

part 2 of 2—

Ministering to Troubled Children

by Timothy P. Lyons

Intervene in Problem Behaviors

It is important to address behaviors as they come up. Children are born with a drive to explore and test their surroundings. This includes social boundaries. This is how they learn. Even though they may not be receiving training in these areas at home, we cannot ignore disruptive behavior or allow it to interfere with the learning of others. Several simple keys can turn a combative or disrespectful child into a willing pupil and ally.

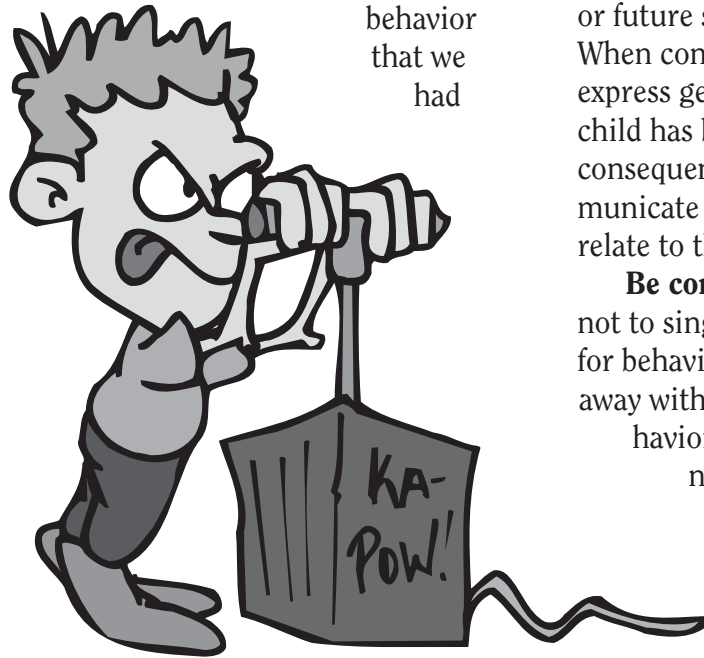
Show respect to every child

We must model behaviors we expect to teach to others. Protect their self-esteem and improve their attention to you by taking them to the side to talk. Address the child person-to-person. Speak to his heart, not his head. Ask questions. Listen. Ask more questions. Be discerning and build a relationship. Children are more inclined to obey those they respect and

feel connected to. Alternately, they challenge rules from those whom they perceive as uncaring or harsh.

Address a problem while it is small

Delay is an invitation for confusion for a child. When we confront a behavior that we had



previously been tolerating, they will struggle to understand when the behavior is acceptable and when it is not. Help them to explore their motives and the needs represented in their ac-

tions, and help them find more appropriate ways to meet them.

Communicate clearly

Say exactly what you mean in clear and kind terms. Do exactly what you say you will do. Show respect, giving the reasons for your rules. Define your expectations and any consequences or future steps you may take. When consequences do occur, express genuine sorrow that the child has brought about those consequences and directly communicate how the consequences relate to the child's behavior.

Be consistent. Be careful not to single out an individual for behavior that others may get away with. Do not ignore behavior when it reoccurs; do not become worn out when children need repetitive instruction. Problem behaviors do not develop overnight and will not be

changed without patience and persistence. Love the children enough to be a stable force in their lives.

Always stay positive. Remember to measure progress rather than failures. Encourage

the children and offer hope. Demonstrate to them the nurture of God's love and grace and you will win them for eternity.

Troubled children and their families desperately need our help. The torch of the gospel can transform individuals,

families, and entire cultures. Children's ministries provide a unique avenue to become involved when we recognize behavior problems as our opportunities to minister. May God equip us for the opportunities that lie ahead.

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Questions for Further Study—

1. In what ways do you communicate your expectations and consequences of behavior to the children in your ministry?
2. What areas in your life do you need to improve upon to be more effective in ministering to the children with problem behaviors?
3. List two ways that you could reach out to families of troubled children in your church.