

Classroom Discipline: A Management Guide

For Catechists

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One of the most difficult matters for beginning and experienced teachers is effective classroom discipline. This seminar will focus on issues that are of the greatest concern to Catechists. You will not be given a miracle cure for the disruptions taking place in your classrooms. Nor will you be given a single, simple method that will solve all of your classroom management problems. Effective classroom discipline does not just happen. What worked well last year may have little impact this year.

Maintaining effective classroom discipline is the result of a constant stream of proper decision-making. Whatever discipline decisions you make are a direct result of the philosophy that you as a teacher hold and live out before your students.

Typically, teachers tend to compensate for poorly developed classroom management practices by seeking a safe have in endless rules and classroom procedures. Don't misunderstand me, these rule and routines are necessary to good classroom control, but effective classroom management is the outgrowth of a personally developed, Biblical philosophy of discipline.

Although the Bible is not a sourcebook for specific, classroom discipline techniques, it does provide a firm philosophical basis and clear guidelines for the teacher.

Before we examine some Biblical principles, let's define effective discipline. What is effective discipline? Effective discipline means *the classroom is relatively free from confusion, disorder, and anti-social behavior. Each student and the group as a whole operates freely within a structured framework which they understand, accept, and incorporate into their behavior without constant reminders and punishment.*"

Let's look at the following Biblical principles as we together develop a Christian philosophy of discipline.

Principle #1

Discipline is Related to Disciple

The purpose of discipline is to disciple students in the Lord's way. While punishment looks back, discipline addresses the future. "Discipline" is instruction that molds, shapes, corrects, and inspires appropriate behavior; punishment is the infliction of suffering, pain, injury, or loss. Discipline provides the opportunity to redirect students.

Principle #2

The Mark of Sonship

Hebrews 12:6 reminds us that "*whom the Lord loves, He chastens.*" Chastening is a mark of sonship. (Hebrews 12:8).

Principle #3

A Framework for Godliness

Maintaining discipline provides the framework necessary to build faith in Christ. Because our students live in a world that is characterized by "every man does that which is right in his own eyes," we must make every effort to show our students the necessity of living according to God's principles.

Principle #4

Submission to Authority

Learning to submit to the authority of parents and teachers is vital to the proper development of the student's relationship with God. A student's willful resistance to the authority of the teacher is a clear indication of his willingness to resist the power of God over his life.

"The present is an age of insubordination, and can we doubt that this has result from the loss of authority in the family and school!" 1871 Address from the Commissioner of Education, Washington, D.C.

Principle #5

Learning by Observing

Teachers who maintain the same standards for themselves as for their students use the most effective technique: they practice what they preach! Students internalize the values, beliefs, and goals of their teachers. Modeling appropriate behavior is the most effective and efficient way to teach children appropriate behavior. The Scriptures clearly teach that student will be like his teacher (Luke 6:40).

Principle #7

Decision-Making is Essential

The goal of discipline is to produce self-discipline and Biblical patterns of living in the life of the student. A major factor in teaching self-discipline is personal, Biblical decision-making.

Principle #8

Peers Play an Important Role in Reflecting a Biblical Lifestyle

Even though godly principles of discipline are taught in the home, church, and school, this instruction may be diluted by the lifestyles of the student's friends.

One seminar in maintaining effective classroom discipline will only give you some starting points in designing your own Biblically-based philosophy of classroom management. One starting point should focus on developing a relationship of trust with the parents of our students and involving them in the process of discipline. By concentrating on building relationships beyond the classroom, we will be able to minimize disruptions within the classroom.

A word of caution: before the parent looks to see if the students are under control, they look to see if you as the teacher are under control.

While communication is one the most beneficial tools for building trust relationships with parents, it is the most often neglected. When parents were asked: "*What teacher behavior frustrates you the most in a discipline problem situation?*", the number one response was: "**not notifying me of problems at school.**" We need to learn to communicate before problems arise.

Two Guidelines In Gaining The Support Of Parents

Let me give you two guidelines in gaining the support of parents:

1. **Communicate** to both the child and to his/her parents that you genuinely care about the child.
2. Be concerned with meeting existing **needs** of the student.

Parents need to be contacted when the child has accomplished or achieved something worthy of praise. This pattern needs to be implemented by the teacher on a daily basis.

As teachers we need to approach parents for information on how we can best address the child. We must not come across as accusatory when informing parents of a problem,

Practical Hints

1. **Communicate** early
2. Communicate before the **child** does
3. Communicate **frequently** (notes & telephone)
4. Schedule **parent conferences** early in the year
5. Communicate what you **like** their child
6. Schedule **home visits**, when possible
7. Stress School-Parent **Partnership**
8. Be **available** before and/or after class
9. Develop a positive attitude about **teaching**
10. Make parents feel **welcome**
11. Schedule **fun-filled** events
12. Be highly visible
13. Encourage parent **volunteers**
14. Understand child **development**
15. Never **surprise** parents
16. Daily **prayer** cards for one family

Three Things To Remember

Before you select any effective discipline program, there are three things to remember:

1. Decide the specific behaviors that are necessary to maintain a conducive **learning** environment.
2. Develop the **simplest** manner of expressing the selected standards.
3. Maintain flexible, **positive**, and negative consequences, while maintaining a **consistent** standard for every child.

Usually, four or five general standards are normally sufficient for a classroom setting. the main issue in setting the standards is respect – respect for others, respect for self, and respect for property. Simplicity and consistency are the keys for an effective discipline program.

Regardless of what technique we use, as Catechists we are responsible for implementing a Biblically-based approach.

Research on classroom discipline reveals that the foundational issues are the same:

1. Changing inappropriate behavior to appropriate behavior, and
2. Encouraging appropriate behavior to manifest additional appropriate behavior.

All the various discipline systems boil down to producing desired behavior through an effective implementation of rewards (encouragement, praise, positive reinforcement) **and** consequences (correction, punishment, negative reinforcement).

Praise, encouragement, and support should be a focal point of all classroom discipline. Frequently, positive reinforcement is tool often absent in the majority of classrooms. When I visit classrooms, I see list of rule and their accompanying consequences. Many times only the negative consequences are placed on the wall. there is no visual display for consequences for positive behavior. The overemphasis of the negative, and minimization of the positive, is detrimental to maintaining strong classroom discipline.

We have found that the majority of discipline problems in the classroom occur for one of two reasons: the discipline program is inadequate, or implementation of the program is ineffective. If you remember anything from this seminar, let it be the following: **clearly define the standards** and **consistently follow-through!** These are the elements of every effective discipline plan. These two can be implemented in a variety of methods, but they must not be neglected.

In our surveys, both teachers and parents indicated that lack of standards and inconsistency were the major reasons teachers fail in regard to classroom discipline.

The surveys had the following things to say about effective discipline:

1. **Flexibility.** A reasonable balance in firmness tendered with flexibility and very consistent consequences for broken rules.
2. **Set Expectations.**
3. **Inconsistency.**
4. **Consistency.** The #1 word in discipline. Students must be able to count on their teachers to be the same in regard to discipline every day.
5. **Complacency.** Teachers become inconsistent with discipline program. Daily routines lead to complacency.
6. **Perseverance.** Teachers who fail keep moving the boundary areas.
7. **Selectivity.** Have few rules and be 100% consistent!

Nine-Step Discipline Program

1. Identify **standards**. Welcome parent **involvement**.
2. Simplify standards to three or four general **classroom rules**. These should be broad enough to cover the spectrum of inappropriate behavior.
3. Survey students to determine **positive** and **negative** consequences.
4. Determine positive and negative consequences based on **standards** and **student** input.
5. **Display** class standards in the classroom with a list of approved consequences from which effective consequences can be **selected** to fit the need of each child.
6. Daily review discipline plan with the class during first **two** weeks of school.
7. Meet with parents, individually or collectively, during first two weeks of school. Implement discipline plan. Be **consistent**. Focus on praise and encouragement. Address infractions firmly, fairly, and consistently.
8. Communicate student **progress** to parents regularly.

Although classroom discipline programs are a reflection of each teacher's personality, strengths, and attitudes, they must be developed within a Biblical framework. God's Word provides a number of clear principles related to discipline and personal growth.

Discussion Time

1. *"Effective discipline does not just happen. Maintaining effective classroom discipline is the result of a constant stream of decision-making* What are some decisions, commonly made in your classroom, that affect your success in maintaining classroom discipline?
2. The eighth Biblical principle for establishing a framework for classroom discipline was **Peers Play an Important Role in Reflecting a Biblical Lifestyle (especially in word and deed)**. What steps can be taken in your classroom to direct the influence of the peer group in order that it will have a positive impact upon the class? In the school?
3. *"Inconsistency"* was noted as the number one reason that teachers fail in regard to class discipline. What are the most common areas of inconsistency evident in your classroom? In the school?
4. *"Passive resistance/noncompliance"* was reported as one of the five problems occurring most frequently in Christian schools. How does this problem manifest itself in your classroom? How do you address this problem?
5. Teachers who are successful at managing discipline in the classroom expect the best from their students. What are some of the things that you do to encourage the very best from your students?