

Discipline Tips for Preschool Students



Procedural Discipline Reminders for All Students

- All students, those with and without disabilities, are entitled to certain rights before they can be excluded for any period of time from a federally- or state-funded program for disciplinary reasons.
- Any disciplinary removal of a student with a disability from the current placement for more than 10 consecutive school days is a “change of placement” for the student.
- Disciplinary removals of a student with a disability that are not necessarily called “suspension” might be counted as “change of placement” days for that student.
- Care should be taken to ensure that a student is not denied access to his or her specially designed instruction due to frequent disciplinary removals.

Tips for the Preschool Classroom

Expectations:

- Have clear, concise, and explicit expectations. “Children must understand what to do and how to behave.” (DeMeo, 2013)
- “Expectations must be reasonable, positively worded, and relatively few in number.” (DeMeo, 2013)
- Teach expectations and appropriate behaviors explicitly. Do not assume that they already know how to behave or what is expected.
- Be calm and impassive. Be sure your emotions are controlled when addressing behavior.
- Don’t expect behavioral change overnight. It takes time, patience, consistency, and commitment.
- Be prepared for tantrums—they are a “developmental certainty. Limit your reaction and give students a place where they can calm down and feel safe.” (Inskeep)
- Constantly point out good behavior. Reinforce the behavior that you want to see.

Routines:

- Create consistent, predictable, and structured classroom routines. Every time you meet with students, keep the same routine so they know what to expect.
- Consider implementing the use of an interactive class picture schedule to reinforce the routine, and teach the use of this schedule explicitly to the students.
- Implement individual interactive picture schedules for specific students if needed.
- Let students know well ahead of time if the schedule must change and why.
- Ensure smoother transitions by giving a warning ahead of time verbally, giving an auditory sound, using a timer, etc.
- Use lots of visuals to reinforce expectations, like a picture schedule, visual reminders of space (i.e., tape on the carpet or a hula hoop outlining a student’s designated area), choice boards, “first-then” boards, and pictures to remind students of appropriate behaviors, expectations, etc.
- Alternate between active and calming activities to keep students engaged and to meet their need for movement.
- Give everything a place. Order and tidiness help preschool students feel secure and focus.

Consequences:

- Be clear, sound like you mean it, and use serious facial expressions.
- “Don’t overreact to behavior missteps.” (Inskeep) No matter what happens, you should keep a calm and even demeanor, voice, and tone.
- Do not waiver. Follow through with what you say you’re going to do.
- Correct misbehavior in a calm, consistent, and reasonable manner.
- Make “start” requests rather than “stop” requests.
- Use logical consequences. For example, if children don’t pick up toys, they can’t play with them next time. If a child uses a bad word, give him a different word to say. Use logic that young children can follow when setting consequences.

Familiarity:

- Know your students. By making personal connections with students, you’ll have relationships upon which to build when things aren’t going smoothly.
- Know your students. By learning about their personalities, you will learn any behavioral triggers and can identify unusual behavior before it escalates.
- Know your students. By knowing what is going on in students’ families, what they have experienced, etc., you can better understand why certain behaviors may occur.
- Know your families. By knowing your families, you can learn if there are any underlying reasons for behavior, enlist their help in managing behavior, learn what strategies might work at home, and establish consistency between classroom and home.
- Know that changing the adult behavior is how we change the student’s behavior.

Below are a few resources on setting up a preschool classroom and using visual supports:

References

DeMeo, W. 2013. Positive discipline strategies for the preschool classroom. Excerpted March 6, 2017 from *When Nothing Else Works: What Early Childhood Professionals Can Do to Reduce Challenging Behaviors*. William DeMeo. 2013. Lewisville: NC: Gryphon House. Retrieved April 20, 2020 from: <https://www.gryphonhouse.com/resources/positive-discipline-strategies-for-the-preschool-classroom>.

Inskeep, Charlotte. 10 Discipline Tips that work well with preschoolers. *Children’s Ministry Magazine*. Loveland: CO: Group Publishing, Inc.

IRIS Center Module: Early Childhood Environments: Designing Effective Classrooms: <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/env/#content>

AFIRM Visual Supports (VS) Step by Step Guide:

<https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/sites/afirm.fpg.unc.edu/files/imce/resources/VS%20Step-by-Step.pdf>



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