

# Eleven Suggestions for Improving Discipline in the Classroom

**A** sea of expectant 1st graders gazed at me. Savoring the moment, I thought, "I'm in the right place doing the right thing." But later, when I taught 7th grade, that was not the case. One morning after our family devotion, I put my head down on the table and cried. "I can't face another stressful day with misbehaving students," I confessed.

"Yes, you can," my husband encouraged. "What did the Lord say to Joshua in the passage we just read? 'Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee. . .'" (Joshua 1:9, KJV).

When he reminded me of God's words, I dressed for school, with renewed strength.

Discipline is generally considered the number-one problem facing the classroom today. How can teachers maintain classroom control in the midst of concern about the decline of morals in society, which has led to violence, substance abuse, and pornography, just to name a few concerns?

Listed below are 11 suggestions gleaned from study and my 30 years of experience in the classroom.

## 1. Show genuine love and concern for each child.

Students deserve to be treated as individuals who will one day become useful members of soci-

***Discipline is generally considered the number-one problem facing the classroom today.***

ety. A student wrote me a note that said, "I'm stupid, dumb, weird, crazy, and ugly. I can't do splits, I dress funny, and I don't have many friends, including boyfriends. Mom has a boyfriend, and I don't see her much. I could cry." She signed it with a sad, tear-stained illustration of a face. My heart ached when I read her letter and realized that those who seem unlovely really need love and help most of all.

## 2. Help students understand the relevance of their classwork.

Often, if lessons don't seem to relate to real life, students don't see the reasons for learning the material and can become disruptive. If you explain the purpose of the instruction, present it in bite-sized concepts, and don't hand out routine busy work or mountains of unfamiliar homework, this frustration can be avoided. One way to help students see the relevance of a topic is to have them write the lesson's purpose in several complete sentences. They will more readily accept goals that they understand and can state in their own words.

## 3. Protect your classroom from needless interruptions and fund-raising.

Many valuable hours disappear in the maze of finding enough money to stock libraries or buy playground equipment and classroom supplies. Often, parents and neighbors would rather give a donation than buy the poor-quality items that students sell. Some might assert that selling adds to a child's education. But wouldn't a paper route, lemonade stand, or some other afternoon job ac-

BY MARYANN CAVENDER HOOD

compish the same purpose while freeing the classroom for learning?

One Christian school teacher complained that telephone calls, walk-ins, and chatting parents were wasting much of her time. If people entering the school have to check in at the office, many classroom interruptions can be avoided. Using copies of the teachers' schedules, the principal or secretary can arrange parent conferences or take messages to relay at a more convenient time. Teachers in one-room schools can utilize a telephone-answering machine to minimize interruptions.

**4. Make learning exciting by giving teachers some freedom to operate within a community's culture.**

Our principal allowed students to compete in speech contests (for example, speaking against alcohol, drugs, and smoking) in churches and schools. We also took trips on the school bus to cerebral palsy centers and nursing homes, taking small gifts and presenting programs.

Another way to provide exciting learning experiences is through outdoor education. Because I grow a variety of wild flowers and herbs, I took the children through the woods to my home rather than going by bus. On the way, we examined leaves, tree bark, rocks, beetles under dead logs, and other items of interest.

**5. Search for new ways to motivate**

Picture Removed

**students and enrich the learning enrichment.**

Visualized missionary stories enabled me to make social studies come alive and provide for bibliotherapy. As I

read aloud these heartwarming adventures, students learned to solve their problems. One student retold the stories to her younger brother, eventually leading her whole family to Christ.

# **How can teachers maintain classroom control in the midst of concern about the decline of morals in society?**

A variety of options and hands-on activities can keep students busy while others finish their studies. Listening centers with headphones, reading nooks, art and game centers, science tables, and hobby corners can add insight to lessons taught, provide for different learning styles, and prevent “the devil’s workshop.”

**6. Establish a healthy regard for democratic procedure and majority rule while respecting the rights of the minority.**

I did not require a Jehovah’s Witness student to say the Pledge of Allegiance because her religion prohibited it. I did talk to my class about respecting the beliefs of others. At the end of the school year, when 1st graders served as “big brothers and big sisters” to the kindergarten class for a day of transition, the time came to pledge to the flag. My Jehovah’s Witness student stood with her “little sister,” placed the kindergarten child’s hand over her heart, smiled at me sweetly, then sat down. I felt I had been successful in teaching respect and regard for individuality.

**7. Use the Bible, not only in religion and literature classes, but also to teach universal values and concepts and encourage self-discipline.**

After memorizing Bible verses about controlling one’s behavior, one student asked, “Is it wrong to listen to hard rock music?”

I replied, “What does Philippians 4:8 say? Are the lyrics true? Are they pure? Are they lovely? When you consider what God says, I think you’ll have your answer.”

**8. Develop an official set of guide-**

**lines and procedures for disruptive behavior and a sequence of steps to use in dealing with infractions.**

Be sure that your school has a handbook with rules for discipline spelled out. Update it periodically, after asking for faculty, parental, and student input. When students asked me why they could not chew gum in school, I pointed out the school rule and explained the reasons why this was necessary. They accept rules for the entire school more readily than they do from individual teachers.

**9. Utilize peer counseling and discipline.**

A student who usually sat in the back of my class habitually complained about most activities. One day, after learning Philippians 2:14, the group turned around and teased, “Do all things without murmurings and disputings.” After they repeated this a time or two, he stopped his griping.

My class had a three-day outdoor educational activity at Camp Cosby, where they learned to work in groups. Students eagerly cooperated to make the program a success because they knew that if they did not follow the rules, they would have to forgo games, campfires, night hikes, and other delightful ways of learning. They would let down their partners and cooperative

groups and might even be sent home early.

**10. Be alert to teachable moments.**

Lesson plans can be flexible enough to utilize unexpected happenings. For example, my 5th graders blamed one boy for tearing the flag. Later, another youngster asked me to come outside the door for a private talk. With tears trickling down his face, he whispered, “I’m so sorry. I tore the flag. I walked by, and my pencil got hung up in it.”

I hugged him and replied, “That’s all right, Louis [not his real name].” We walked back into the classroom. With my arm around his shoulders, I announced, “Students, I’m so proud of Louis. He told me he tore the flag by accident. It took a lot of courage to tell the truth when he could have gotten away with a lie. Don’t you agree?”

**11. Set a good example.**

Remember to treat students as you would like to be treated. One proverbial saying I have taught my students is this: “What you do speaks so loudly I can’t hear what you say.” This works for the teacher as well as the students. Loving Christian teachers point students to a better way of life and demonstrate proper role modeling in their day-by-day living. Take time for yourself, and to tend to your spiritual life. Remember, God hasn’t asked you to “go it alone.” He has promised to help you. Meditate, pray, and read inspirational materials that will help maintain a calm and gentle spirit.

These recommendations are not exhaustive, and many teachers already practice some or all of them. But if they are put into operation, these ideas can alleviate many classroom problems and help students learn self-control. ✍

---

(All Bible quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.)

---

**Maryann Cavender Hood** is a freelance writer and retired teacher of various subjects in grades 1 through 7 in the U.S. and Bolivia. She has also led out in a kindergarten workshop for teachers. Mrs. Hood was selected Teacher of the Year for Etowah County, Alabama, and several times at her local school. She writes from Gadsden, Alabama.