

Three Ways To Keep Discipline In Children's Ministry



Over the years, I have been involved in ministry to children through special events, summer camps and The Light Kids Conference. I know there is a difference between day in an day out ministry and the one shot special event or summer camp, but there are also lots of similarities. There is always a range of energy in the room. There is always a kid that just seems to be bouncing off the walls and there will always be a need to keep control. From most of my experience, this has been done from the front as we have gathered with 100-400 children at one time. However, I believe these three principles work in both large and smaller groups. Here are three ways I deal with discipline during children's ministry events:

1. High Expectation

Remember they are kids, but treat them like adults. Set the bar higher and they will surprise you. What is your expectation of children when they arrive – what are you asking them to do? Sit quietly? Participate in an activity? How do you speak to them? Let them know what is going on, what is coming up and how they will be a part of it. Let this expectation be known from the front, from the leader. I have often mentioned the children's ministry leader that had the most impact on me as a child. She was tough and kind at the same time. She taught the lesson, but stopped to make sure kids had it. No one got up from their seats, everyone listened and she made it interesting and fun. She involved the gifts of children as readers, musicians and helpers during the hour long class each week. Maybe times have changed a little bit, but I have still found that kids respond to loving authority and high expectation.

2. Invite, Build and Trust

The biggest part of your job in keeping order in children's ministry happens long before you enter the room full of kids – it happens as you are inviting leaders to come along side you in ministry. Having leaders around you to help make sure that things are smooth and ok is critical. Here are three things you need to do to get quality leaders around you: 1) INVITE them to serve with you, 2) BUILD them up with training and encouragement and 3) TRUST them to lead. Inviting is a key part to having volunteers. If you are a children's ministry leader, you know the intensity of need for volunteers in ministry. One rule of thumb is to spend 20% of your time with volunteers in ministry. It so easy for children's ministry leaders (and any ministry leaders, really) to invest all their time and more in getting things prepared and working directly in ministry. Clearly marking out the 3-8 hours a week (depending on your ministry job hours) that you will be focusing on inviting and building up volunteers, will make all the difference in both preparation and discipline. There are a million ways of building up and training volunteers to help with discipline. One example is to search out a short video clip about discipline in children's ministry and just send it to them or you may send them an article you find from another source. I just searched the internet for "children's ministry discipline" and got millions of results such as [this one](#). Finally, trust them. You must follow through on the legal side of background checks and safety issues regarding adults working with children. Then you can have confidence in each leader to handle discipline issues according to protocol.

3. Love Loudly, Discipline Quietly

Everyone has their own philosophy, so here's mine: Love big! When you see a kid then you give a big Hi! A big smile! A big hug or high five and you watch for ways to love them loudly. When it comes time for discipline, you take them aside and make it more discreet. Too often this is backwards and the discipline becomes the focus. The focus is really on leading, teaching and loving the children. This should be done the loudest. How does this play out? You need to have a balance of loud and soft in your ministry. If you find yourself constantly yelling out directions, then you don't have a balance. One very small example of this I see all the time is when a Sunday school teacher or children's ministry leader says something like, "Alright, we are all going to get up and..... DID I SAY GET UP?" I know this is little, but it creates the need for loud discipline. A better way is to describe what will be happening next. "Guess what we are going to do now? Well, in a few moments, once this door is open, I want you to get up out of your seat quietly (still in a quiet voice) and follow me as go on a hunt for..." The difference in kids response is amazing.