

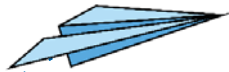
Controlling the **CHAOS**



by Vickie Kangas

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WHY IS CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT important?



1. IT STOPS TEACHER BURN OUT

It eliminates frustration and helps with exhaustion which leads to “burn-out.” We all know people who felt it was their “duty” to serve for a year since they had children attending church, and they could hardly wait for their year to be over and they could escape the classroom. With a room full of children that behave badly, they didn’t look forward to their time with the children. When their time of service is over each week, they leave feeling tense and cranky. They don’t want to chat and fellowship with other Christians after church, but rather to escape to their home, a “safe place,” and relax.



2. IT PROMOTES HAPPY TEACHERS

The teacher who spends an hour in a well-controlled classroom is sad when the time ends. Perhaps there was more to teach, but the time is up and the parents are waiting for their children. The teacher leaves the room with a smile and a joyful heart because of seeing God’s word take root and the eyes of the students opened to new truths.



3. IT TOUCHES THE FUTURE

The teachers hear testimonies of change in their students because of things they taught previously. They know that they are touching the future, changing lives, and helping families become more mature because the children are learning how to live like Christ.





4. IT ADVERTISES THE CHURCH'S CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

After church the teachers are not in a hurry to get home and unwind, but they want to tell other people about something a child said that made their heart sing. They want to connect with the parents of their children and tell them how glad they are that the child came today and what they talked about in class. Perhaps the teacher will give the parents a lead-in question that they can use to ask their children about class, and give the kids a chance to tell mom and dad what they learned, or practice a Bible verse and reinforce the lesson.



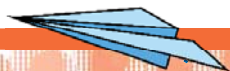
5. IT ENCOURAGES OTHERS TO VOLUNTEER IN THE MINISTRY

When others see how much the teacher enjoys teaching, they are very likely to volunteer to help in a classroom or step in to replace a teacher when it's vacation time. They may volunteer to become teachers as well. When a teacher comes out of a pleasant, peaceful classroom, their joy is infectious and others will want to experience it too.

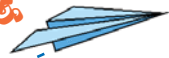


6. CHILDREN ENJOY COMING TO CHURCH

Classroom management helps children feel safe, secure, and loved. They trust that the teacher will protect them from any hurtful thing that could happen to them. In a safe, peaceful environment the children learn more. They don't run to mom or dad after the church service and tattle on everybody and everything. Concerned parents might doubt that they are doing the right thing by allowing their children to go to class instead of sitting at their side and being bored during the church service. Also, when class was a good experience, they are very likely to invite others to attend.



What is the key to Having a Pleasant, Well Controlled Classroom?



THE KEY: PREVENT PROBLEMS BEFORE THEY START

The most important factor is not how problems are dealt with, but rather taking active steps of prevention and not having any problems to begin with. Prevention is achieved by being prepared with all supplies and with the lesson. To have a great class, a teacher must give God many hours, behind the scenes, not just the hour that the class happens.



I. PLAN THE SCHEDULE

The good teacher carefully plans the schedule, suited to the preferences, needs, and ages of the children. I'll go into detail on schedules a little later.

Today's Schedule:
 10:00 Welcome, Rules, Plans, Prayer
 10:10 Bible Lesson
 10:25 Workbook Time
 10:35 Game Time
 10:50 Snack Time
 10:55 Memory Verse Learning
 11:10 Craft Activity
 11:25 Life Application & Prayer





2. PLAN AND PREPARE MATERIALS

If there's a craft, all the supplies are ready and in easy reach, even in sight of the children so they can anticipate a fun activity coming right after their lesson. There is a finished sample for the children to see what they will be making.

If there's a snack, it's ready to serve. Any packaging is open. A helper is aware of their responsibilities and won't need instructions during class time. The garbage bag is ready for the cleanup.

If there is a game planned, the materials for the game are at the location where it will be played. The teacher has thought through the instructions and is ready to clearly and quickly explain the rules and how to play the game.

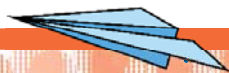
Why is this obvious tip so important? Anytime a teacher turns their back on the class to spend time getting materials, the kids have an opportunity to cause problems. Prevention means that they never get that opportunity. Frequently children say, "I did not!" and deny any involvement in a negative behavior. If they know it won't work because the teacher is watching, they won't even try because they are fully aware that they will be caught doing it.



3. MEMORIZE THE STORY

The teacher must know the lesson very well, and not refer to any notes. During the lesson, the teacher should be looking into the eyes of the

children, and adjusting the story because of their responses. Next I'll give some things to watch for and suggestions of ways to adjust the story.





4. WATCH THE STUDENTS

If students look bored, the teacher should involve them in an action that enhances the story. Stop the story, and ask the students to stand up and act out part of the story.

Another idea is to stop the story and ask a question about what might happen next. This quietly pulls the student's minds back into active involvement. Their answers will show how much they understand.

Perhaps the teacher will decide to use more visuals next time. The teacher might realize that they didn't enjoy listening so long and next time shorten the story, or narrate it while some of the children act it out.

The teacher should be very tuned into what might be going through each child's head. Watch for warning signs that somebody is thinking about pulling the hair of the another child, and prevent it from happening by having everybody stand and act out a part of the story, (become sheep, ride a horse, fetch water out of a well and pour some and drink it, pretend to be blind, etc.) Then rearrange the seating, and continue the story, knowing a problem was prevented and the kids only had fun and were oblivious that somebody was about to do something unpleasant.

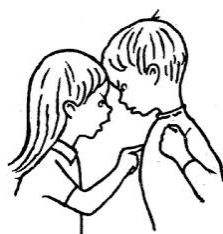


This type of alertness can only happen when the lesson is so well known that the teacher isn't thinking about what comes next, but knows what comes next, is thinking about how it's impacting the children in the room. The focus is on the group dynamics and who is listening and who is not, and possible reasons for why they are not listening and interested.



5. ADJUST FOR CROWDED SEATING

When students sit in crowded conditions, more problems fester. Students need more activity to keep them focused on the story when distracted by other students in small areas. The teacher should plan places in the lesson



that give the students something to add with their voices, to vote with a gesture or their expressions, or something to act out with their hands or their bodies. Later, I'll tell how to plan the seating for the class.



6. PLAN FOR THE AGE OF THE STUDENTS

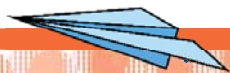
Young children have very short attention spans. It's natural for them to disconnect from you and think up something else to do when you exceed their ability to stay focused. That can be a negative thing. They'll bother somebody else. The class will all look at what they are doing, and they'll enjoy that. You've lost the class, and your story isn't being heard by anyone.

When you are preparing your story, practice it, time it, and work in some physical activity for the children. Don't ask them to sit and listen to you for more than 4 or 5 minutes. Children in Intermediate grades can handle 10 minutes if it's interesting. Children in 6th grade through Jr High can handle 15 minutes of listening. Object lessons and idea triggers work very well to maintain control during a listening time with older students.



7. PLAN FOR THE LEARNING MODALITY OF THE STUDENTS

Some children are made by God to be visual learners rather than auditory learners so a lesson that is only heard will not have half the impact as one that they could see. Other students are kinesthetic learners rather than visual or auditory and must move their bodies to remember what was taught. Studies have shown that a lesson that has actions and allows the children to be physically involved will be remembered better by all students. It takes time to make visuals to hold up, prepare the story well, and plan for student involvement. Teachers who put in the time have much better classroom control.



HAVING RULES PREVENTS PROBLEMS



Do the children know what is expected? Are the class rules simple and clear? Are the rules reviewed weekly?



1. HOW DO CHILDREN FEEL ABOUT THE RULES?

Most children like to be “good” and please their teachers. If they know what is expected, most children will try to meet those expectations. Children feel angry when they are blindsided with randomly invented rules. They are embarrassed in front of their peers when they are pointed out for not behaving right. Often their reaction will be defiance or rebellion. They will purposely plan to punish the teacher for tricking them with rules and embarrassing them. This reaction can be avoided with prevention. Make 5 or 6 clear and simple classroom rules that will be strictly enforced, carefully taught, and practiced so everyone understands the expectations in the classroom.



2. WHY DO CHILDREN BREAK THE RULES? HOW TO PREVENT IT

Sometimes a child will need more attention than they are getting so they will break a rule just to get that attention. The prevention for this is to plan ways to give that type of child extra positive attention. Don't let the student become so desperate for attention that they are willing to break the rules to get it. If he/she does break the rules, be careful to not allow him/her to get the attention he/she desires from it. Don't make a big show out of it. Make sure the student gets better attention as your “helper” than for causing problems and the situation will only happen once or twice and it won't come up again. Ask yourself, “What does he/she need that isn't getting met?” The answer might simply be movement. (ADHD) It might be a little control. It might be a little spotlight on him/her. The child is gaining something that is desired from the bad behavior. The teacher needs to discover what it is and provide it in a better way.





3. TEACH THE RULES

Have some fun acting out a scene where somebody breaks the rule, even in a small way, and another scene where a child follows the rule. Be sure to teach the exact difference and what is expected by the rule. For example, “do not use your hands to do something bad” can be broken by pushing a child down to the ground or by a tiny poke in the arm or trying to take a crayon that the child is currently using. Teach the difference between good and bad touches. There will be times to hold hands as the class travels to a different destination. There will be times the class holds hands to pray. There will be times when a hug is appropriate to comfort a friend.

Another fun example to teach the rule about “taking turns to talk” is to hold a competition to see which team of students can keep completely silent the longest. This demonstrates that although it’s difficult to be silent, it is not impossible for anyone in the room.



4. REVIEW THE RULES AT THE START OF EVERY CLASS TIME.

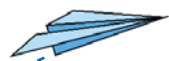
This is the key step that causes the rules of your room to seem normal to the kids. After spending a good length of time teaching them the first two days of class, quickly review them every single time you have class. Develop a routine that the kids expect when the class begins. For example, welcome any new students, begin in prayer (short one, asking God to make the brief time together count and cause changes for the better in every life represented.) and then have the kids tell the rules, why we have them, and explain them if necessary (for example when there is a new student).



5. TELL THE STUDENTS THE SCHEDULE AND PLANS

Next, tell the kids the schedule for the day. Let them know what fun things you have planned for them. They will soon realize that you have total control and if the class misbehaves, it will take you some time to sort it out and deal with the student in a loving way, and that means that you won’t have time to cover all the fun things you have planned. If you have times next to your schedule they will know when they are falling behind the schedule, and when they are a little ahead and could play another round of the game. In my experience, the students cooperated well with my plan, looked forward to each activity, and **enforced the rules on the other students without my intervention.**

What rules are necessary?



The rules should be age-appropriate.



1. RULE CHARTS FOR PRESCHOOLERS AND YOUNGER CHILDREN

Young children need to see a chart to remind them all the time. Because they can't read, mainly use pictures. Hang the chart in a very prominent place. They can't remember well from week to week, so start every class time going over the rules and what each picture signifies.

Classroom Rules

Looking Eyes

Listening Ears

Quiet Mouths

Helping Hands

Walking Feet



2. RULE CHARTS FOR MIDDLE GRADES CHILDREN

Lead a discussion for the children to decide on their own rules for their classroom. Older children (Inter and up) obey rules better when they aren't imposed on them from the teacher. It works well if the students brainstorm together what rules they want for themselves. Why? When they feel ownership of the rule, they are likely to follow it and enforce it. Peer opinion is much stronger than teacher's opinion at their age. If they were involved and saw how much the other students wanted a rule, they will not want to break it and bring on the wrath of the other students.

IN this
CLASSROOM
WE DO SECOND CHANCES
We apologize
we forgive
We respect each other
We never give up
WE KEEP OUR PROMISES
we encourage one another
WE LAUGH OFTEN
WE BELONG
We are a **FAMILY**





3. RULE CHARTS FOR JUNIOR HIGH AND HIGH SCHOOL

When thinking of rules, children of this age tend to think of too many. See the example rule chart on this page where this happened. The teacher wrote down everything that was suggested and then as a class, combined rules that were similar and found a way to word it to turn them into one simple rule rather than many. The rule chart isn't pictures, but it's the kid's own words. Keep it simple, and together work out the wording, keeping it short, yet everyone knows its significance.

Classroom Rules

Respect yourself

Be honest, do your best, have a positive attitude, participate, believe in yourself

Respect others

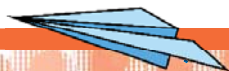
Work together, wait your turn, work quietly, be kind, listen, and stay on task.

Respect our school (or church)

Follow directions, pick up after yourself, raise your hand, and follow the rules.

In This Classroom

We do second chances
We apologize
We forgive
We respect each other
We never give up
We keep our promises
We encourage each other
We laugh often
We belong
We are a family



PLAN LEVELS OF CONSEQUENCES FOR RULE BREAKERS



1. WHO IS TO BLAME? FIRST, IT'S PROBABLY THE TEACHER.

The teacher failed at prevention. When a potential problem starts developing, the teacher must take action quickly, and make a change. For example: Change the lesson delivery. Ask the students to stand up and spread out and act out part of the story that was just covered. If they have been sitting in one place too long, they will begin distracting themselves, sometimes in a negative way. You must realize that they can't sit so long. It's your fault there is a problem starting to develop. Quickly change your teaching style, and have the kids exercise in some way, and while they do that, rearrange their seating to move children away from each other before student tensions become a problem.



2. CLASSROOM ATMOSPHERE: DON'T BECOME A PRISON WARDEN ABOUT THE RULES

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3. THE CONSEQUENCES STEPS

After the rules are explained and understood, the steps of consequences when a rule is broken should be explained to the children. They don't like surprises that hurt them. The teacher should be very consistent in taking

these steps of consequences unless the problem is extremely dangerous and it calls for immediate removal of a student. First is a signal or warning, next is a move between quieter students, next is moving to the time out chair, next is being taken out of class, and last is going to parents. As the rules are reviewed at the start of each class time, the consequences are also reviewed.

our consequences for breaking a rule

1. Signal and warning
2. Change seating
3. The time-out chair
4. Taken out of the classroom
5. Involve the parents



1. SIGNAL AND WARNING

Sometimes a simple quiet gesture is agreed on by the children to be a reminder, or warning. Children appreciate a warning before a punishment or consequence is put on them. For example: One finger raised quietly means that in our class we don't all speak at once or interrupt because we feel everyone is important and deserves a chance to express themselves. The rule is "Only one person speaks at a time and others must listen and give that person their full attention and eye contact." Maybe the chart says, "Take turns to talk." The class might decide that it works well to raise your hand and be recognized before talking.

TIP: Use a stuffed animal as a microphone prop.

The class might decide that they will use a ball or stuffed animal that they keep in the center of their discussion circle. Only the person holding the object can talk. When they are done, they can return it to the center for another child to hold and speak, or they can toss it to the student who has his hand raised to indicate he has another thought to add to the

conversation. If somebody forgets and interrupts, the teacher can lift a single finger, indicating “one at a time.” It is the warning that the class agreed on using.



2. CHANGE SEATING

If prevention hasn't succeeded, a teacher needs a plan of action that will be minimally disruptive to the flow of the lesson. The easiest is to simply move the seating, place the student closer to the front, place him between two girls, move good friends apart, etc. Later in this book, there is more about seating options.



3. THE TIME-OUT CHAIR

When a student breaks a rule, never ignore it. The whole class is watching you. The students want order and peace in the room. The student must have a consequence. Ask the student to leave the group and sit in a designated chair where they can still listen, but must remain quiet. The students soon recognize the chair as a mild punishment similar to being sent to the bedroom and removed from the family. It's a short punishment, small children can sit there for 2 or 3 minutes, older children feel the effect of it in about 5 minutes, but not longer. At the end of the time, invite them to leave the chair and rejoin the group. Plan to talk privately to the student soon, when time permits, to find out if they understood what rule they broke. What was going on to cause them to take the actions that they did? Option 1: Get everyone involved in an activity and then talk alone quietly with the student. Option 2: Ask the student to stay after class, when the others leave, to talk alone with you.



Discussion time: The teacher must listen to the student's side of the problem.

A punishment always needs a time of expressing love to the student and explaining why the behavior was wrong and planning how to not have it happen again. As a teacher, don't be angry but show love, concern, and

fairness. Try to understand from the child's point of view the reasons behind their misbehavior. Be open to hear what is said rather than scolding and defending yourself. Be willing to be a child advocate to make sure that what caused the problem doesn't happen again and the child can feel that you are trustworthy and fair and will protect him in the future. Teachers should realize that most outbursts are reactions to something that happened and the teacher didn't see it. Perhaps the child was provoked by another child.



4. TAKEN OUT OF THE CLASSROOM

There might be times when the "time out" corner doesn't work out. The child sitting there is still being a distraction to the other children. The next step on the correction ladder is to remove the child from the room. It's important to have a volunteer who can take the child out of the area and talk with him/her about what's going on and what's bothering him/her. Prearrange with your volunteer where they can take the child to talk and what the signal will be. For example: a call on a cell phone, a text message, or perhaps the teacher will send a child to get them out of the church. The volunteer will give the child a chance to get away from the class and express themselves. Often after about 15 minutes the child is finished venting and bored and would like to return to class and do the fun things you told the class about in the opening time. They don't want to sit with the volunteer instead of playing games, eating snacks, making crafts, etc. But before they return, they need to admit they handled it wrong, confess what they did that broke a rule, and repent. They need to promise to follow all of the rules to gain re-admittance into the class.





5. INVOLVE THE PARENTS

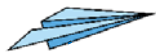
The last stage on the ladder of consequences, if the previous ideas didn't solve the problem, is to involve the parents. Have the parents come and pick up the child or have a volunteer escort the child to sit with them. Arrange to have a meeting with the parents after church so you can explain what the child did and why he was removed from class and get suggestions from the parents about what works for them. Express an understanding of the child's view of the situation and what caused him to misbehave. Often a problem that the teacher faces is the same thing that happens at home. If the teacher and the parents are in agreement on how to handle things, and they are in agreement on the importance of attending church and learning more about God, things will go smoothly in the future. Stress that the student is welcome back in class and that you care about him and you want him to learn about God and never to feel rejected from church. Agree with the student that this one instance was in the past and we'll start fresh next week.



Last step: The student must sit with his family in church.



use your voice to control the class



Your tone of voice is a mighty tool in classroom control.



1. VOLUME IS IMPORTANT, WHISPER

First, never yell at a student. If a student needs a warning, whisper in that student's ear. It is nobody else's business, and it could embarrass the child if it's said to him in front of the others. Remember that peer esteem is more important to children above the 3rd grade than pleasing a teacher.



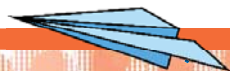
2. LOWER VOICE AND ASK FOR A CLASS RESPONSE

If the class is getting too noisy during a craft activity, use your voice to regain the control. Drop your voice to very soft and ask the class to raise their hands if they can hear you. When the noisy talkers see the class respond to you, curiosity will shush them as they try to discover what they just missed hearing. "Give me a smile if you can hear me," works sometimes. I've had success softly saying, "Touch your nose if you heard everything I just said."

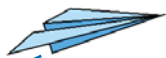


3. SING THE DIRECTIONS

I've seen a great response when the teacher applauds and breaks into song with the next direction. All of the children are so surprised that the adult is singing the directions a hush falls on the class. They listen carefully to the instructions the teacher is giving.



Find an attention signal that works for you



1. THE SPOKEN PHRASE SIGNAL

With my young students I found it worked well for me to say, “Eyes on me.” I taught the students that when they hear me say that, their response was to instantly stop talking, put their hands in their laps, turn and look at me, and listen carefully. We practiced it until they had it perfect and then practiced it any time later when their responses weren’t immediate. It worked like a referee’s whistle to stop a game. I preferred it to other signals because I had it with me always, in the hallways, playground, and anywhere I went with the class.



2. THE BUNNY EARS SIGNAL

To quiet the group, raise your hand high holding up two fingers. This signifies bunny ears in a listening posture for younger children and a peace sign for older children. They respond by becoming silent and holding up the same sign. When everyone has the sign up and the room is silent, you take down yours, and they can relax theirs, but remain quiet and listening while you speak. Of course this signal needs to be taught and practiced a little, but it is effective with large crowds of children.



3. THE CLAPPING SIGNAL

Another easy signal is the clapping rhythm of “shave and a haircut.” The teacher starts it, the children turn to face the teacher, giving their full attention, and they finish it. This is a way to stop their hands from what they are involved in and stop the chatter that’s natural during snacks or crafts. They need to be taught the rhythm, and a chance to practice it often. Don’t



worry about a new student, they will learn very quickly just by observing the class do it. When it gets boring, vary the clapping rhythm so the class has to listen harder and copy you. Start with a short rhythm of about 4 claps, but then expand it to several measures of rhythm. They listen and repeat it. If they mess it up, they usually giggle, but you can tell that it was too hard, and adjust to a shorter rhythm. Your goal is never to embarrass a student or make him feel inferior, but to get their attention and gain control of the class for the next event in your schedule for the day.



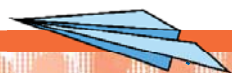
4. THE HOO-HA SIGNAL

The leader calls out “hoo-ha” and the students respond “hoo-ha-ha” as they stand up, turn around, and sit back down. This helps get the wiggles out of their bodies and interrupts whatever they were doing to turn their full attention on the leader. Sometimes it’s fun to do it a couple times in succession for a little more exercise and a longer interruption.

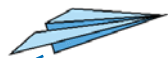


5. THE BELL AND LIGHTS SIGNALS

Turning off the classroom lights startles the children and gets their immediate attention. Turn the lights back on quickly and while their eyes are on you, give the next instruction. With older children, I experienced quick success with this, however when they discovered it wasn’t a serious emergency they were no longer startled and could keep right on chatting with the lights off so it wasn’t as effective. A bell or whistle can also startle the students into instant quiet and full attention on the teacher. It would be important to check how far the sound traveled to insure that it didn’t bother other classes or the church service nearby.

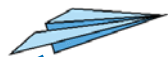


How is a classroom controlled by the seating?



Children can be controlled by their environment. When children are overcrowded there will be problems. Again, prevention is the key to success.

the teacher must assign places to sit.



1. SEATING WITH MATS

Small children do not mind sitting on the floor so kindergarten teachers often use little mats to designate their seats. Where I taught kindergarten in the public school, we used carpet samples. Colored paper, plastic bags, or newspapers would work just as well. It often helps to have one color for girls and a different color for boys. If the class seldom has new students, the mats could have names on them so the teacher could rearrange the seating each week and allow the students to find their own mat and sit on it when they enter the classroom. If the mats are spaced far enough apart the teacher can easily see when a foot or hand reaches out to bother another student. The teacher is free to walk amongst the children while teaching.



2. SEATING WITH CHAIRS OR BENCHES

Older children prefer chairs or benches since they can get uncomfortable sitting on the floor. However, I've used the floor with success with older children by remembering to give them chances to stand frequently.





3. SEATING WITH TARPS

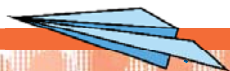
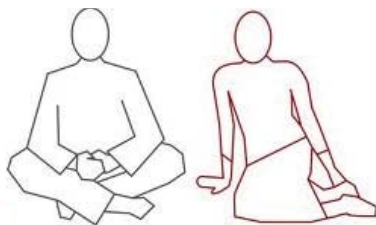
Outside, I've gathered a class of children on a tarp or two. They are comfortable sitting on the tarp because it's clean and bug free, even though we are sitting outdoors in the dirt. Require the students to be completely on the tarp. Pretend that it's a boat, and off the tarp is the ocean, filled with sharks so they must sit completely on the tarp to be safe.



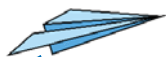
4. HOW TO SIT

How to sit is also important. I called it "crisscross applesauce" which meant crossing their legs in front of them and sitting on their bottoms. I corrected any student who sat on folded legs, since it makes it easy to rise up on their knees, and difficult for the student behind them to see me.

They can't get into as much trouble from the crossed leg position and the teacher can easily see it before it occurs and take evasive action. It's important to remember to let older students stand, plan some breaks, to prevent them from moving simply because they are physically uncomfortable.



Decorate the CLASS area



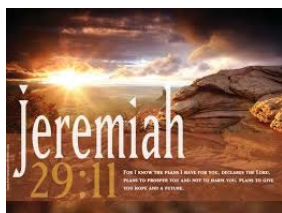
Part of planning the environment is planning what a child will look at when his mind wanders for a few seconds. Don't fail to value visual inspiration.

Put posters up that direct the child's thoughts toward God. Hang the theme of the lesson or the Bible verse to help a child memorize it.

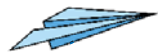


If you are having class outside, hang things and posters from a tree, or the outside wall of the church.

If you are indoors and have a wall, you can also hang the student's worksheets or art work to show that you value them. They will want to do their best because it does matter, it's not a secret, and everybody will be looking at it. You show that they are important to you and to God. If there is nothing to look at, their eyes will look at other students giving them an opportunity for mischief.



CONCLUSION: What's most important?

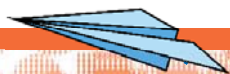


Prevention is the key to never having problems that need punishment. Prevention costs a teacher a lot of time behind the scenes but the rewards are worth it.

Have a clear and simple set of rules that are taught and enforced with consequences.

The teacher who has good classroom management looks forward to teaching, enjoys being with the children, and sees great spiritual fruit from the lessons. You feel the joy of fulfilling your calling: "Go into all the world and TEACH the gospel and make disciples..." and the fulfillment of using your God given teaching gift.

Your class will grow because the children will have fun at church and they will invite their friends. Their memories of church when they become adults will not be bitter and resentful. The waves of influence will reach far and wide, generation after generation, when you give your best to the calling of teaching.



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