



Let the Kids Decide



“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love” (Galatians 5:13).

• When have you given children freedom?

• How are you currently empowering your students to make good choices concerning their behavior?

▼ Training Session

A child defiantly asks, “Why do I have to sit down?” How do you respond?

“Because I said so” doesn’t exactly work. Sure it’ll get kids to do what you want. But what do they *learn*? Does that help kids really mature?

God gives us freedom to choose. So try this approach: Give kids choices.

Let kids choose the rules. It’s great to set guidelines *with* your class. Let them have a say in the rules.

Start with a general set of guidelines, three basic concepts to lay a foundation. These usually work well:

- Respect others.
- Take care of our resources.
- Participate with enthusiasm.

These general rules cover pretty much everything. If you want to add one or two, fine, but draw the line at five. Keep things simple.

Let kids know these are your expectations. Then let them work together to define each one. For example, have elementary kids come up with five behaviors they’d expect under each guideline. If you teach preschool children, ask them how to treat each other, how to treat toys and the classroom, and what they should do during activities.

Then look over kids’ definitions. Make sure they’re accurate. For example, “Eat doughnuts every week” isn’t a rule. “Use kind words” is.

Letting kids decide their own expectations allows them to set goals—and to have a big stake in their learning environment.

Let children choose the consequences. Sometimes even when kids set their own expectations, they don’t live up to them.

It’s easy to remove the misbehaving child from the environment. But that also removes learning. Rather than quickly sending children to timeout, give two or three options.

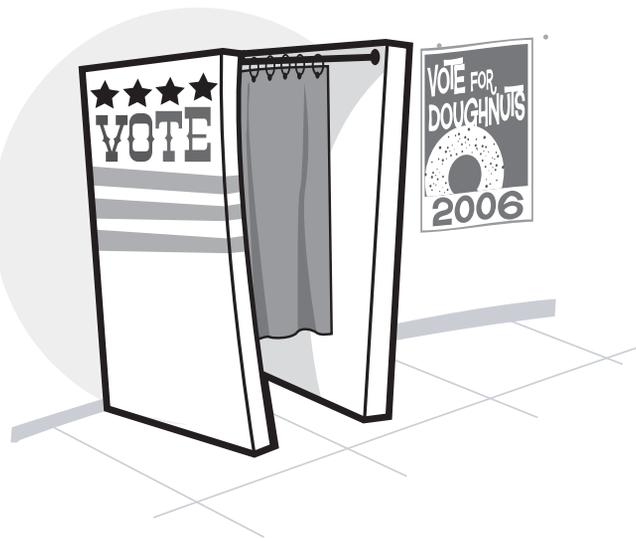
Let them choose if they want to participate: “You can either choose to participate with everyone or choose to spend time away from the group. It’s your call.”

Or give a choice of consequences: “You can either be my partner for this activity or spend time away from the group. You decide.”

Giving the privilege of choice empowers the child to choose wisely.

If you’ve given choices and the child breaks a rule again, take away the privilege to choose. Say, “I’m sorry. You’ve been given choices and the chance to make the right choice. Now it’s my turn.”

When you give kids power to choose, they’ll learn that they have power over their own behavior. And you won’t be seen as the disciplinarian!





Take this training deeper as you think over these questions:

- Why would your children want to decide their own rules and consequences?
- How can allowing your students to decide their own consequences encourage them to make good choices?
- Coach or disciplinarian—which way are you leaning right now? Why?

▼ Journal

Lord, help me to discipline in love when I'm faced with challenges, especially as I face. . .

Lord, please help me be a coach. . .

God wants the best for you. He created an incredible system of rewards and consequences. If you find the area of discipline a bit challenging, follow his lead. His disciplinary measures are fueled by his love for you. That's an attitude worth noting!

▼ Application

Learn by example. Pop into another class (maybe even a school classroom) to see how other teachers handle rules and consequences. How does a teacher enforce expectations? What are the expectations? Can you tell just by hanging out in the room? Do kids feel empowered? What can you take from that class to use in yours?