

## GUIDING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR: DISCIPLINE POLICIES

*"Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flows the springs of life." (Proverbs 4:23)*

Part of shepherding the children whom God has placed in our midst is discipline. Inevitably, there will be situations that arise when a child needs to be disciplined. The following guidelines have been adopted to direct children through this process.

### General Guidelines:

- **Appropriate interactions and expectations** will reduce the incidence of behavior problems. Check the environment, are children being "set up" to misbehave? Sometimes, simple changes such as a change in the room structure can help steer the children towards appropriate behavior.
  - Example: If a child continues to play with the toys on a shelf during story, turn the shelves around so they face the wall.
- **Make sure children know expectations for behavior.** Expectations need to be stated clearly and simply. Make eye contact when you speak.
  - Example: "Right now, we are listening to the story. You need to sit right here and look this way."
- **If inappropriate behavior occurs, state expectations and consequences.**
  - Example: "Blocks are for building, not throwing. If you throw the blocks again, you will not be allowed to use them."
- **Follow through with consequences.** Children will learn quickly they need to obey when you follow through every time.
- **Observe the child's behavior.** What is causing the behavior? Are the child's needs being met? If so, is there a sin that needs to be addressed?
  - Example: During story time, a child continues to talk even though you have directed him to sit quietly. Is it an issue of disobedience or has the story been extended beyond a practical amount of time?
- **If inappropriate behavior persists, you may need to separate the child from the group or situation for a quick time-out.** Time-outs should be one minute long for each year of the child's age (i.e. 4 minutes for a 4-year-old). A chair for a time-out should be placed in an unused area of the room, away from other children.
- **Communicate with the parents** when they pick up their child if it was necessary to use a time-out or other discipline.
- **Bring them back to the gospel!** Why are they doing what they are doing? We are all sinners in need of the saving grace of God! Take this opportunity to share with the child (at their level) the fact that they are sinners in need of that grace. Then pray with them for forgiveness and a changed heart.
- **If the child's behavior does not change, have an adult find the parent.** The parent should take the child from the room for appropriate discipline. It is the discretion of the teacher if the child may return to the class.

- **For persistent problems**, please contact the Student and Children Ministries Coordinator to discuss options and appropriate methods of behavior management.
- **Remember to extend grace to the child.** It can be easy to let previous behaviors affect the current situation. Aren't we glad God doesn't do that with us? This is a great opportunity to demonstrate the love and forgiveness of our Lord.

### **Appropriate Interactions:**

- Encourage the child to learn and grow in faith. Respect each child's learning style as he/she responds to the information you are giving them.
- Treat each child under your care equally, giving equal opportunities for special favors or responsibilities.
- Respect each individual child.
- Catch the child in good behavior and encourage him/her. Send notes home informing parents of good behavior.
- Maintain an orderly classroom without controlling it. Lead the child into cooperation for the benefit of all to learn.
- Protect each child from shame or humiliation from either adults or other children.
- Avoid kisses, massages, bear hugs, and contact with private body parts. Any physical contact with a child should be done with doors open and/or in front of others.
- **Words of praise and encouragement are the best way to communicate God's love, and your support and respect for a child.**

### **Inappropriate Interactions:**

- Physical discipline (examples: spanking, grabbing arm or chin, etc.).
- Verbal or emotional manipulation (i.e., silent treatment, withholding bathroom privileges, causing shame, embarrassment, and/or humiliation)
- Sexual manipulation (i.e., sexualized hugs, strokes, and/or kisses for good behavior, etc.)
- An adult blaming a child to justify the adult's inappropriate behavior.
- A particular child singled out for excessive discipline.
- A child told or threatened not to cry or tell anyone.