

Behavioral Principles and Guidelines for Children

at
St. Paul's Presbyterian Church
Orlando, Florida

We love children at St. Paul's and are thrilled to have them among us. They are not only the future of this church but they are the means by which the fame of the Lord's name will be carried to the next generation. We who labor on behalf of children, youth, and their parents take our responsibility seriously and want to do all we can to nurture faith in these children and to encourage their parents. This responsibility is what has inspired and informed these principles and guidelines for behavior at St. Paul's. If you would like an expanded description of the philosophy and theology behind these principles and guidelines, please contact the church office.

THREE CONVICTIONS

There are at least three convictions, which have motivated the development of these "Behavioral Guidelines for Children at St. Paul's". First, we are a big family and it is important for certain boundaries to be in place for the sake of the "family". Stewardship of church property, the safety of others and the safety of our children are at stake. A child running through the foyer on a Sunday morning may not be a concern to most people but for a 75-year-old woman, who is shaky on her feet and terrified of a broken hip, a running child poses a very serious threat.

Second, children who are well disciplined and under control honor the Lord, honor their parents and are a positive reflection of the ministry of our church. If this is true, then the opposite is also true. Unruly children dishonor the Lord and are an embarrassment to their parents and to the church (Proverbs 29:15, I Timothy 3:4, 5).

Third, and probably most important, is that discipline is an important part of nurturing faith in our children. To follow Jesus is to obey Jesus and to submit to His authority. Cultivating an obedient spirit in our children and teaching them to yield to God-given authorities in their lives helps to prepare their hearts to obey Christ and to bend their wills to His.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Although it is possible to control the outward actions of a child and produce a desired behavior, the goal of our ministry to young people is to direct their hearts toward God and cultivate a spirit, which is responsive to Him. True obedience and discipline flows from a heart that is responsive to the Lord. It is not merely the conformity to an external set of rules. Therefore, if we are concerned about the behavior of our children, the most important thing that parents and youth-workers can do is to seek God's help in nurturing hearts of faith out of which acts of righteousness will flow.
2. We will maintain high standards for behavior at St. Paul's but we are also committed to being fair and realistic about our expectations of children. If a child only had six hours of sleep the night before, we should not be surprised if he has difficulty sitting still in

church. If a preschooler is expected to sit quietly for a lengthy service, we are probably expecting too much. If there are 45 minutes of unstructured time between a social event and worship service, we should not be surprised if children will get into mischief. We will do our best to consider children and their limits and try to accommodate their needs as much as possible.

3. Parents are ultimately responsible for the behavior of their children. We will expect parents to keep their children under control during public gatherings and to make sure that their children are always under adult supervision. When under the supervision of a youth or children's worker at St. Paul's, that worker will be expected to maintain order and appropriate behavior of the children in his care. If a child is not responsive to any of the permissible forms of classroom discipline, the child will be taken to his parents.
4. The raising of children is also a community responsibility. As a church family we gladly stand with parents and are eager to do all we can to support and encourage them in their parenting responsibilities. We consider it a serious responsibility to teach the full counsel of God and inspire children in faith, in love and in righteousness. Some children will struggle with behavioral problems more than others will. The Director of Children's Ministries and the pastors are eager to pray, strategize and work with parent to find solutions

EXPECTATIONS OF CHILDREN AT ST. PAUL'S

Although the behavioral boundaries vary depending on the age of the child, the activity they are involved in, and where that activity takes place, most rules will fall under one of four basic teaching goals, which we have for the children at St. Paul's.

1. Respect for the House of the Lord

Children will be expected to treat church buildings, furnishings and equipment in a way that honors the Lord and to use those things in the way that they were intended. Specifically, children will be encouraged to stand only on floors, not on pews, tables, balcony ledges or windowsills. Children should refrain from running in aisles or church corridors. Paper is an appropriate medium for artistic expression, not walls or furniture. Trash belongs in trash containers. Space and equipment should be left in the same or better condition than it was found. Items such as pianos, microphones, the pulpit and its furnishings should be avoided unless permission to use these items has been obtained. Children or their parents may be asked to accept responsibility for accidental or intentional damage to church property or equipment.

2. Respect for Adults

We want the children of St. Paul's to honor the adults in the church with respectful speech and behavior. Talking back or defying the instruction or correction of an adult are examples of what is considered disrespectful. We also will encourage children to use Mr., Mrs., Ms. or Miss, when addressing adults.

3. Respect for Others

We will endeavor to provide a physically, emotionally, and spiritually safe environment for every child involved at St. Paul's. Children will be encouraged to think before they speak and find encouraging things to say to others. Therefore, mean, crude or hurtful speech or actions toward others are not acceptable.

4. Respect for Themselves

We will encourage children not to act in ways that will put their bodies or their faith at risk.

A WORD ABOUT CORRECTION

We believe that discipline should be primarily positive and so we encourage parents and those who work with children to be quick to encourage and affirm positive behavior. We also encourage immediate and consistent response to negative behavior before it escalates into a serious problem. If the parents are present, we will expect them to correct their children when they misbehave. We will also encourage other adults not to ignore a behavior problem when they see it. If someone else speaks to your child, please do not be offended or insulted.

If parents are not present, the person in charge may respond by first speaking to the child and issuing a warning. If the child persists in the behavior, he may be denied a privilege or isolated from the group. The last resource available to the worker is to take the child to his parents.

Since it is our conviction that parents are the appropriate persons to employ corporal punishment when needed (and this is best carried out privately), any physical form of correction is considered unacceptable in the classroom or any other group setting. Those working with children and youth are only permitted to gently restrain a child to keep him from hurting himself or another.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. Please discuss this with your children. If you have any questions or concerns feel free to contact the church office.