

Children's Ministry Classroom Management

Steve Alley

Introduction

Classroom management is all about creating an environment that facilitates enjoyable learning. As teachers or team members, we control that environment! We decide what that environment will “say” to the children when they walk into our classrooms. That environment will either say, “Hi, come in, I’ve created a great learning environment for you today,” or “Hey, what’s happening? I don’t know what’s happening either. I hope the time goes quickly because neither of us really want to be here.” Both of those “messages” to the children effect how they behave during class!

Educators and child development experts all agree that children will rise or fall to the level of the realistic expectations placed on them. God works the same with us. He tells us that He will never expect more out of us than we can handle (1 Cor. 10:13), but He also challenges us to “be holy” (1 Peter 1:16). God’s expectations match what He offers to us. He challenges us to be holy, and He offers us His power and strength (Philippians 4:13).

We, in Children’s Ministry, are like God. We set standards and are there to assist the children in meeting them. We “struggle” with the sinful nature of our children, and we set boundaries to assist them in controlling those natures. We also understand that “satisfied sheep don’t roam,” so we do all we can to care for the needs of our children.

There is no “magic bullet” for classroom management. Every child is different, and every child responds to classroom management techniques differently. A good teacher gets to know each child and makes minor adjustments to the techniques for each child. But, consistent, “standard” rules or expectations must exist in each classroom, regardless of the personal differences or “needs” of each child.

The Challenges

1. We have a vision and passion for teaching that is “thwarted” by learners who disrupt, challenge, or disconnect from the lesson.
2. Children are not naturally interested in the “deeper things” of life or God – we must attract them to it.
3. Many “untrained” efforts to “control” the class may actually produce anger or frustration in the learners, which ultimately works against “classroom management.”
4. An “out of control” class may drive children away. They may not want to return. The Gospel message, or expressions of God’s love may be stopped by a lack of “classroom management” skills.
5. Today’s children don’t naturally respect teachers or those in authority. We must “earn” that respect.



Enemies of Classroom Management

1. A “boring” teacher (not fun, not personal, not happy, not exciting)
2. A “prison” environment (too many rules, no freedom, adults as “guards”)
3. Disconnected lesson (not related to the child’s age or world)



Classroom Management And The Needs of The Children

There is a basic principle of discipline or classroom management that says, “If a child is ‘satisfied,’ he/she will be less apt to behave inappropriately.” The challenge of “satisfying” a child’s needs falls on the shoulders of the teacher. If a teacher is “lesson-focused,” and doesn’t care for the needs of the children, the children recognize that quickly and will “rebel” against that teacher or environment. A good teacher asks, “What does that child need?” and then proceeds to satisfy that need. Some basic needs of today’s children are:



- **Attention**
- **Touch**
- **Freedom**
- **Significance** (feeling important, valued, etc.)
- **Boundaries** (realistic, consistent, positive)

How To Create A Controlled Learning Environment (Before The Children Arrive)

1. The “Before Class Checklist”
 - ✓ **Tables Ready** – chairs set, materials placed, pencils sharpened
 - ✓ **Materials Ready** – all handouts sorted and separated, craft is punched out/ready, teaching aides punched out/ready, A/V tools ready.
 - ✓ **Whiteboard Ready** – rules, memory verse, table points, anything related to the lesson
 - ✓ **Sign-in Table** – all materials out and ready, name and date on sign-in sheet, coloring page for students as they enter
 - ✓ **Lesson** – read and understood, memory verse chosen (if not using the one given)
2. Control your classroom – “manage” your environment
 - a. **Set expectations** – same rules every week.
 - b. **Be consistent** – consistency will prove that you mean business and they will know exactly what is expected of them.
 - c. **Positive reinforcement** – make an example of the students that listening and doing exactly what you asked.
 - d. **Correct poor behavior** – if a student is being particularly distracting to you or another student, something needs to be said.
 - e. **Prizes** – table with the most points gets a prize, or stellar students get a prize.
 - f. **Engage students in the lesson** – have them answer questions, act out parts, put the pictures on the board, raise your hand if you...
 - g. **Relate the lesson to the students’ lives** – it will be more interesting if it pertains to them. This isn’t adult stuff; this is kid stuff.
 - h. **Be prepared** – know what you’re teaching before you walk in the room. Believe it or not, they can tell. Being prepared shows you care and know what you’re doing.
 - i.



How To Create A “Flow” of Activity That Doesn’t Lag

1. Plan ahead!
2. Pray ahead!
3. View your class time as a sequence of learning moments, rather than a series of time-fillers.
4. Take them from “I don’t care,” to “I can’t wait to apply this!”
5. Craft an objective for the class – “When they walk out, I want them to say, do, or feel...”
6. Be careful of “bird walks” unless those walks satisfy the learning objective.
7. Keep moving!
8. Remove “dead time”



The Dangers of “Free Play” and How To Create “Controlled Play”

1. “Free Play” translates to an “uncontrolled” environment, which degrades “classroom management.”
2. “Free Play” with involved team members can be valuable in establishing relationships.
3. “Controlled Play” involves fun, activity, and interaction with a lesson-focused purpose.
4. Steps to “controlled play”
 - a. Plan ahead
 - b. Pray ahead
 - c. Ask yourself, “What does this have to do with the lesson?”
 - d. Prepare the children for the “controlled play” time – set goals, set boundaries, challenge with a question, strategically interact with the children during the activity, challenge them with lesson-focused “debriefing” afterwards.
 - e. Set a limited time for the activity, stop short. Too little time is better than too much time.



How To Deal With A Disruptive Child In A Non-Disruptive Manner (Positive Reinforcement)

1. Table points
2. Prizes
3. “Thank you, _____ for _____.”
4. “I love the way _____ is _____.”
5. Thumbs up if you...
6. You say, “Eyes Up,” they say, “Voices off.”
7. You say, “One, Two,” they say, “Eyes on you.”
8. Clap a pattern, they repeat
9. Put your finger on your nose when you’re done
10. Hands on your head
11. Say, “Oh no, you’re breaking rule #1, show respect, please make a better choice.”
12. Say, “This is your second warning, I hope you don’t have to move. I would love it if you could sit with your friends but you have to show me you can handle sitting with your friends.”



Regaining Control After A Lively Activity

1. Give instruction to “sit down,” “quiet down,” once.
2. The use of “transitional voice” (softer, calmer) – “That was fun, wasn’t it, (child’s name who is sitting down, or giving you attention)”?
3. Begin the next activity without repeatedly saying, “Shhhhh” or “Stop talking.”
4. “Raise your hand if the person next to you isn’t paying attention.”
5. Change the setting – “Come sit over here on the floor with me”
6. Change your location – talk from the back of the room, etc.



Online Resources

1. <http://www.theteachersguide.com/ClassManagement.htm>
2. <http://www.nea.org/tools/ClassroomManagement.html>
3. <https://www.edutopia.org/search?query=Classroom%20Management>