum

[www.pentecostalpublishing.com](http://www.pentecostalpublishing.com)

for apostolic resources: books, music, literature, church supplies.

[www.kidsprayer.com](http://www.kidsprayer.com)

apostolic site for prayer: links for children and for adults; reports of prayers by children; resources for teaching children to pray.

[www.upci.net/missionaries](http://www.upci.net/missionaries)

for UPCI missionaries

[www.teachersparadise.com](http://www.teachersparadise.com)

for supplies: theme books, bulletin board art and borders, craft supplies (geared for secular education but lots of helps for church)

[www.cmmag.com](http://www.cmmag.com)

for *Children's Ministry* magazine, which is an excellent resource for teachers; subscribe at this Web site and you will be able to access their archive files for teacher training, safety issues, craft tips, and more.

Watkins and Durant, in *Early Childhood Behavior Management Guide* (1992), list eleven strategies for promoting positive behaviors.

1. Anticipate what is normal for ages and stages of development.
2. Reduce opportunities for problem behaviors, such as asking young children to sit for long periods of time or to readily share items.
3. Give children names for feelings and help them learn appropriate ways of demonstrating emotions.
4. Remember that young children cannot delay gratification of needs in the ways that adults often do.
5. Avoid overtiring or overstimulating children or placing them in fear-producing circumstances.
6. Do not expect children to move quickly from one activity to another without a transition.
7. Permit age-appropriate choices.
8. Model good behavior for children.
9. Make your expectations for children's behavior clear.

10. Before children violate rules they should clearly know what the consequences will be.

11. Provide lots of positive reinforcement for children's appropriate behavior.

We all probably have one or two misconceptions about children's behaviors. There are many philosophies and ideas about right or wrong ways to deal with children. Five of the most common areas of misconceptions are:

1. **There are good and bad kids.** This is absolutely false! Some children are overwhelmed with their life experiences and manifest their confusion and frustration by using inappropriate behavior. These children are the very ones for whom Christ died! When we seek God's guidance, He can give us the genuine love that is necessary to help them work through their issues.
2. **Without regular spankings, children will become spoiled.** This is also a false notion. The "spare the rod" theory is taken out of context. Any type of

*continued on page 2*

# Seasonal Ideas



## Summer Cupcakes

Frost cupcakes with light blue frosting. Place a gummy ring (or any other candy that looks like an inner tube) in the center. Stand a Teddy Graham in the center of the ring so he appears to be floating in water. Enjoy!

## Ice Cream in a Bag

(by Sherri Osborn)

1 Tbsp sugar	ice
½ cup Half-n-Half	1 pint size zipper bag
¼ tsp vanilla	1 gallon size zipper bag
½ cup rock salt	

Combine the sugar, Half-n-half, and vanilla in the pint size zipper bag and seal tightly. Combine the ice and rock salt in the large zipper bag. Place the small bag inside of the larger bag and seal. Shake the bag until the mixture turns into ice cream! This will take about five minutes. (You may want to wear gloves.) Add sprinkles, candy, nuts, or fruit and enjoy!

## Watermelon Tambourines

2 sturdy paper plates per student	red/green/black crayons
dried beans	hot glue or stapler

Optional: Sunflower seeds

Have students color the edge of the paper plate green (rind), the inner section red, and draw black seeds in the red portion. (Optional: Glue on sunflower seeds for 3-D effect.)

Place a handful of dried beans in the center of the plates and staple or hot glue edges securely.

Make a juicy, joyful noise unto the Lord!

## Fun Flip-Flops

Bible time characters generally wore sandals, but today's flip-flop craze takes footwear to a new level.

Purchase a \$1 pair of flip-flops for each student. Cut 6" x ½" strips of any colorful cotton material (the brighter the better). Let students tie strips onto flip-flop straps. Double knot each strip and push together tightly for a fuller look.

Optional: Use balloons (deflated) instead of cloth strips.

## Ice Cream Reward

As an optional attendance, memory work, or other special project chart use one of the following.

## Ice Cream Cone

From brown construction paper cut one ice cream cone for each student. As each weekly goal is met, add a construction paper scoop of ice cream to the cone. At the end of the contest/project, serve ice cream cones as a reward.

## Banana Splits

From construction paper cut a banana split boat for each student. As goals are met, add three construction paper scoops of ice cream; strawberry, pineapple and chocolate syrup; cherries, and brown construction paper confetti for nuts. At the end of the contest/project, serve banana splits.\* (Challenge Option: Students get a real banana split made according to the one they earned on paper.)

\*Be aware of any food or nut allergies.

continued from page 3

harsh punitive punishment creates a sense of lower self-esteem and actually does more harm than good. Spanking a child is sometimes necessary within the appropriate setting and context; however, it should never be done in anger. Beating a child is and always has been wrong.

- 3. Shaming a child, especially in the presence of others, also results in the loss of self-esteem and confidence.** Shame and guilt are similar issues, but should never be used to exploit a child or make him feel devalued. Even as sinners coming to Christ, there is a sense of love, mercy and acceptance. We teach repentance as an act of grace, not as an opportunity to pound a person lower to the ground.
- 4. Boys are bullies and girls are ladies.** Teachers need to avoid gender bias and work toward treating all children equally. Aggressive behaviors are exhibited by both girls and boys, and many boys practice behaviors of gentlemen. Teachers must resist stereotyping children and should not show preferences for one gender over the other.
- 5. Some kids are troublemakers.** Children mature at different levels and learn to use their energies in different ways. Labeling certain children as troublemakers is neither kind nor Christ-like. Teachers should assess what the true source of contention is that

causes the trouble and work with the child(ren) to change the situation. Children can devise amazingly creative solutions to problems. Teachers should refrain from intervening too soon in children's problems and allow them time to come up with a solution between themselves.

Teachers can remember that the joy of the Lord is their strength! When dealing with issues related to behavior of children, the teacher can experience joy! There are many resources available on the topic of behavior and guidance for children, but none is effective without the genuine presence of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide in every situation. Nothing is too difficult for a prayed-up, Holy Ghost-filled teacher who is full of the love of God!

## References

*Positive Discipline and Child Guidance*, Ibtisam S. Barakat and Janet A. Clark, (2001), Human Environmental Sciences, University of Missouri Columbia.

*Complete Early Childhood Behavior Management Guide*, Kathleen Pullan Watkins and Lucius Durant, Jr., (1992), The Center for Applied Research, West Nyack, NY 10995.