

## **Guidelines for Teachers**

(An excerpt from the Teacher Orientation Handbook by Pat Ellenwood, DRE, Unitarian Universalist Society of Wellesley Hills, MA)

Behavior problems in the classroom may present the most frequent test of our abilities to put ideals into practice. In the past, some teams have offered snacks or treats as a bribe for good behavior. This is not consistent with the covenant and in the long run does not work and may cause difficulty for some children. It is better to work on developing a respect for the group that results in positive behavior.

It is important that there be an agreed on set of guidelines or covenant for the group. If there are different expectations from week to week, it is confusing for the children and ultimately does not contribute to a sense of community among the children and adults. Be sure that in your first meeting you come to consensus on what the expectations are for both the children and the adults. The covenant will be a valuable resource for this. It is better to be proactive rather than reactive.

Guidelines that help include:

**Please make boundaries immediately clear.** Kids want to know what the limits are. Let them know what is "out of bounds" for you. Rarely is misbehavior directed at the teacher, so don't take it personally.

**Avoid criticizing a child in public.** There should be at least two adults in the class for every meeting. If a child disrupts the group, the first choice is to deal with the individual in private - not in front of the whole class. It is better to wait until a private moment to discuss the incident with either you or your teaching partner.

**If you are provoked, be authentic.** It is better to be honest than to be hypocritical but at all costs **avoid sarcasm**. Try to give the child or the class a way out of the difficulty. If it is an individual, give her/him a way back into your good graces - a smile, a hug, or a touch. Children can learn from your politeness, forgiveness, and generosity of spirit.

**Be prepared .** Know your material well enough so that you know exactly what is to be done during the meeting. Plan for more than you need. If something bombs, you have an alternative. Have everything ready when the kids arrive. The better prepared you are, the more relaxed you will be; the more relaxed you are, the easier it will be to deal with problems that arise.

### **Additional suggestions that may help to insure a positive outcome:**

- \* A warm greeting for each child goes a long way.
- \* Remember your sense of humor and beware of false dignity.
- \* A gentle voice is often more effective than a loud voice.
- \* Avoid making comparisons or encouraging competition as motivation.
- \* Let the children know who you are and what you think.
- \* Express your opinions freely but acknowledge that their opinions are valid as well.
- \* Let children know that we celebrate the differences among us.