

Managing Your Class

Identifying the causes of misbehavior is the first step toward making positive change.

It is normal for children to test boundaries but if behavior problems persist in your class try stepping back and taking a look at the bigger picture. Might any of the following factors be contributing to what is happening?

Why Children Test Boundaries

- **Boredom** A lesson was not well prepared, is not interesting or is not suited to the age or gender of the children.
- **Desire to gain power** Children may want to be in charge of their own lives and have problems with others telling them what to do.
- **Attention** A child wants the teacher to pay attention to him or her.
- **Testing boundaries** Children want to know what a teacher will do when a rule is not followed.
- **Revenge** A child is angry about something or with someone and is acting out.
- **Selfishness** Like adults, children sometimes struggle with selfish behaviors.

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A well-planned lesson minimizes the opportunities for children to become bored and turn their minds to mischief. However sometimes a particular child (or combination of children) becomes challenging at one or other stage of childhood development. Keep in mind that these children may someday be pillars of their church! Try to see and focus on their good qualities.

An experienced and confident teacher takes charge of the classroom and seemingly effortlessly achieves a happy group of children busily engaged in learning. Teachers who are still developing an inner sense of confidence may find the following suggestions helpful in achieving their teaching goals.

Expect order in Sunday school. If basic order is not established, or is disturbed, then the students will not be able to learn well.

Communicate your expectations. Be direct. “We don’t take the Lord’s name in vain.” “Everyone is expected to join the group.” “That behavior is not allowed in Sunday School.” “We will all listen quietly.” “Put your hand up if you would like to ask a question.”

Prevent problems before they happen. If you know that two students tend to chatter or distract when they sit next to each other, try assigning seats for all the students. It may be better to seat children on chairs or around a table instead of on the floor. Consider your teaching environment and look for ways to make small changes that will bring a fresh atmosphere. Add extra help in the room so that children do not have to wait as long for assistance with projects. Doing just a little more project preparation before class may also shorten waiting time during a lesson and head off opportunities for boredom. Reflect on situations in which children act out, e.g. as they first enter the room. Address it right away. If some activities consistently get out of hand, e.g. drama, consider being flexible in your thinking by, for example changing props or assigning “busy” students a task—putting them in charge of something. As a last resort you may choose to avoid a particular activity until the children are older and the behavior passes.

If children have been sitting for too long and are just tired have them get up and move around. Do some stretching exercises, Simon says, or follow the leader. There will be renewed energy when you go back to the lesson.

Get help. If problems persist, talk to your Sunday school coordinator, your pastor or the parents of children involved. Sharing the problem may bring clarity to what is happening. Parents may be willing to support you by addressing issues with their children at home, and by being involved with a plan for improvement.