

# Using Good Group Management Tools

1. **Provide Structure.** Set up the space (i.e., classroom, multi-purpose room, or yard) to match the needs and energy level of the activity.
2. **Stay Grounded.** Always start an activity from a point of order. Help students calm down with quiet time or deep breaths. Help children to focus. Try flicking light switches. Consistently ask "Are you ready" and wait for their reply. Use signals, ring a bell, communicate in a whisper, etc.
3. **Give children Clear Expectations.** Let students know which behaviors are acceptable and which are not in different situations. Inform students when you change activities and, therefore, your expectations, i.e., when outside, noise and activity levels may be higher.
4. **Provide Cues and Diffuse Bad Behavior.** Give gentle yet firm reminders of the rules. Notice when someone is not on task/target. Respond to signs of anxiety and agitation before they escalate. Facial expressions, body posture and hand signals (i.e., raise your own hand which starts a chain of hand raising--as everyone raises a hand, it starts to get quiet in the room).
5. **Reinforce Positive Behaviors.** Praise children when they are positive and appropriate. Call out the names of students who are following directions. Reinforce positive behavior in a variety of settings. Boost children's self-esteem, but make sure your praise is sincere and not so abundant that children start to tune it out or become dependent or anxious if they don't receive it.
6. **Ignore Negative Behaviors.** When appropriate (no possible danger); ignore a child who is seeking attention in a negative manner.
7. **Isolate or Relocate Children Who Are Misbehaving.** Move one or more children who are being disruptive to another seat or to a quiet area.
8. **Touch Children Appropriately.** When appropriate, a gentle touch to calm a child goes a long way! A flat hand on the back to guide children is more appropriate (and safer when you're angry) than grabbing a child's arm.
9. **Build Rituals.** For regular routines and transitions, create rituals, i.e., a chant, game, question, movement, etc. You may wish to plan something to do regularly whenever the group gets out of hand.
10. **Use Individual or Group Problem Solving.** If there is an unresolved dispute, bring together a few individuals or the whole group. Follow these steps to reach an agreement:
  - Listen to one person's side at a time. All must agree to be silent when another is talking.
  - When all have spoken, see if someone can state the problem and where the agreement lies.
  - When the problem seems clear to everyone, brainstorm possible solutions to the problem.

- Discuss the outcomes for each solution and pick one.
- Have the involved parties agree to follow the solution. A written or verbal contract may be necessary.

**11. Provide Choices.** Offer children choices for their activities.

**12. Group Participants Together in Small Groups.** Smaller groupings may be more appropriate and easier to manage than one large group. They provide better opportunities for developing individual children's interest and providing them with more attention.

**13. Use Peer Pressure to Help You.** Once you have helped to create a healthy group climate, let the participants remind each other of the rules and keep each other in line. Ask the group if it is acceptable for one disruptive person to act this way. Put it back on them.

**14. Foster Leadership.** Let the natural leaders of the group emerge. Participants who are demanding attention or pulling the group to follow them often become positive leaders when given the chance.

**15. Give Rewards.** Follow teaching, group meetings, or less popular activities with a more desirable activity such as a game, snack, etc. Let participants earn the right to do or receive something special. However, keep the focus on the behavior and not the reward...let it be a reward, not a bribe.

**16. Transform the Situation.** When it all seems to be falling apart or a child is stuck in a negative groove, turn it around. Turn it into a game or contest. Diffuse the problem.

**17. Redirect Children Who Are Behaving Inappropriately.** When a child's actions are inappropriate or disruptive, redirect him by suggesting or teaching other ways to act to get what he wants. Help the child see how he or she is responsible for his or her own behavior.

**18. Chart Difficult Behavior.** For difficult to change behavior, develop a behavior modification system in which children earn a check mark for specified behaviors. Reward a certain number of checks with a gift, toy, activity, or special privileges at the program.

**19. Help Children Save Face.** Try to create an opportunity for a child to save face, to correct a wrong, to find a way out, to change a behavior on their own, and to take responsibility for themselves. No one wins when a child feels cornered or embarrassed.

**20. Use Natural Consequences.** If the group is disruptive and irresponsible or an individual is disrespectful, then let the natural consequence follow. Rudeness will exclude an individual from being invited somewhere. If you fail to show up for snack during the allotted time, you miss snack. If the group or child will not take responsibility for their actions, then it naturally follows that they will not have what it takes to do certain activities.

**21. When appropriate use Logical Consequences.** These are consequences of behavior that have been arranged by the staff (or children). They're best if they're related to the incident. For example, if you cheat at a game you'll have to leave the games area. If you don't assist in clean up, you lose special privileges.

**22. Monitor Activities.** Circulate throughout the room. Make the rounds. Check on children's progress. Comment on their involvement or progress in a specific activity. Get involved. Redirect wandering children. Ask questions and expand the thinking of children involved in an activity. Head behavior off at the pass...if an activity or an interaction is likely to escalate into something more, be there. Don't wait too long before you respond.

**23. Send Consistent Messages.** Make sure your words, mannerisms, and body language is consistent. If it's serious, be serious. If it's a joke, make a joke...but don't confuse the two. Avoid sarcasm that sends mixed messages such as "That was really smart."

**24. Follow Through.** Once you set forth an expectation or potential consequence, it is imperative that you follow through. Children learn to trust that you mean what you say, you're focused enough to finish what you start.

**25. Choose Your Words Carefully.** Resist the tendency to talk too much with young children or to lecture older children. Draft some phrases that are brief and to the point when guiding young children: "That hurts, sit with me, join the group, walk, look at my eyes, come here, use your walking feet." Avoid those words that can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy: "You always, you never, why can't you, I never expected you to...", etc." Avoid words that attack a child's personality and pass judgment, i.e., "You're lazy, you're stupid, you're a troublemaker, you're bad." Instead, focus on the specific frustrating behavior, i.e., "When you don't participate in clean up, you're not being fair to the rest of the children. It's your mess; you need to clean it up. When you make a decision to break a rule, that's your choice but you will have to face the consequences. Leave the other children out of it. You have a wonderful knack of influencing your peers; that's a sign of a leader, but we need to help you learn how to use that to influence them in positive ways, not negative ways."

**26. Don't practice Long Distance Discipline:** Go directly to the child, establish eye contact.

**27. Take away or Minimize the Audience:** Remove or relocate the child who swears, spits, throws a tantrum, etc., to a new area away from the group. For example, the young child who spits can spit all he or she wants; as long as it's in the toilet.

**28. Diffuse Power Words** (i.e., swear words, bathroom words). Simply say, "I've heard those words before" (and then let it go).

**29. Use assertive I Messages:** I want you to... I'm concerned when you...I feel... I expect you to...I know you can make good choices. Focus on what to do, not what to stop doing. "I need you to stop...." will often trigger a confrontation or denial. The immediate response is for the child to say, "I wasn't doing anything. It isn't my fault."

**30. Ask yourself "Does it Really Matter?"** It's normal for children to exert their autonomy and independence by making a lot of requests. Sometimes staff get into the habit of saying "no" more than is necessary. Before you say "no" to a child, ask yourself, "Does it really matter?" If it doesn't, then let the child do as he or she pleases. This helps in giving them power when appropriate and in building that warm and respectful relationship that will make you more effective when you need to guide and discipline. If it really does matter (i.e., safety, values, it's inappropriate, too expensive, etc.) then it's OK to say no...just make sure you explain your decision to the child. Your explanation is part of the learning process. Don't allow the child to turn no into a yes by arguing or throwing a tantrum.