



# TIPS FOR GUIDING BEHAVIOR

## GAIN PERSPECTIVE

Discipline (and disciple) originally comes from the Latin word *disciplina*, which means “instruct or teach.” Therefore, in its best sense, to discipline is to guide or lead by teaching. Our optimal goal in discipline is that a child will become “self-disciplined” and equipped to make better choices when faced with dilemmas related to behavior. Scripture has a lot to say about discipline. To help you gain perspective about communicating with children in order to “guide their behavior,” consider the following passages:

- Psalm 94:12-13a
- Proverbs 3:11-12
- Proverbs 15:5,31-32
- Hebrews 12:7-11

## START WITH SELF-DISCIPLINE

Many times, we as leaders can prevent many of the behavior challenges we face by changing our own behavior and approaches. Keep the following areas in mind as you begin to discipline yourself:

- Know and understand children. Children are not miniature adults when it comes to symbolic vs. literal thinking and attention span.
- Spend time in prayer for the children you will lead and for your own attitude. This may help you see each child through the eyes of Jesus.
- Plan ahead. If you do not have a plan, the children do. Once the children’s plan goes into action, it is difficult for even the best teachers to catch up.
- Prepare the environment. Having too much equipment in the room can cause behavior challenges. Make sure the equipment in your room is safe and complements the age of the children.

## DEVELOP TECHNIQUES FOR GUIDING BEHAVIOR

The ultimate goal in discipline is to develop self-discipline within each child. Although your time with children during VBS may be short, the following practical tips can help you accomplish this goal.

- Establish and maintain boundaries consistently and fairly. State what a child is or is not allowed to do and only state directives that you plan to enforce.
- Use positive, clear suggestions. Children do not do well with multistep directions. Keep guidelines and instructions simple and to the point.
- Give options. After instructing the child that what he is doing is not acceptable, give him two different positive choices from which to choose.
- Listen to a child when he talks. Model respect and good behavior with your actions. Listening to what a child has to say makes him feel accepted and secure.
- Deal with problems immediately. Children truly have the ability to forget what the crime was when the consequence is delayed too much.
- Separate the child from his actions. We need to love children unconditionally just as God loves us unconditionally. Let the child know that, although you are not pleased with his behavior, you still like him.

## TAKE STEPS TO CORRECT UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR

Once you have the techniques in place for guiding behavior, you need to be sure to take action in correcting unacceptable behavior immediately. The following basic techniques can help you keep things running smoothly as you guide children.

- Get the child's attention. True communication only takes place when eye contact is made. Stoop, sit, or do whatever is necessary to get on the child's level.
- Make the child aware of his need to change his behavior in a positive manner. This may be a simple look or nod in the child's direction, or you may just need to come and stand in close proximity for a child to be aware of his behavior.
- Only give directives you plan to enforce. Omit idle threats.
- Offer options to help redirect behavior. Children need practice in making choices. Consider stating more than one way in which a child can change his behavior.
- Remove the child from the group so that he can still see the "fun" going on, but others in the group cannot hear what is being said. Go into the hallway, but never go to a private place out of the view of others.
- Seek the help of an authority figure, such as the VBS director or pastor.

## REACH YOUR GOAL

Successfully guiding children's behavior requires good planning on the part of the leader and a positive strategy to get results. The key to a quality learning environment is discipline on the part of the leader(s), and a good understanding of how children are wired by God and how they learn.

*This handout is adapted from Kid's Discipline 101 by Jerry Vogel. Jerry was the father of 4 and grandfather of 13. He taught preschoolers on Sunday morning with his wife, Janie, at Brentwood Baptist Church, Brentwood, TN.*