

# MINISTRY TO DIFFICULT KIDS

BEHAVIOR NORMALLY MIRRORS DISRUPTIONS AND CHAOS THAT A CHILD MAY BE EXPERIENCING IN LIFE. WE ARE GOING TO HAVE CHILDREN IN OUR MINISTRIES THAT HAVE CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS, SOME WITH SPECIFIC DIAGNOSED DISORDERS, AND OTHERS THAT ARE JUST STRESSED, OVERWHELMED, FRUSTRATED AND THEY ACT OUT. NEVER TALK ABOUT A "BAD" CHILD, THEIR BEHAVIOR MAY BE UNACCEPTABLE BUT THE CHILD IS NOT.

## SHOW LOVE TO EVERY CHILD

We do not help a situation when we get upset with the child or the parents. See it as an opportunity to show God's unconditional love. Most children act the way they do for a reason.



## ALWAYS STAY CALM

Sometimes when we are dealing with difficult behavior, we can let it get the best of us. Take a deep breath and ask for help before things escalate.



## BE WELCOMING

Greet every child when they arrive and be glad that they are there. Children sense when they are not wanted.



## REINFORCE POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

Find opportunities to praise children when they do things well.



## COMMUNICATE POSITIVELY WITH VOLUNTEERS AND FAMILIES

If you know the specific situation of a child, update your volunteers. Encourage volunteers to build a relationship with the parents and create a partnership that will keep communication open.



## ENCOURAGE AND TRAIN YOUR VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers need clear guidelines for how to manage the classroom. Give them support and encouragement. Sending an encouraging text after they have had a difficult class will go a long way.



## BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Understanding what's going on in homes and with children will help you have compassion in situations that involve challenging behavior with a new perspective and approach to guiding behaviors. Situations that may cause disrupting behavior can include a new baby, a move, divorce, death of family member/friend, illness, trauma, etc.



## RECOGNIZE THAT YOU ARE DEALING WITH A CHILD

Children need tender direction and loving leadership. Constant discipline, criticism, and raised eyebrows make them feel foolish and inadequate. Kids are going to make mistakes and may even be clumsy. Allow them to be children.



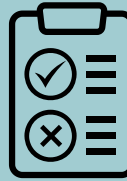
## GIVE THEM GUIDANCE

When a child acts out, they may be asking for affirmation and reassurance. Gentle guidance and loving discipline can redirect them to change behavior.



## BE LOVINGLY FIRM WHEN NECESSARY

Enforce the rules and give clear expectations. Children need to know that you are in charge, but they also need to know that you care about them. This creates stability in most children.



## KEEP A ROUTINE AND BE CONSISTENT

If multiple volunteers are working with the same children at different times, then expectations need to be the same. Communicate with volunteers that when dealing with difficult children, consistency in expectations and routines help children feel secure, develop self-discipline, and understand what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

## USE THE BUDDY OR SHADOW SYSTEM

If needed, have a volunteer come in to sit with the child. This volunteer isn't there to teach the lesson, but to help the child focus so they participate appropriately with the rest of the class. If the child becomes over-stimulated or disruptive, then the volunteer can take them in the hall to help them calm down and return to the classroom at the right time.



## PICK YOUR BATTLES AND SOMETIMES SAY YES

Children love to be heard and to make suggestions. Always remember that the ultimate goal is to help children learn about God and grow in a relationship with Him. Your "yes" shouldn't distract from that. Ex. If they want to sit on the floor instead of chairs, let them; if they want to play a favorite review game instead of the one you had planned, let them.



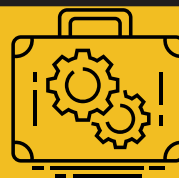
## CONFIDENTIALITY IS IMPORTANT

It's very important that we don't share information that we learn about children and their families. Let the parents reveal what they want people to know, that is not our job. Also, don't talk about the child and their struggles with others – just remember this is someone's child and parents don't like their child being talked about in a negative manner.



## CATER TO THEIR INTEREST

Teach in a manner that will engage your group and in a way that includes the different learning approaches (visual, verbal, musical, physical, relational, logical, natural, reflective). Get them moving, don't expect a child to sit still for long amounts of time.



## HAVE A RESOURCE KIT

We can keep simple things on hand to assist with behaviors and help children regulate themselves. Ex. Sour candy for distraction from a behavior; sensory objects like fidgets, pop-its, play-doh, or texture strips; a drink of water to calm them down; protein bar in case they are just hungry.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Wholly Kids  
by Lifeway Kids



Trauma-Informed Children's Ministry  
by Robert Crosby and Lori Crosby