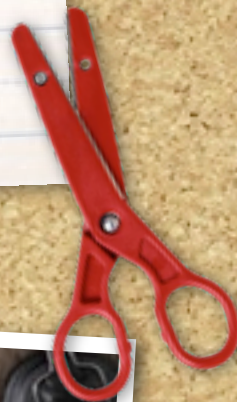




Sunday School Teaching Secrets



Welcome to Sunday School Teaching Secrets, a guide to help you get more from every Sunday school session you teach! We know that you put your heart and soul into your class, and we understand how frustrating it can be when your class does not give 100% back to you in participation and enthusiasm. We'd like to help with tips developed just for you.

With these tips, you can better maintain control of a class getting off topic or out of hand. Also, you'll find 5 tips to get better participation in your classes than you ever thought possible! Finally, we outline 3 strategies for managing classes of mixed ages. We understand the difficulty of engaging five-year-olds and thirteen-year-olds in the same environment, so look to these tips to make your classes more enjoyable than ever.

Every teacher has dealt with the nightmare that is a rowdy class. Many teachers will tell you their fool-proof plan for regaining control, which often contain threats, lack of enthusiasm, and a frightening environment. This report attempts to give you meaningful, gentle ways of regaining control in your class that are both effective and uphold Christian examples.

One important thing to remember when regaining control in any class is to warn students, very clearly and so everyone is aware, of the consequences of not following the rules. Students should never be able to say, "But you didn't tell us what would happen..." It is the responsibility of every teacher to outline the steps of punishment in the class so that all students can weigh the decision of misbehaving with the consequences they know will follow.

Finally, it is essential that you, as a teacher, stay strong in your commitment to gently punish your students. Empty threats will get you in trouble, because students quickly learn that you have no intention of following through on your threats. They will lose respect for you and stop listening to your in-

structions, leading to a class that is perpetually out of control.

7 Tips to Refocus a Rowdy Class

1. Develop Consequences with your Class

At the beginning of your Sunday school sessions, sit down with your class and develop a set of consequences, ranging in intensity and duration. These punishments should be a collaboration of your ideas and theirs. Punishments work best when students believe in their power and truly feel they are losing out on something, so getting their input will help you as a teacher punish them effectively but not too harshly. Share with your class the importance of creating systems of rewards and punishments. This can spark a class discussion on the importance of following rules and laws and what happens when someone chooses not to follow the rules.

Impart on them the knowledge that it is their choice to follow the rules or not, so they should be willing to accept the consequences if they choose to break those rules. Make a poster with the rules clearly stated on them and hang it in the front of the room for all to see. This will help students remember what they have agreed upon when something goes wrong. When your class gets out of control, direct their attention to the poster and inform them that they are getting close to receiving the first of those punishments. Use the punishments in the order you created them, with the least severe first and the most severe last. Hopefully, the respect you and your class develop for each other during this process will make those more severe punishments unnecessary.

2. Implement a warning system

When your class gets a bit out of control, implement a warning system. This system should follow the general “three strikes, you’re out!” rule to allow students a chance to redeem themselves before they have to face consequences. Talk with your class at the beginning of your Sunday school sessions and ask them to help develop a set of punishments for misbehavior. Such punishments could include: taking away personal play time during sessions, removing future rewards, implementing quiet time for reflection and reclaimed control, and separating students who cannot stay focused when near each other. Some examples of warning systems are listed below.

Draw a stop light on the chalkboard, but do not fill in the colors of the lights. When your class misbehaves, color in the green light. Gently correct their misbehavior and clearly state that the next time it happens, you will implement the first punishment agreed on by the class. When the class misbehaves again, color in the yellow light and implement the first punishment, as earlier stated to the class. This time, warn them that the next time they misbehave, they will face the second punishment agreed on by the class. This second punishment should be stronger than the first and should show students that misbehavior will not be tolerated. A good punishment is requiring total silence for the rest of the session.

Draw a Noise-O-Meter on the board with different tick marks for different noise levels. As the noise level in your class increases, draw a mark with colored chalk to indicate where your students are. Show your students which levels are “getting too loud,” “dangerously loud,” and “TOO LOUD.” Point out to students when you move your marker from one level to the next, so that they can gauge their behavior and respond appropriately. Let stu-

dents know from the beginning of your Sunday school sessions what the punishment is if the Noise-O-Meter reaches a certain point. Implement this punishment if your class reaches that level.

3. Rather than Yell, Lower your Voice

Have you ever noticed how hard people strain to hear a whisper, even if it has nothing to do with them? The irresistible power of a whisper can be enough to pull your class back on track in no time. Often, your class will be listening just enough to catch the basics, but while focusing on some other project or talking to someone else. When you, all of a sudden, lower your voice dramatically or stop talking altogether, it will jolt them back into paying attention to find out what they just missed.

To do this properly, first ask for attention at regular volume and wait for it. If after several tries your class is not responding as you would like, do one of two things. You can sit quietly, waiting for them to get the message and stop talking. Often, several students will catch on first and will “shush” the others into silence. Or, you can lower your voice dramatically and say in a low tone, “if you can hear me, raise your hand.” Some students will immediately raise their hands and other will not. Repeat the phrase several times until all students’ hands are in the air. When everyone is quiet, proceed with the lesson as planned. With this tactic, it is important to maintain your patience and control, waiting for them to respond to you, even if it takes several minutes.

4. Take Away Rewards

Every class functions better when it involves a rewards system, so chances are, you will have a series of rewards already in place for your class. When they misbehave, make sure to warn them first of the



consequences if they continue to misbehave. Say very clearly that the punishment for continued misbehavior is the removal of that day's, or the next class period's, reward. Perhaps you could take away a game you play to start every class or take away tickets from each student if you use a ticket system for rewards. As with every punishment, clearly warn your class before taking away any rewards.

By warning them, you give students the chance to fix their behavior before facing consequences, a pattern that will help orient them to the real world, where they often will face consequences without the chance to rectify their mistakes. Show students that what they are doing is wrong, but that you will give them the chance to make it right. This gives students the ability to make a choice and see where it goes, an important part of life in general, and certainly an important part of life in a classroom.

5. Ask for Students' Help

When students are getting out of control, ask for volunteers to help with different aspects of the lesson. Helping your students engage in the activity reduces their interest in other things and helps all students focus, because they will also want the reward of helping with a certain project. Choose those students as helpers who have been quiet and respectful during the session, to set an example for other students. Call the student's name and explain why they are being chosen. Show other students that if they too behave, they will receive similar privileges of helping with important daily projects.

For this to work, you must first build the idea that helping the teacher is a privilege that students should desire. Unless they want to help, students will not be motivated to participate and pay attention, so at the beginning of your sessions, tell your students that one of the biggest rewards you give out is the chance to help with the lessons. Not all students will buy

into this reward, even after you hype it up, but if you never present the idea as something desirable, none of your students will look forward to the opportunity.

6. Offer Rewards for Well-Behaved Students

When punishments fail to work, try rewarding your students for good behavior, or even marginal behavior. When everyone else is misbehaving, find the student or students willing to follow your directions and sit quietly, follow directions, or help you when needed. Tell the class that the best behaved person in the class that day will receive a reward, such as food, extra tickets in your ticket system, or the privilege of being first in line. Other rewards can include helping the teacher or the religious leader in a special religious celebration or making an important decision about the day's activities.



Students don't always need to receive a tangible reward to feel special or to be a good example for other students. Sometimes, all that is necessary is to verbally point out which students are doing well.

This works in reverse as well. Instead of punishing a student, they will suffer sufficient humiliation by just having their name called out in front of class. Interrupt your lesson, calling the student by name, and ask them directly to please stop doing their distracting behavior or to please pay attention. Tell them that they are distracting the rest of the class and that they are being disrespectful to you. This is often enough to stop that student from acting up again, and enough to keep other students from acting up as well.

7. Change Activities

Often, when students misbehave, it is because they are bored or uninterested in the project at hand. Do your best to engage them by offering rewards, asking for student help, or warning them with punishments,

but if your class still does not seem enthused about the material, change your tactic. Make the same message stick in their heads by using an analogy that makes sense to them. Use real-world concepts and problems that affect them daily to make your ideas stay in their minds.

If nothing is working on the project you are facilitating, change activities and topics entirely. You should always come to a session with more planned than can fit in, to make sure that there is never any down time that students can use to misbehave. Having extra projects also helps when you need to abandon one and move on to another, such as is the case in this example. When nothing seems to keep their attention, give everyone two minutes of quiet time to reflect on the lesson of the day. This will help them calm down and give you a chance to develop a new strategy, one that incorporates the idea for the day and keeps your students involved and excited.

5 Tips to Get Better Participation

All Sunday school teachers want better participation in their classes, but did you ever think it was possible? When you help students get involved with lessons, maintain contact with their parents, and show students why you think every activity is worthwhile, they will be much more likely to put time and effort into your class. With the five suggestions below, your class will be participating more than ever in no time! Read through them, use them, and watch your class jump at the chance to answer questions and participate in activities!

1. Let Students Choose Activities

While you cannot let students make all the decisions, they will be much more interested in an activity they “chose.” A good way of letting them make decisions

without really making decisions is to give them options. By offering more than one possible activity, you allow them the freedom to influence the session but remain on track, still achieving your objectives while you build their confidence and independence. When students feel that the activity chosen was their idea, they will be much more likely to participate in it, leading to its success. They do not want to pick an activity that others will find boring, so it is important to them that it work out. This means they will have to participate and stay on track, pushing the other students to appreciate the activity as much as they do.

2. Keep Things Fast Paced

Nothing kills participation like a slow-moving session. Keep your kids involved and interested by changing things up frequently. If students do not understand why they are doing something or do not find it interesting, they will not participate fully in it, so it is important to keep them enthused by keeping them busy. If you lose their attention, even for a second, you could have lost them for the whole session, so keep things jam-packed with activities. It is important to practice these activities before arriving at the session, so that you can fix any problem areas you find. If you appear unprepared or confused, your students will follow your lead and quickly become disinterested. In our current world of instant gratification, teachers must seek to reach kids on their level of high intensity and quick results.

3. Explain the Significance of Every Activity

Your students have to understand the importance of every activity before they will buy into it, so be sure to start every session explaining what the theme of the day is and how each of the activities fits into the idea. Pick activities that really do match well with your lesson. Your students will see through any “busy work” that you give them, and they will refuse to participate because of it. If you do not have enough meaningful projects to assign, allow them

time to express themselves creatively through art instead of leading them through an exercise that both you and they know is not helping them learn.

Your students are not always going to agree with you when you think something is important, but by explaining it, you give them the chance to see it from your point of view, which often will change their minds. Remember that the success of your explanation comes in your enthusiasm for the project and your knowledge of the activity, so be prepared and excited to lead them in another session of Sunday school.

4. Engage Students With all Five Senses

Many students are visual learners; some, however, are auditory learners, and still others are tactile learners. To help everybody learn the way that is best for them, combine different sensory elements in your lessons. Show pictures or write on the board for a visual effect. Read aloud what you ask students to read silently with you to give auditory stimulation. You can also listen to quiet music to help students during quiet time or ask them to sing along to a favorite Christian song. Have students touch and move with crafts activities for holidays and any day that fits in well with your lesson. Taste is a hard sense to involve in your lessons, but food is a fantastic motivator that can be used sparingly to get your students to participate. Bring in ethnic food for them to try around different holidays or bring treats for the most-involved students. Finally, engage their sense of smell with incense, candles, or potpourri, remembering to account for the dangers of having lit incense or candles around young people. Put safety first, especially because smell is not one of the main senses used in learning.

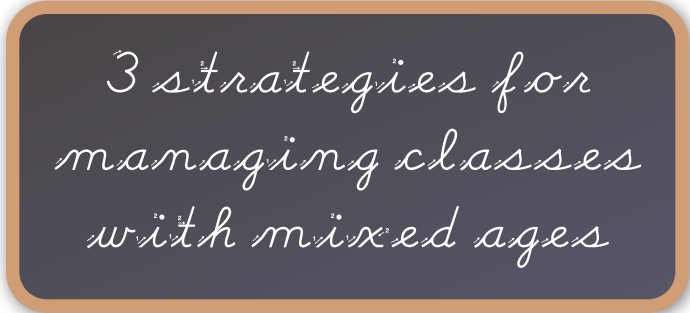
When you help kids learn their way, you keep them interested. Also, by engaging them in different ways, you will be helping them to remember things because of the many senses involved in the lesson.

5. Keep Parents Involved in Your Lessons

Students will not be excited about going to Sunday school or participating once they are there if their parents do not set an example of enthusiasm. To get parents on board about your Sunday school sessions, send home frequent reminders about what is happening during the classes.

Ask parents to come by at the end of a session to chat with you and ask any questions they may have regarding the classes. Building a good rapport with the parents of your students will have a direct reflection on your students' attitudes, because kids learn so much from their parents. Talk to your students' parents about how important they are in getting their children excited about Sunday school.

Talk to parents when students are not participating as much as you would like or have seen in the past. Ask the student if anything is bothering them, and if they are unresponsive or vague, bring the issue to the parents. Most parents are more than willing to help, especially since you are taking time out of your schedule to meet with them and discuss a concern about their child.



*3 strategies for
managing classes
with mixed ages*

One of the hardest parts of being a Sunday school teacher is making your lessons mean something to every student in your class. This is especially hard to do if your students are different ages, with different levels of maturity and attention spans. However, it is possible to engage all your students with the same lesson, at the same time! With groups of vastly different ages, it is always helpful to have an assis-

tant teacher or a teenage helper, since you will not be able to focus your time on everyone. Before getting too frustrated, ask for help from your religious director. You will be amazed at how much one extra pair of hands can help! Read on for tips to spread the message of Jesus to students of all ages.

1. Present the Same Lesson in Different Ways

Because your students have different life experiences and different ways of handling new ideas, it is important to present a lesson in different ways so that it means something to everyone. There is no lesson too hard or too easy for your students, but every lesson must be tailored specifically for your age group. One easy tool to making a lesson mean something to everyone is to begin with everyone together, going through the basic Bible passages or explaining the basic concept. You can ask for help from your older students with reading the passages or helping with set-up.



When you have explained things to the level that your youngest students will understand, break your students into age groups. The youngest can start on their project first, while you move between the other groups, starting with the youngest and ending with

the oldest. While working with each group, you should review the lesson just presented for the youngest students and build on it, delving deeper into the ideas you are presenting or adding more Bible study to the lesson. The oldest students should be able to engage in a discussion of the material, which you may or may not have to facilitate. This is a great way to present the same lesson to different students, while making it mean something to all of them.

2. Ask for Help from Your Students

While your older students in class should not only be used as assistant teachers, it is important to show them that they are older and more responsible than the other students in the room. They should be given small tasks to help them stay involved and feel engaged in the lessons and the sessions in general. Your younger students should also have a place in the responsibility of making the classroom run, but of course, their task should be less-involved and less essential. Giving all your students tasks helps them see their place in the class and makes everyone feel important. This helps you stay on top of your many responsibilities as a teacher and imparts some sense of accountability to your students, an important life lesson.

3. Engage all your Students in Regular Class Discussions

Although your students are different ages and have different ways of looking at the world, there is a good way to get all your students engaged in discussion. With everyone in a circle, start the discussion by explaining what you hope to do—ask questions that you let hear your students' opinions and that spark discussion among the group. Ask specific questions to the younger students, such as "Can you tell me about a time you felt really sad? What happened?" For the

older students, you can ask, “Why do you think God allows us to be sad?” All ages can answer both questions, but they might be geared toward different groups. Keeping the ages together helps you manage all the students in your care and also helps them get to know each other and appreciate the opinions of all ages.