



Tips for Managing a Group of Kids

Kids are fun, and kids have energy! Whether you are a group guide, a classroom teacher, or an assistant, be prepared to confidently lead them using some strategies that follow.

Attention Getters

Call and Response—The teacher teaches the kids that when she says something, they reply back with something else. Practice the following ideas so they know your expectations for responding to them.

- » **Teacher:** Blackbeard the pirate.
Kids: Everybody quiet.
- » **Teacher:** Mystery.
Kids: Island.
- » **Teacher:** Ahoy, mateys!
Kids: Aarrgh!

Rhythm Claps—The teacher claps a little rhythm and the kids try to clap the exact rhythm back. Vary the clapping patterns.

Countdown—Hold up five fingers and start to count down from five to one. By the count of one, they need to be completely quiet.

Soft Talk—Start talking about something important very softly, or in a whisper. They will often get quiet to hear what you are saying.

Flash the Lights—This is a good signal to listen up.

Lining Up and Walking Through the Building

If You . . .—Say different categories for lining up in fun ways, such as the following:

- » “If you are wearing red, line up. Now, if you’re wearing blue, line up.”
- » “If your birthday is during the summer, line up. Now, if your birthday is during the school year, line up.”
- » “If you have a dog, line up. Now, if you have a cat, line up. Now, if you have no pets, line up.”
- » “If your first name starts with A–L, line up. Now, if your first name starts with M–Z, line up.”
- » “If you are quiet, line up.”

Let’s Be . . .—When you are leaving a room, encourage good behavior in the hallway by making a game out of it. This works well with younger kids.

- » “Let’s be mice and walk as quietly as we can.”
- » “Let’s be robots. No talking—just stiff movements.”

Proactive Tips

Be Prepared—One of the best ways to ward off discipline problems is to be prepared. If you have things well organized and have thought through your day so there isn’t downtime, it really helps. Keep things moving! This takes more time on your part, but is very worth it.

Active Participation—Keeping kids actively engaged in the lesson is perhaps the best thing you can do to keep the class from getting rowdy. The lessons are written to be creative, fun, and full of active participation. Play the games, act out the Bible accounts, and do the other ideas listed. Occupy kids’ minds and attention with good stuff!

Helpers—Involve the kids. Let them be helpers. Some kids just want to feel wanted, so giving them a responsibility is a way to show you trust them. Try putting them in charge of a simple task like filling out the attendance roster as kids come in to VBS, collecting name tags, carrying crafts, helping others learn memory verses, passing out papers, or holding a poster for the teacher. Sometimes a simple task can keep them busy and make them feel important!

Pray—Some kids may never have had anyone pray for them. Pray not only about behavior situations, but also about their eternal souls.

Notice the Good—Sometimes a poor behavior is an attention-seeking device, so be proactive and give attention to that child so she doesn’t feel the need to act out negatively. Negative behaviors can be a cry for love and attention.

Use Humor—Kids of all ages love to laugh! Have fun together. If you see a situation is getting tense or a child is getting upset for some reason, try thinking of a way to lighten the mood with humor.

Distraction—When young kids are dropped off or start to cry, distracting them is a good technique to try. Ask them to tell you about something on their clothes (“Oh, what’s that on your t-shirt?”), get them talking about some of their favorites, or show them an intriguing toy or puppet.

Keep Them Busy—If there is any downtime, fill it with something productive! This could occur while waiting for the next rotation or the assembly to begin, if craft time ends a few minutes early, etc. Use the time to find treasure chests, practice team cheers, or go over memory verses in fun ways (make up motions, make them into a rap, etc.). You may also want to play a quick game, like one of the following.

- » **Stone Face**—Have a competition to see which child can hold a frown for the longest without cracking a smile.
- » **I Spy**—Look for island things to spy out.
- » **Simon Says**—Simon can say Bible-themed things, like: Read your Bible (hands in front of you making a book), pray (praying hands), tell others (cup hands around mouth), go to church (make a church with a steeple out of your interlocked hands), etc.
- » **Quiet Mouse**—Have a competition to see who is the quietest in line.
- » **Follow the Leader**—Play the normal version or an island version. An island version uses island animals and activities, like the following:

Fly like a macaw.

Swim like a shark.

Move like a jellyfish.

Go windsurfing.

Ride a surfboard.

Dig for clams on the beach.

Calming Rowdiness

Don’t Yell—Kids may respond at first if someone yells, but they eventually dismiss it. Try some of these other ideas instead.

Separate Kids—Separate kids who misbehave around each other, but also encourage problem-solving when possible. “What are some things we could do to help you and ___ get along?”

Give Choices—Avoid power struggles by giving choices. If a child is resistant to doing something you’ve asked of her, try your command another way. “You can either sit with the rest of the group and listen to the teacher or sit with ___ (leader’s name) at the back of the room.”

Praise in Public, Correct in Private—If someone does need correction, be careful not to embarrass him in front of his peers. If you need to talk to a child about a misbehavior, pull him aside at a time when the rest of the group is distracted. Kids will be less defensive if they don’t feel they have to “save face” in front of their peers, and if they feel you really care and aren’t just coming down on them.

Know Church Policies—Know your church’s policy for severe behavior issues. Do you take the child to your VBS director? Do you alert the child’s parents? Do you involve other staff members? Be prepared.