



Bible App for Kids Curriculum: **Dealing With Challenging Behavior**

Kids are kids, and they do kid things. Sometimes those kid things are a challenge. Here are some strategies that can help you deal with challenging behavior.

First things first. When you notice a behavior that stands out to you, ask yourself, “Is this behavior causing a distraction or a safety concern to the other kids, or is it only bothering me?” For example, it’s hard to ignore the lone two-year-old who’s standing up in the middle of Movie and Music Time after you’ve asked them to sit down three times, but if none of the other kids care, it’s something you can just leave be.

Once you determine a behavior is unsafe or a distraction to the other kids, try these **four strategies** to help you think on your feet and deal with challenging behavior compassionately and effectively.

1. **Redirection:** Give kids an appropriate activity they can do instead.

Why does it matter? Asking a kid to stop a challenging behavior may stop it for a moment, but redirecting them to a new, more appropriate activity helps them to leave it behind for a longer period of time (or altogether!)

Redirection Tips: When you redirect a child, stay with them and do the new activity with them to help them stay interested. Here are a few techniques that may help you deal with some common challenging behaviors.

- **Running:** Say, “Let’s stay safe by using our walking feet.” Gently walk with the child and play with them until they are focused on an activity that does not encourage running.
- **Hitting:** Say, “It hurts when we hit. Let’s use gentle hands, instead,” and give the child an opportunity to use their hands in an appropriate way, such as giving you a high five or holding your hand. Once they’re calmer, re-engage them in play or refocus them on the learning activity. If necessary, separate them from the child they were hitting.
- **Not sharing:** Say, “All of these toys are for sharing. When they’re finished, you can have a turn.” While the child is waiting, help them find a different toy to play with, and remember to follow through on the turn you promised!

- **Shouting:** Say, “Let’s use quiet voices. Tell me again in a quiet voice so I can understand you.” Listen closely, and act impressed when the child speaks very quietly to you.
- **Screaming/Crying:** Say, “I can’t understand you when you’re crying. Can you try to tell me again?” Encourage the child to speak to you until they can communicate their problem or feelings without crying. Move on to an appropriate activity together once they calm down.

2. **Be Positive:** Use praise, kind words, and encouragement.

Why does it matter? Positive, encouraging leadership motivates kids to move in the right direction, and can actually prevent some bouts of challenging behavior.

Tips to be positive:

- **Praise:** When you see a kid doing a great job, praise them specifically for it. Say things like, “Thank you, Casey, for putting toys away. You’re a great example to follow,” or “Wow, did you see the way Jalen shared! She is being a great friend!”
- **Humor:** Sometimes all a kid needs is a good joke. Stay near them and do something silly, like telling all the kids they’re puppies or pretending you just ate a bottle of hot sauce. Once you can get a giggle, a kid may be able to reset and try again. *Avoid tickling and forcing yourself into a child’s “bubble.” This can be threatening and cause more distress.*
- **Kind words:** Just being nice to a kid helps them to feel secure, precious, and loved enough to connect to you instead of seeking out inappropriate behaviors. Be generous with kind words like, “I love you,” “Good job,” “You look great today,” or “It’s good to see you!”

3. **Neutral Attitude:** Using calm, nonthreatening speech, posture, and body language.

Why does it matter? Negative or overexcited words, body language, and facial expressions may increase a child’s level of shame and distress, which in turn causes more challenging behavior.

Tips for maintaining a neutral attitude: You may be highly agitated on the inside in response to a child’s behavior, but there are techniques you can use to avoid elevating the situation:

- **Ignore a first offense.** If a child does something that is out of line one time and no one is hurt, try ignoring the situation. If the child doesn’t get the attention they expected, they may not try the behavior again.
- **Regulate body language:** Relax your face, sit on the floor or kneel, sit beside the child instead of face to face, modulate your voice to be calm, keep your hands loose and unclenched, and avoid staring the child down.
- **Let go of hard feelings:** If you feel agitated after the situation is over, discreetly talk with a trusted friend to get it off your chest and avoid grudges. Ask God to help you let it go. Both you and the kid need a fresh start the next time around.

4. **Get Help:** Be familiar with the resources you have when it’s more than you can handle.

Why does it matter? When a child is overstimulated or nonresponsive to everything you’re doing, you need to know who can help so you don’t act out of anger or frustration.

Where to get help:

- **Prayer.** The best wisdom you can ever get in leading a child comes from the one who knows the best way to lead everyone. Take a moment to pray before you approach the child.
- **Another leader:** Someone else in the room with you may have success redirecting the child.
- **Experience Coach:** In LifeKids, there is an Experience Coach in the hall who can be contacted via walkie-talkie. They can take a kid out of your room for a moment, talk with them, go for a walk with them, and help them calm down so they can try again.
- **Mentor leader:** Talk through your situation with someone who handles challenging behavior well, and see what strategies they use that might help you, too.
- **LifeKids Buddy:** Some kids may exhibit a disruptive or unsafe behavior week after week. Talk to your Experience Coach or your campus LifeKids Staff to see if a LifeKids Buddy is an option to give the child the one-on-one leadership and attention they need for success.

A final note: The end goal is not to punish and shame a child into a rigid format of behavior. It is to extend grace to them so that they can better understand the love of Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. The end goal of all interactions with kids is to share with them the grace and love of Christ. How can that goal influence the way you deal with challenging behaviors?
2. What behaviors are most difficult for you to address?
3. Which of the four strategies may help you deal with the behaviors that are most difficult for you to address: redirection, being positive, neutral attitude, or getting help?
4. How will you use that strategy?
5. How do you think that strategy will help?
6. What are some strategies that aren't listed above that have helped you deal with challenging behavior?

Prayer

God, thank You for giving us your grace, compassion, and wisdom as we lead the kids you have entrusted to our care. Help us to meet their needs and build them up to better understand the love of Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.