



MORE TIPS FOR DEALING WITH KIDS WITH CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

By Linda Ranson Jacobs

04/27/2012



As the adult it is imperative that you stay in control. Remember you are constantly modeling for the children in your groups and classes. Think about what you are modeling. When entering a confrontation are you remaining calm or are you exhibiting the very behaviors you're trying to stop?

Limit your responses

Think about what to say before you approach the child. Tell the child you need time to think about what happened, buy yourself time. Use what I call "the peace maker form". It's a piece of paper with three columns on it. The child writes or draws what happened in the first column. In the second column they write or draw what they did. In the third column they put down what the other person did or how they reacted.

This gives the child time to calm down. Sometimes I address the situation at the time. Other times I might wait to address the issues. Sometimes you can address the situation and the child role play what happened or you might talk them through the scenario. Take your cues from the child and the situation.

Empower the child by giving choices

Make sure the choice is possible. Choices empower a child who feels like he or she has no power in their life.

Restate the problem

Use positive terms to state the problem back to the child.

Focus on a success

Describe to the child a success they have had before and build upon that success. "Now Jimmy, remember several weeks ago when you got mad and you went over to the table and drew a picture? You were still mad but you were able to work through the anger by drawing. And know what I've still got that picture in my office."

Let the child "save face"

Allow for face saving for the child, (does it really matter if the kindergarten age child picks up the blocks with a scowl on his face?) What's the goal here? To get the blocks picked up or not?





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Use the following terms

- Oops
- Bummer
- Hmm
- I see
- What's your plan here?
- Oh well

Ask the child for their ideas

In my child care one time one of our challenging behavior children was using the dinosaurs in the sand table. During his enthusiastic play he had placed the dinosaurs out in the walkway area. When the other children began to complain that they couldn't get through the teacher entered the scene. Instead of accusing him or telling him he had to put all of the figures back in the sand table she said, "Hmm this is a problem. What's your plan here?"

He said, "What? What do you mean?" She explained that the figures belonged in the sand table but she just knew he had a plan. What was it? He thought for a minute and said, "I could take all of these dinosaurs to the block area where I'd have more room?"

This child didn't care about the sand he just wanted to play with the dinosaurs. By using the question "What's your plan" the staff person was able to de-escalate what could have been a power struggle and potentially volatile situation. She complimented him on his great idea and asked if he needed her to help him move all of the dinosaurs over to the block area.

Meet with the challenging behavior child and ask him what ideas he has. Brainstorm ideas. Sometimes the child will come up with some clever ideas and many times they will be harder on themselves than the adult. Meet with the child at a peaceful time - not when the child is in the throws of an outburst. At times we had the child write out what would take place the next time he or she got out of control. Sometimes we turned this into an agreement and had the child sign and date the agreement.

Avoid always having to have the last word

At times this is hard especially when you have had this argumentative child arguing with you all day. It's important to remember that as the adult you are always modeling appropriate behaviors to every child. One





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Page 3 of 4

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parenting expert said that children learn 80 percent by example but only 20 percent of what is said to them. In my observations children will generally imitate the adults in their lives.

Develop a plan for when a child loses control completely

1. Keep other children safe – move others out of the way.
2. Or as a last resort, move the child - know in advance where you're going with him and who will remove the child.
3. Arrange a system to alert other teachers, such as "code red" so they can be prepared to help or get other children out of the way.

Be realistic

For some of these children life is just plain hard. They get discouraged and even depressed. Then they come to church and we expect them to sit down and be quiet and listen. For many experiencing the divorce of their parents sitting down and listening is almost out of their realm.

More Tips

- Avoid situations that will set the child up to fail
- Back off when you see a child getting frustrated
- Catch the child being cooperative
- Laugh and use a sense of humor

Be firm, set boundaries and love them so much they can feel your love. This may sound strange but many times in a live conference I have said, "Children are a lot like dogs. They can smell danger. They can tell if you don't like them. They know when they are loved. Like dogs they will reciprocate love. Once you win a child's trust they will do almost anything you ask of them." This is especially true of the child of divorce. For them on that one day, you may be the only adult that has been kind to them. You might be the only adult that emulates the love of Jesus Christ.

I drew them with gentle cords, With bands of love, And I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them. [Hosea 11:4]

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Linda Ranson Jacobs is one of the forefront leaders in the area of children and divorce. She developed and created the DivorceCare for Kids programs. DC4K is an international program for churches to use to help children of divorced parents find healing within the arms of a loving church family. As a speaker, author,



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Page 4 of 4

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trainer, program developer and child care center owner, Linda has assisted countless families by modeling and acting on the healing love she has found in Jesus Christ. More great articles about how to successfully minister to the child of divorce in your church can be found at Linda's website [Healthy Loving Partnerships for Our Kids \(HLP4\) \[http://www.hlp4.com\]](http://www.hlp4.com). Linda also offers support, encouragement, and suggestions to help single parents and those working with single parent children. She can be reached by e-mail at Linda@hlp4.com.