

Maintaining focus, control and discipline

Kids are characteristically boisterous and noisy. They have a lot of energy and love to have fun. Be careful not to suppress that spirit within them; rather channel their enthusiasm toward the things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy.

General comments

- Some children may have physiological and emotional problems. Be firm but loving with them. Children often struggle with factors outside of their control and don't have the maturity to deal with their emotions in an appropriate way.
- Don't try to mould the personality of a child to conform to your expectations of the model child.
- Some children are crying out for attention (from anyone). They want to be noticed, even if it evokes a negative response from others. Be aware of the child's background. Your group may be the only safe place where the child can express his pent-up emotions of anger and frustration.
- Have only a few basic rules that reinforce a respect for God, for the teacher and for others. The short time of ministry you share together should not feel like school.

In a small group

- Make eye contact with each child as you talk to your group. When reading from the Bible, look up often. Stop and ask a question like, "What do you think it must have been like...?" Then continue with the passage, reading short chunks at the time.
- When a child loses focus, say the child's name without skipping a beat. The longer you pause to regain the attention of one child the more distracted the others become - and you will probably lose momentum too.
- Once in a while, ask a question—not to catch them out—but to bring their daydreaming thoughts back to the lesson and make them feel part of what is going on.
- Always talk to a disruptive child in private about his behaviour. Explain the effects his action has on others and how it affects what you are trying to accomplish. Suggest that the two of you make a pact (agreement) that he stay within the set boundaries. Maybe you could decide on a secret signal to use when he is approaching the point of being disruptive.
- Involve the child in the lesson, even if it is by holding something for you. Make the child feel needed, important, and most of all, loved.

Suggestions for a large group

- If children are losing focus and becoming restless, stop in mid-sentence... and hold the tension. Then carry on. Keep the talk exciting by having sudden surprises.
- When there is a general buzz and you want everyone focused and quiet, hold something small (like a ball of paper) above your head. Tell the children that you are going to drop it and that those who can hear it hit the floor must put up their hands (not shout out).

Hold the object above your head until you are satisfied that it is quiet enough, then drop it. While it is still quiet, continue by speaking softly as if you are telling them a secret.

- Where possible, assign leaders to small groups within the big group. These leaders can quiet a specific child within their group, draw the attention of listless children to what is happening up front, and by their enthusiasm encourage the participation of distracted individuals.
- Alternatively, split the group down the middle so that you have a group on the right and a group on the left. The two teams—with appropriate names—each start with 10 points. They are penalized if they are noisy, but can gain bonus points for attentiveness. Have a big chart for keeping the score.
- When you are about to address a large group of children and your voice cannot be heard above the noise, use a sports whistle to signal that you're about to say something. Flipping the lights on and off also works. At the sound of the whistle, the children—having been told what to do—'freeze' as if stuck in space. Those who move or make a noise after the whistle has gone must go sit right in front, or if outside, sit in the 'cooler' for two minutes.