

GRACE-BASED CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT MINISTRY GUIDE

by Jared Kennedy

Start With An Inventory of Your Classroom Environment

Grace-based classroom environments are filled from top to bottom with the gospel of the Savior. Take an inventory of your classroom environment, how well does it align with the traits below?

- **Sin-Aware.** We don't pretend that kids are basically good and just need a little direction. Instead, we expect absolutely everyone (including ourselves) to arrive with big problems only Jesus can fix.
- **Delighting in Jesus.** We won't let kids use Jesus to get something else they want more. We don't approach teaching, prayer, and worship as things to be done because they're important and necessary—after which we turn to more 'fun' activities when it's time to enjoy oneself. Rather, we communicate that nothing is more enjoyable than Jesus.
- **Grace-Aware.** We celebrate and model the work of Christ for us and in us, and we give God the credit for every good change that happens in a kid's life or our own life. We expect God to bring growth. This creates a place of mercy and openness, because, when God gets the credit for spiritual progress, there's no need for either one-upmanship or defensiveness, only deeper faith.
- **Focused on the Heart.** We're never satisfied with merely manipulating outward behavior, but instead we recognize that kids who look obedient still need Jesus. We don't let either rule-keeping kids or rule-breaking kids use their behavior as a way to avoid Christ. We seek heart-level growth in both.

9 Key Strategies for Creating a Stable Environment

The effective formation of our children requires a stable environment. For this reason, it's important for a children's ministry to supplement parental training by upholding high standards for behavior, respect, and discipline. I hope these four goals and nine strategies are helpful for you to that end.

1. Be well prepared and organized.
2. Give clear expectations.
3. Be consistent.
4. Model the way.
5. Praise children for good behavior.
6. Give the reason for the why behind the what.
7. Have a strategy for involving parents when a child persists in negative or disruptive behavior.
8. Don't motivate by comparison.
9. A few DON'T'S: No children's ministry leader should ever use corporal punishment. Spanking is not appropriate for someone else's child. Also, never ridicule, humiliate, or deny a child food or drink.

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MANAGING PARTICULARLY DISRUPTIVE OR PERSISTENT NEGATIVE BEHAVIORS

What should you do when a child is acting in a particularly disruptive or persistently negative way?

1. The teacher or classroom helper should clearly and gently identify and explain to the child the inappropriateness of his behavior, and offer instruction regarding the correct way to conduct himself.
 - Walk to or stand by a child who is being disruptive.
 - Make eye contact with child. Get on their level. Know their name & speak their name as you speak to them about their unruly behavior. “Johnny, we don’t throw paper airplanes during the Bible story. We’ll stand up & play games soon, but right now is a time to ‘give me five.’”
 - With younger children, redirect the child to a new activity, giving the child a choice of two options: (“Billy, would you like to play with a truck or a ball?”)

2. If a negative behavior continues, use a time-out. In our children’s ministry, we ask our teachers to make sure the child is away from other children and classroom activity. We do not want to shame the children by punishing them publicly in front of their peers. Instead, we get help from the service coordinator (called a Sunday school director in some contexts) or a member of the hospitality team who is stationed in the hallway.
 - Give one warning before implementing a time-out except in the case of physical harm done to another child—hitting, kicking, biting, hair pulling, etc.
 - The time out typically lasts one minute per year of the child’s age. So, a five-year-old would have a time out for five minutes.
 - The purpose of a time-out is to stop negative behavior, talk about the offense, give correction, and teach forgiveness.
 - We want to encourage the child to turn away from their sin and if their behavior involved another child to ask forgiveness. Encourage the child ask for forgiveness (“Will you still be my friend even though I took your toy?”). This is something that we teach, but (because we want forgiveness to be from the heart) we cannot mandate that children do this. Wait on God to work on His timetable in the child’s life.
 - Before returning the child to class, the leader should take time to pray with the child and ask for God’s forgiveness as well.

3. Confidentially share the situation with the child’s parents when class is over. Make sure you honor the child and at the same time, encourage the parents. Encourage the parent to follow up with the child after they return home. DO NOT talk to parents EVERY time that you have to correct a child, BUT you should inform parents any time that behavior management reaches the level of a time out.

4. Finally, if these three steps do not correct the behavior, contact the coordinator, who will page the parent and consult with the parent for help and support. If negative behavior reaches this level, the parent may be asked to remain in the classroom when the child until the unacceptable behavior ceases.