

Teachers' Top Ten Discipline Tactics

by: June Allan Corrigan

Try these at home! Practiced methods by professionals who know how to get rowdy children to quiet down, listen up and follow the rules.

Have you ever visited your child's classroom and wondered how the teacher maintains order among so many children when you can't even get your two at home to mind? Realize your dream of jackets hung up, toys shared and children sitting quietly at the dinner table by following these ten classroom tips that work at home too.

You'd be hard pressed to find a teacher who doesn't rank discipline as their number one priority. "Discipline is paramount. You can't run a classroom without it," says Barbara Yeamans, a third-grade teacher at Central Elementary in Imperial Beach, California.

Teacher Tactic: DISCUSS THE RULES

"On the first day of school, I outline the basic rules," says Yeamans, "I also let students brainstorm to create a class mission statement." She finds there is a greater inclination for children to want to behave when they feel part of the rule-making and discipline policies.

Parent Plan

With children who are old enough to reason, discuss what kind of behavior would help your household run best. Draw responses out of them. Asking "What will happen if you're always running in the house?" might cause them to consider the accident that is bound to eventually happen. This will prove more effective than your reprimand of "Stop running in the house!" which, with no discussion, is destined to fall on deaf ears each time.

Teacher Tactic: POST A PLAN

"A plan is essential," says Patty Corrigan, who teaches fourth grade at Central Elementary. "Not only does it give structure to the day but it calms a child to know what is coming up next." She lists the order of activities on a white board for students to reference: Reading 9 am. Math 10 am. Recess 10:45 am. If she forgets to write something down, the children often remind her to add it to the list.

Parent Plan

Outline your daily and weekly plans on a calendar or dry-erase board in the kitchen. It'll help your household have an idea of what's coming up next whether it's a piano lesson at 4 pm, soccer game at 5:30 pm or a visit to Grandma's house on Sunday. Let your kids add stickers or draw pictures on the schedule. Everyone will feel more comfortable having a general idea of what to expect.

Teacher Tactic: CREATE ROUTINES

"Everything runs more smoothly with firm routines in place," says Lori Anapoell, a literacy teacher at Sage Canyon Elementary in Carmel Valley. When children know what to do and when to do it, fewer behavior issues crop up and independence is fostered.

Parent Plan

Identify the tasks you expect your children to complete every day, like brushing their teeth after meals or putting dirty clothes in the laundry hamper. Walk them through the steps. Show them the proper amount of toothpaste to use and where the hamper is located. Practice simple household routines until they become habits. As in any classroom, established routines are key to a smooth operation at home too.

Teacher Tactic: SWITCH GEARS SLOWLY

Switching from one task to another can be difficult for kids who tend to get absorbed in what they are doing. "Ease into a transition slowly," cautions Lori Anapoell. She often counts down, advising students they have a few minutes left before they need to stop one activity and start another.

Parent Plan

If your child is busy coloring, don't suddenly tell her to drop everything and go take a bath. Instead tell her bathtime is in ten minutes and she'll need to finish her drawing and begin putting her crayons away soon. Set a kitchen timer and remind her again when time is almost up.

Teacher Tactic: USE SIGNALS

Unspoken cues that help focus a child's attention and redirect them to new tasks or away from questionable behavior are invaluable to teachers. "I raise my hand in the air and display fingers in a one, two, three countdown until I have their attention," says Barbara Yeamans. Some teachers tap out a few notes on a xylophone or tinkle a bell to elicit students' response without ever having to say a word.

Parent Plan

Come up with some nonverbal prompts such as a few notes on a harmonica or flicking the light switch to let your children know when it's time to settle down, clean up or even come to the table for dinner. Find something you're comfortable with, use it consistently and give your voice a rest!

Teacher Tactic: REWARD GOOD BEHAVIOR

Instead of constantly harping on students' shortcomings, education professionals prefer to practice positive reinforcement. "When I would see a child picking up trash on the playground or displaying good manners at lunchtime, I'd hand them a ticket from my good guy basket, says Dr. Susan Mahler, a retired principal of Olympic View Elementary in Chula Vista and a former kindergarten teacher. "The goal was to collect five tickets and earn a special reward such as an extra recess."

Parent Plan

When your child picks up her toys or clears her plate from the table without prompting, recognize her efforts. Say "Good job!" Every so often reward her good behavior with something more tangible such as a small toy. Praise the things she does right so she'll do them again.

Teacher Tactic: STAY A STEP AHEAD

Recognizing and heading off potential problems is what teachers do best. "When I have a student who is too chatty, I'll seat her with quiet, focused kids," says Lori Anapoell. "I've given some real fidgety kids a squishy ball to squeeze while I teach a lesson and some have even been allowed to chew gum. It makes a huge difference in their behavior."

Parent Plan

Identify the times your child is likely to misbehave and prepare strategies to avert the problem. If she's prone to meltdowns in the supermarket, have some crackers or a book on hand. Or put her in charge of placing items in the cart. Staying one step ahead and preventing problems from happening in the first place is what effective discipline is really all about - both in and out of school.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

How to get kids to:

- **SIT STILL.** If your child won't sit still at the dinner table, point to other family members who are quietly seated. "Always model appropriate behavior and if you can use another child to illustrate, all the better," says teacher Patty Corrigan.
- **GET THEIR ATTENTION.** Wait to speak until your child stops what she is doing and focuses her eyes on you. Teacher Barbara Yeamans says, "One, Two, Three - Eyes on me" To which her students are trained to respond, "One, Two - Eyes on you."
- **STOP TATTLING.** Create a tattle box where kids can drop in messages or pictures about a sibling's or another child's wrong-doing. "This gives kids some satisfaction of 'telling' without you having to listen," says Teacher Lori Anapoell.