

Bible Lessons for Children
Learning to Know the Triune God through His Holy Word
By Tamarie Tigh

Group Management

Environment: Setting an environment that promotes student learning is very important for class management. Students that are fully engaged in the learning process are less likely to be disruptive. Students that are bored, idle, and waiting for the next activity are more likely to occupy themselves in an unacceptable manner. Therefore, it is imperative that the instructor is prepared, knowing exactly what comes next, moving quickly from one activity to another, having materials laid out ready for use, and including students in the process. Posting the daily schedule for children to follow can help students to feel more relaxed since they know what to expect next. Children tend to feel safer and more comfortable when they understand and follow a routine, resulting in a more cooperative and helpful attitude.

Expectation & Attitude: Children generally try to meet the expectations set for them by the adults in their lives (unless they have been repeatedly informed that it is impossible for them to do so by continuous negative feedback). So, the instructor must be careful to portray a positive attitude about each activity within the lesson, making clear the expectation that students will fully participate and enjoy the experience. Students will reflect the attitude of the instructor. An interested, enthusiastic instructor will have interested, enthusiastic students. Beware, the reverse is equally true; students will also mirror boredom and disinterest.

Agreements: Children need to know the expectations concerning their behavior. This is most successful if it is approached as a set of agreements to which everyone adheres. The golden rule should be the standard for these agreements. *“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”* (Matthew 7:12 King James Version) Agreements should be short, positive, few in number, and enforceable. The agreements should be posted for all to see, should be reviewed occasionally, and should be referred to when necessary. Following are some possible agreements:

- Treat others with respect.
- Obey authority.
- Listen attentively.
- Follow instructions quickly.
- Take responsibility for yourself.
- Make smart choices.

Recognition: All people want to be recognized for their accomplishments and appreciated for the things that they do well. Instructors should recognize students that are following instructions and behaving properly. This recognition can be simple and woven throughout the lesson. Use of students' names in this process is very important. Examples: *“Jane, thank you for sitting so quietly.” “Great job, John; you followed the instructions wonderfully.” “Carlos, you were the first one to get ready for Bible Reading; thank you for moving so quickly.” “Maria, you showed great kindness when you helped your little sister.”* This positive reinforcement sets an upbeat atmosphere, focuses students on correct behavior, and encourages other children to strive to earn praise as well.

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Controls: Sometimes children have difficulty focusing and staying on task. There are some simple tactics that instructors can use to help control situations. For controls to work, instructors must maintain awareness of students' actions and respond accordingly.

- To stop incorrect behavior, make eye contact with distracted students and/or move close to them.
- To re-direct students, request them to perform simple tasks or ask thought provoking questions.
- To bring attention back to the task at hand, use students' names.
- If children appear to be extremely disruptive, take a brief break to stand and stretch.

When it is necessary to get the attention of the entire group, use pre-planned silence signals. It is best to have 2-3 signals that can be used interchangeably so as to remain fresh.

- Clap: Leader claps a beat or rhythm until all students have joined in the clapping.
- Class/Yes: Leader says, "Class." Students respond, "Yes" in imitation of the teacher (Sing-song, 3 times in a row, whisper, etc.)
- Count Down: Leader counts down 5-4-3-2-1 shhhh.
- Eyes On: Leader says, "1-2-3-eyes on me." Students respond, "1-2 eyes on you."
- Hands & Eyes: Leader says, "Hands and eyes." Students fold their hands and look at the leader.
- If You Can Hear: Leader says, "If you can hear me, clap one (twice...)." Students clap.
- Peace Sign: Leader makes the peace sign and places finger over lips until all students join in.

Consequences: Prevention of wrong behavior is preferable to the need to discipline wrong behavior. Following the advice in the preceding paragraphs should set an environment, expectation, and attitude for learning that will involve students in a positive experience. However, if a child chooses to misbehave, it may be necessary to implement consequences. The instructor must be very careful to assess the situation to determine exactly what happened and to fit the discipline to the offense. Children should not be disciplined for accidents, personalities, ignorance, or opinions. Did the child intentionally do something that the child knew to be wrong? Only if the answer is yes should the child be disciplined.

In most cases it is wisest to document the incident, inform parents, and allow them to deal with the situation as they see fit. For simple infractions, there are consequences that can be administered during class, such as having the student write a note of apology to the injured person, having the student write the agreements as a reminder, having the students sit out of the activities for a short space of time, or having the student explain verbally or in writing why the behavior is unacceptable. The goal of discipline is repentance. Therefore, giving the child an opportunity to apologize and to be forgiven is imperative.