

Discipline Tips and Tactics

Each visit a child makes to My Gym should be a positive, fun, and learning experience. In keeping with that, it is important to be compassionate, loving, and patient when disciplining a youngster and to act in the best interest of the class as well as that of the child.

There is a fine line between appropriate and unsuitable methods of disciplining children and controlling your class. To implement the My Gym program properly, you need complete control. You will, of course, encounter difficult disciplining situations along the way. Employing appropriate discipline will not turn parents off. As a matter of fact, they will be pleased; and you will gain clientele.

Reminder: These below descriptions are based on the maximum class size limits of 20 students for Tiny Tykes through Terrific Tots, and 16 for Preschool Gymnastics, Ninja Jr., and above.

I. We realize that disciplining is not easy.

- A. Make sure the child has been placed in the correct age-appropriate class. We often assume a child who is big for his age is a Mighty Mite, when he is only 2½.
- B. Always fall back on “The My Gym Way” (i.e., The “3, 4 or 5 - Step Rule” listed below).
- C. Disciplining should usually be done quietly and directly in the child’s ear, although there are exceptions. You do not want to create negative energy out loud or embarrass the individual. Never humiliate a parent or student.
- D. When controlling your class (disciplining), it is important to look at “who” you are being. Consider each complaint or incident as an opportunity to turn a situation around. Keep an open mind; leave room for other opinions.
- E. Never take a child’s reaction or acting out personally. The child is merely responding in the best way he can at that age.
- F. Feel out each child individually. Try to sense what he may need.
- g. Partner with the parent early on, so that a situation does not get out of hand. When you work together with the parent to see what ways are effective in getting through to his/her child, you can both keep your class running smoothly and help that child.

II. Disciplining Guidelines - Terrific Tots

- A. Remember that you have the parents helping during the class, and parental embarrassment could be an issue.
- B. Involve the parent in your disciplinary actions when necessary. Don’t let frustration set in.
- C. Individual tips to keep the children’s attention and help with disciplining:
 1. Move through skill stations quickly. Utilize your parents in the control of the children during skill stations and all structured activities.
 2. Mold/train your parents; remind them where they need to be. Tell them it is more work at first; but, once the children understand the structure and learn what we want from them, the parents can back off more. This is preparing them for the independent class that will be coming soon.
 - a. Especially during skill stations, ask parents to follow their children group to group. Ask them to sit behind the group and encourage their children throughout.
 3. Use fun, simple, and effective “attention getters.” (See My Gym Language and Key Phrases) Remember, the more animated you are, the more your Tots will follow along, be amused, and listen.
 4. Be appropriate with your discipline; don’t take the parent’s role.

III. Disciplining Guidelines – Preschool Gymnastics – Ninja Training (or other Independent Programs) “3, 4 or 5 - Step Rule”

- A. Step One: In a fun manner, get the child to participate
 - 1. Use age appropriate “kid tricks”, “attention getters” or redirection. (See My Gym Language & Key Phrases section in Training Manual)
 - 2. Keep moving – less talk, more action! The longer children are sitting, the more they can get bored or distracted.
 - 3. Be patient and loving, and remember that the child is only 3 or 4 (Preschool Gymnastics or Ninja Jr.).
 - 4. Focus on the good behavior of the children who are listening. This will indirectly affect those who are not. (e.g., “I really like the way Joey and Susie are sitting and listening so nicely.”)
 - 5. Remind children of which fun event is coming next. This often helps them get through their immediate task.
 - 6. Separate children (friends) who are too distracted when sitting next to each other.
 - 7. If a child complies, give him specific praise for the task accomplished.
- B. Step Two: Slightly more serious
 - 1. Similar to Step #1, but with a slightly more serious tone.
- C. Step Three: This is now serious, make direct eye contact and be sure to receive confirmation from the child as to what you are telling the child.
 - 1. Firmly request what you need from the child. Make sure your actions match your words and that your tone of voice is serious.
 - 2. Always give affirmation of the children’s behavior once they have listened. Eye contact and positive gestures often work well. (e.g., “Thumbs up, Johnny, way to go!”)
 - 3. If the child complies, give him praise for the specific task accomplished. (Ex: “Thank you for sitting on the mat!”)
- D. Step Four: Give the child an ultimatum. (It is his decision.)
 - 1. Give the child a reason why he must listen, and tell him what will happen if he does not do what is requested. You are giving him a choice to either listen or:
 - a. Sit out on the other side (“time out”)
 - b. Forgo sitting with the other children on the mat/line-(Sit child somewhere else.) This is like giving the child a “time out” in the gym. Works well when parent is not present.
- E. Step Five: Follow through on ultimatum (typically a “time out”)
 - 1. Follow through with the consequence previously given to the child.
 - 2. Remove him from the situation, and explain why he is sitting out.
 - 3. Tell the child that it is not that you don’t like him; it’s the behavior. Reiterate or ask him why he is sitting out to make sure he understands.
 - 4. Involve the parent when possible. This way there is no misunderstanding of what was requested from the child.
 - 5. Follow up/Check in: After the child has been sitting out for only a few minutes, have him go back to join the activity.
 - 6. Explain on the way back to the carpet that his behavior was what caused him to sit out, not him personally. Reconfirm your acceptance and love for that child – “We’re still friends.”
- F. Why and When to use 3, 4 or 5 steps:
 - 1. Three Steps: 1- Fun manner, 2- Firm request with ultimatum, 3-Follow through

- a. 3 steps can be employed with a child who repeatedly misbehaves. Child understands the consequences and continues to test the teachers.
 2. Four Steps: 1- Fun manner, 2- Firm request, 3- Firm request with ultimatum , 4- Follow through
 - a. This is the most frequently used of the disciplinary techniques. It gives the child ample opportunity to behave. Use the 4-step rule in most disciplining circumstances.
 - b. Always try to connect with the child and bring him back in a positive manner, before giving the ultimatum.
 3. Five Steps: 1-Fun manner, 2-Fun manner again, 3- Firm request, 4-Firm request with ultimatum, 5-Follow through
 - a. Use with children with whom you wish to be lenient and/or with children who normally behave. These disciplining situations are not as severe; therefore the ultimatum can be delayed. These types of cases are common.
- G. Extraordinary Discipline Issues (very rare in the My Gym setting)
1. If a child in a Preschool Gymnastics or older class (parents not on the floor) hits, kicks, pushes/shoves with malicious intent to hurt, bites, spits, verbally abuses, uses profanity or performs any similar actions to what is described toward a child or teacher, the 3, 4 5 Step procedures are not applicable. You must move immediately to Step #5, remove the child from the floor.
 - a. The child should immediately be removed from the class and given a “time out.” Be supportive, gentle, and continue to operate within the My Gym philosophies for handling children.
 - b. Involve the parent immediately. If the parent is not present, he/she must be called and informed of the situation.
 - c. Gauge the seriousness and follow though appropriately. It is impossible to denote all situations; use your judgment. Here are a few examples:
 - i. If the child hit in a playful manner, not truly meaning to inflict pain or harm:
 - The child may be admitted back into the class and should be supervised closely.
 - If he repeats the action, he should be removed again, involve the parent and explain that he may not be admitted back into class. He may return next week.
 - ii. If a child that is 4 or older bites another child:
 - Use you judgment. In some circumstances it will be OK to allow the child back into the class, while in more serious cases, it will be necessary to not allow the child back into class that day. They may return next week.
 - iii. If a child spits, uses profanity, hits/kicks with intent to hurt, or verbally abuses another child or the teachers:
 - Escalate it a step further and advise the parent of the situation and that due to the child’s actions, the child will not be allowed back into class that day.
 - Speak to the child and explain (in a firm yet supporting manner) that his actions are not OK and not how we treat other children/his teachers. Let him know that he may return to class next week and participate if he does not XXX and is respectful of the children/teachers.

- d. In extreme cases, the methods listed may not remedy the situation. If the harmful actions continue in upcoming classes that the child attends, it may be necessary to escalate the situation a step further. Always remain supportive and be sure your tone is appropriate (not cheery and also not somber) in these sensitive situations. These cases are extremely rare and historically do not ever occur in most My Gyms.
 - i. Option #1: You may opt to expel the child a longer period, such as 2-4 classes.
 - ii. When the child returns, make your assessment and decision as to whether or not the behavior has been remedied.
 - iii. Option #2: You may choose to expel the child permanently.

NOTE 1: If this must be done without a parent's involvement, you must let the parent know what happened when he or she comes to pick the child up or with a phone call later that evening. It is important that you have the parent's support on disciplining philosophies. It is also important that the parent hear what happened from you and not through gossip later. If you involve the parent early on, both of you can tackle tricky situations without making the parent feel inadequate or putting him/her on the defensive. Remember to explain that our disciplinary techniques work for My Gym; we are not teaching how to be parent.

NOTE 2: Use the word "when" vs. "if." The word "if" can be challenging to a young child. Children are at that testing age and will test constantly. (e.g., Saying, "When you sit on the mat, you get your turn." The child will be more apt to cooperate with you instead of challenge what you are requesting.)

NOTE 3: The words, "Time Out": People have different views and ways of using time outs. It was originally designed to remove children from a situation and channel their energy in another direction. It was NOT designed to use as a threat or form of punishment. What works best in My Gym is saying, "To play and learn here at My Gym, you need to listen to the teachers." Older children: A suggestion for when an older child is acting out and requires the follow through of a "time out" right before explore time – Often a child may think, "Hey, I don't have to do the gymnastics, and I can still play." Sitting the child out for a few minutes of playtime is effective. Explain to the parent as well as to the child, "Joey is going to sit here for a little while until we can be a great listener" or "until we understand that we don't want to hit our friends."

NOTE 4: Using the phrase "get to" instead of "need to" or "have to" works well to have children do what you request. They hear it as a treat instead of a chore. (e.g., "When you walk across the beam, you get to step over the cookies!")

IV. Disciplining Reminders

- A. Prioritize the seriousness of the inappropriate behavior. Choose your battles. Look at the offense and decide the appropriate action to take.
- B. Analysis to take into consideration when picking your battles – We have categorized the following behaviors as to levels of seriousness:
 - 1. Level One: Antsy, separation issues, bathroom/water breaks, distractions, friend-related distractions (hugging, wrestling)
 - a. 5 steps recommended
 - 2. Level Two: Minor testing, extremely antsy, focus issues
 - a. 4-5 steps recommended
 - 3. Level Three: Major testing, contrary/sassy attitude, repeated offense
 - a. 3 steps recommended
 - 4. Level Four: Unacceptable actions: hitting, spitting, language, touching
 - a. No steps – children should be immediately removed.

V. Waddlers and Gymsters - who refuse to sit in the circle or participate in structured activities

A. Follow normal protocol:

1. Assistants bring/encourage child back (2-3) times. Do this with love and care...not like the circle time police. When bringing child back, communication with the parent is KEY! Feel out your parent. Here is your chance to explain the philosophy to parents (the reason behind the structured activity) as it applies to My Gym.
2. With parents who are embarrassed or frustrated that their children are not sitting or participating:
 - a. "It's her first time; she will get used to the structure and skills each week. Don't worry."
 - b. "She will have structure the rest of her life. It's okay to try your best to bring her back to the circle; maybe come back for the dance. Then if it's not working, take her off to the side to play quietly." (No ball pit or trampoline rule – too distracting)
 - c. "Each week, it will get better and better. She doesn't even know us or our program yet. We will also help her and encourage her."
 - d. "Maybe it would be good to try a younger class where there is a little less structure, and then you can move up when she is ready."
3. Parents who refuse to do circle or discipline from the beginning and appear not to believe in your philosophy:
 - a. "We acknowledge that children should also have time for independent play and choices. There is sufficient time for "free play" in each class."
 - b. "If the teachers and parents are consistent and follow through, the children will adapt."
 - c. "Structure and following rules here at My Gym will help children in school and other activities."
 - d. "Structure is good for children; they actually enjoy and crave it. The children can learn more in this type of atmosphere."
4. How to come to a resolution with the parent and our philosophy:
 - a. "When Johnny leaves the circle and plays, it becomes too distracting to all those children who are enjoying and learning the structure. Let's figure out what will work best for him. These are some things that have worked for other parents in this same situation:"
 - i. "You keep trying each week. Even if he stays just 10 seconds longer in the circle, it's an accomplishment."
 - ii. "We will help! Sometimes they listen to teachers differently than they do to parents."
 - iii. "Make sure you come 5-10 minutes early to allow Johnny an opportunity to really run around."
(Below notes are for Gymsters age, not Waddlers.):
 - iv. "You can come to class after circle time; just arrive 15 minutes into the class."
 - v. "Follow-through is key. If you say that he can't play during circle time, then just pick him up, and have him watch from a few feet away."
5. Always remember that the integrity of the class is paramount. Although participating in structured events at these ages is not absolutely mandatory, the more structured the children/parents are, the better the My Gym class experience will be. (Mold your parents early on, or they will "mold" you.)

6. Some situations that continue or are more delicate are best handled with a phone call or private conversation with the parent. You can offer suggestions or solutions on what can work.
7. If you ignore a situation in hopes that it will disappear or work out on its own, you could be losing other members or upsetting a parent without even realizing it.

VI. Siblings on the Carpeted Gym Area

- i. There are no siblings on the carpeted area before, during, or after class. Only children enrolled in the class may participate.
- ii. The only exception is for non-mobile infants contained in a carrier and positioned in a safe location near the front desk.