

8 SANITY SAVERS FOR SPARKS LEADERS

Stress less with these pointers for satisfying Sparks ministry.



Sanity Saver 1 – Pray and Mentor

“Kids don’t bring books, lose uniforms, don’t care, parents don’t care, and no help from home!”

Pray – for problem children and their families, for more leaders, for current leaders

Incentives and points; contests

Book bags

Mentoring

Use handbook CD and personal CD player

Communicate with parents – expectations

Parent Guide; Parent letters; Phone calls

Your godly example is the best lesson you will ever teach.

To encourage bringing handbooks and doing sections, use points to ignite their interest. Children can earn points for wearing their uniform, bringing their book, bringing a friend, for each section recited, etc. Have points added to their game time team points and announce a team winner at the end of the night, with a trinket prize for each member of the team. Awana Bucks could also be used for the same idea. Contests are a great motivator – try a Go Dog Go Contest for 4 weeks. For each section recited, a child places a paw print sticker by their name on their team color poster. The color team with the most paw prints on their poster at the end of the contest wins! 1st place - king size candy bars. 2nd – regular size candy bars. 3rd – fun size candy bars. 4th – Scooby Doo graham crackers in the shape of doggy bones!

Sanity Saver 2 – Cut the Chaos

“Kids are running all over the church at the beginning of the night.”

Efficient check-in time

Handbook baskets

Enough secretaries

Caring leaders interacting with kids

Leaders on time

Planned pre-session

Games played on game floor for early arrivers

Songs in large group room

Review games in large group room

Leaders working with kids who need extra time for memory work

Set the right tone for the night. Panic is contagious. If you’re stressed, kids will pick up on it.

Sanity Saver 3 – Motivate Them to Listen

“Our kids are talking, not listening and not being engaged in Large Group Time”

Exciting Large Group Time

Pack it full of excitement

Dynamic story time – use visuals



- Lively singing
- Sparky puppet
- Announcements
- Leaders sitting in with kids
 - Manage discipline problems
 - Encourage kids to listen and participate
 - Kids instructed to talk only if they've raised their hand
 - Establish an orderly routine

To encourage good listening during Large Group Time, try a Quiet Seat Award. Let the children know that there will be a special award at the end of Large Group Time for the child who is sitting in the secret quiet seat tonight. The award will only be given if the child in that seat is a good listener and follows instructions all through Large Group Time. No one knows who is in the seat, therefore all children try to cooperate. It works!! Make a big deal of the award each week.

Sanity Saver 4 – Rock and Rule

“There isn’t enough time to listen to all the kids in handbook time. Kids are noisy and naughty!”

- Organized leaders ROCK! – multiply your time
 - Handbook baskets - leader notebooks; worksheets for kids; record keeping supplies
 - Efficient record keeping
 - do your record keeping as you listen (much more efficient use of time)
 - Pray and ask for more help if your group is too large
- Disciplined leaders RULE – create boundaries
 - Take charge – establish classroom rules
 - Teach kids to use “inside voices”
 - Predictable routine is very important



As a leader, do you make things happen, or do you let things happen?

To keep good discipline in your handbook group while listening to sections, try using colored circles. As you listen to one clubber recite, put a green circle on your notebook or basket if the rest of the group is on task and using quiet voices. If the noise level is rising or children are out of their seats without permission, put out a yellow circle as a caution warning. If the room is rowdy and out of control, display a red circle. They can regain the green circle by cooperating again and using quiet voices. If the green circle is displayed at the end of handbook time they receive a sticker, treat or trinket from your treasure box. If the red circle is displayed, they lose their chance for the reward.

Sanity Saver 5 – Minister to Special Needs Kids

“Working with slow learners and non-readers takes me out of my comfort zone! What do I do with them?”

- Minister to special needs kids
 - Encourage them – 99 ways to praise a child
 - Draw them in with your facial expressions
- Teach non-readers how to memorize
 - Hand motions; Pictures; Handbook CD; Say verse in rhythm
- Verse labels for learning impaired
 - Available to print as stickers and put in book (at awana.org)
- May need to adjust number of helps allowed for slow learners

Sanity Saver 6 - Coach Your Team

“Some kids never want to play games or won’t focus at game time...what do I do with them?”

- There should be one or two line leaders on every color line at game time.
- Game Director should use the 5 count to help kids focus and line leaders support him.

Sensitivity to Kindergarten children – allow to watch (for up to 2 weeks)

After 2 weeks of watching, take their hand and say, “let’s go – I’ll run with you!”

Be a coach on the line – help them understand rules; keep them on their color line; cheer!

Encourage your team to be the first team lined up with their toes on the line.

Assign older team members to be helpers, cheerleaders, examples



Sanity Saver 7 – Maintain Good Discipline

“They won’t be quiet; they won’t stop talking!”

Use 5 count at game time

Teach with Sparky puppet

5 count Scramble

Hand clap patterns

Noise thermometer

Key Chains with name – must turn in if not cooperating

If you use anger in dealing with a child, they will respond in anger.

Learn about ADHD kids

Keep predictable routine

Ask them to focus (many times)

Have them repeat simple directions to you

Don’t give more than 2 things to do at a time

Put them near you; ask “what is it you are supposed to be doing now?”

Keep reminding yourself that the most unpleasant student you have is probably the one that needs you the most. From [501 Tips for Teachers](#) by Robert D. Ramsey

An idea that saved my sanity many years ago was the Marble Jar. Use a baby food size jar and a bag of marbles. The object is to fill the jar with marbles, after which you will do something fun with your handbook group or have a very special treat for everyone. Marbles are earned by children sharing, following class rules, keeping quiet voices, helping, or being kind. The leader won’t say anything, but will drop a marble in the jar. Marbles are lost by children breaking the rules, being noisy, leaving the room without permission, being unkind, etc. Again, the leader says not a word, but takes a marble out of the jar. Let the children know if anyone messes with the marble jar, you’ll dump them all out. Make it last for 5-6 weeks, and then follow through with a special reward. It will help set a new precedent in a classroom of hard to handle kids!

Sanity Saver 8 – Get Excited About Awards

“Record keeping is a hassle; kids aren’t excited about awards”

Vests and Leader uniforms are critical to excitement about awards

Good record keeping is crucial to helping a child get through a book – be efficient

If the leaders are excited about awards and make a big deal of them, the kids will be excited.

Give high fives when a section is finished.

Whoop and holler when awards are handed out at the end of the night

Most successful ways to give out jewels and not lose them:

Leaders do it in handbook room and achievements are announced at Awards time

Jeweler table – child goes to jeweler after earning a jewel and gets jewel installed



THE 5 COUNT EXPLAINED

LEADER Sparky, do you know why the leaders count to 5 in Sparks?
SPARKY Because it's time to tell jokes?
LEADER NO.
SPARKY To remind us we can only tell 5 jokes in one night?
LEADER No.
SPARKY Because they don't know how to count to 10?
LEADER No.
SPARKY Okay, I give...what is it?
LEADER So all the Sparkies will be quiet by the time we get to 5.
SPARKY Quiet!! Oh boy, that's something I have a real hard time doin'!! I mean I just like to talk a lot and tell jokes, and stuff like that.
LEADER That's why the 5 count helps - then you know it's time to stop talking and listen.
SPARKY I don't really like to listen - I'd rather talk! It's boring to listen.
LEADER But if everyone talks at the same time, no one can be heard.
SPARKY Now you sound just like my Mom!
LEADER And if someone tells you how to play the game and you're not listening, you won't know how to play!
SPARKY Yeah, I know! I flew around the circle the wrong way one time, 'cuz I wasn't listening.
LEADER So it IS important to listen to instructions! Maybe we ought to practice how to do it.
SPARKY Okay. Can I count?
LEADER No, that's the leaders job. Now, start talking so I can count to 5, and you get quiet.
SPARKY Why did the computer squeak?
LEADER Sparky - it's not joke time!
SPARKY I know, but you said to talk... anyway, it squeaked cuz' somebody stepped on it's mouse!! Ha Ha Ha
LEADER !—2—3—4—5
SPARKY (silence)
LEADER Super good!! Great job! Now later we'll see how well everyone remembers!

99 WAYS TO PRAISE A CHILD

Everyone knows that a little praise goes a long way. A "little praise" should be something more than the same few phrases repeated over and over ad nauseum. Here are some ideas beyond the traditional, "Good," "Very good," and "Fine." Tuck a few in your memory and start using them.

Wow!
I like the way you work.
Good for you!
That's really nice.
Terrific!
That's it!
You're learning!
You have it.
Super!
You learn well.
Well done!
Excellent!
Nice going.
You've just about mastered that.
Now you have the hang of it.
Sharp!
That's incredible!
Bravo!
Fantastic job!
You're catching on!
Nice work.
Marvelous!
You're really going to town!
One more time and you'll have it.
You're doing fine.
Congratulations!
You did it that time!
Sensational!
I'm proud of you!
That's the way!
You make it look easy!
Keep it up.
Exactly right.
Hurray, for you!
Give me five!
That was first class!
You've got that down pat!
Nothing can stop you now.
I knew you could do it!
You've got your brain in gear!
Couldn't have done it better myself!
How impressive!
You're fun!
A+ job!
I see you're trying.
You gave your best.
Hip, hip, hooray!
You share well.
Magnificent!
That's quite an improvement.
You outdid yourself today.

You are very good at that.
Tremendous!
Not bad!
That's the right way to do it!
Right on!
Wonderful!
How nice!
You did it!
That's better!
That's the best you've ever done!
You're a good helper.
You try hard.
Outstanding!
Keep up the good work!
That's great!
Now that's what I call a fine job!
Superb!
Super work!
Beautiful!
You are learning fast.
Good thinking.
That's the best ever.
You've got it now!
Great!
You're my helper.
That was perfect!
Well, look at you go!
You go girl!
You must have been practicing!
You haven't missed a thing!
You remembered!
Way to go!
I know you can do it!
You're doing beautifully!
You're right on track.
Hurray for you!
Remarkable!
You're special.
God is pleased, and so am I.
Great try.
You learned it right.
You can do it!
Excellent work.
Spectacular!
Yeah!! You did it!
You're fantastic.
You did a lot of work today.
Much better!

Workshop Leader Resource Ideas

Rewarding positive behavior:

In my class, I would have the name of all the children on a color/wood clothing pin. Then there is a chart in a form of a ladder. As each child is behaving positively the teacher would move the name up higher and higher. Reward them when they reach all the way to the top.

This can be done with great creativity.

A gift along with a certificate that they could show to their family is also rewarding.

However, some children will not respond to that. They may not be looking forward for gifts or recognition, but they do fear privileges taken away from them.

As teachers, there needs to be both types of discipline to fit the needs of children.

So on the chart; if the child reaches the bottom, all the way out, then there will be consequences also. Maybe lose snack time or something that they can earn back. (This will also help teachers keep track/order) –cef forum

Communication With Parents

I wonder if the parents would have been angry even if a procedure would have been listed. These may be parents who don't know how to discipline their children and pass on the idea that it's always someone else's fault. In approaching parents, I've heard that a good way is: "I'm glad your child is in my class. What can you tell me about your child that will help me know him better? Also, your child is having trouble following our ____ rule. What can you tell me that will help me work with him better on this? And how can we work together?" That approach tends to diffuse defensiveness.

-cef forum – Nancy Paulson

Quiet Points

From **Janie Allan**, an elementary teacher at SonShine Christian Academy:

"My students have a hard time staying quiet so I came up with a point system. Each period is worth 20 points. If a student disobeys the quiet rule, the points are subtracted in increments. First they are left with 10 points and then 5 points. After the final infraction, they have 0 points left. At the end of the period, I record a running total of points on a section of the board. They like to see how many they can collect. They can spend them on extra computer time, stickers and treats but I set the prices high enough to ensure that I don't go bankrupt." -nea.org/tips

From **Elaine Wargo**, a fourth grade teacher at Perry Elementary in Perry, Ohio:

"When working with cooperative groups, I keep the noise level under control by using colored circles. If a group is on task and using quiet voices, I give them a green circle. If I need to remind them about the noise level, I give them a yellow circle. If a group is way off task, I give them a red circle and step in to give them assistance. This is a great way to model appropriate behavior when I am just beginning to establish groups and ground rules. It also saves time because I don't have to interrupt the entire class to get one group back on track." -nea.org/tips

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Noise Thermometer

From **Susan Reich**, a second grade teacher at Parkview Elementary in Rangely, Colorado:

"Last year as a first-year teacher, I tried what I call a 'noise thermometer' that my students keep their eyes on to monitor their own noise level. The tool worked so well that it will be a permanent fixture in my room. My noise thermometer looks like a three-foot thermometer with red Velcro that acts as the mercury. I number increments from zero (no noise) to ten (extreme noise/out of control). The thermometer starts at zero each morning. When my class gets louder I raise the thermometer to a level that matches their noise level. I never have to say a word. They see me near it and the room immediately becomes quieter! If it hits five, the class loses two minutes off recess and as it is raised even higher, they lose more time. This has proven to be an effective way for students to monitor themselves and work cooperatively to keep noise down. Last year, my class got to five only three times. I hate to use lost recess as a consequence, but losing six minutes all year isn't a bad trade-off for a relatively calm classroom." -nea.org/tips

Safekeeping Box

From **Heather Greenwood**, a Youth Behavior Specialist for grades K-5 at Sugar Grove Elementary School in Houston, Texas:

"Sometimes children bring things from home to play with, which makes it harder for them to pay attention. I decided to resolve this problem by creating a Safekeeping Box. I found a medium-sized box with a lid, decorated it, and put a label on the box that said 'Items in Safekeeping, To Be Returned Later'. When I see children playing with something that is distracting them, I ask them to put it in the Safekeeping Box and let them know that they can retrieve their item at the end of the day. This validates their important personal treasures and assures them they will be returned. Additionally, it cuts down on the distractions in the classroom, as the students learn quickly to avoid having things put into the box." -nea.org/tips

Discipline Cards

From **Lolita Cox**, a sixth grade teacher at Museum Magnet Elementary School in St. Paul, Minnesota:

"I have green, yellow and red discipline cards on a chart for each student. At the beginning of the day each student has a green card showing on the chart. If a child is disruptive, he or she is told to pull their green card as a warning and their yellow card is exposed. After the yellow card is pulled, the child is given a five-minute time out. After the red card is pulled, the child is given a ten-minute time out. If the behavior continues, the child is sent to the school reflection room to talk to the Educational Assistant about how he or she can better handle a situation. Once a reflection sheet is satisfactorily completed, the child may return to class. Few students have to pull more than their green card before remembering to stay on task." -nea.org/tips

1. It is important to act, not react. Give students choices--for example: 1. You may leave the room and go to (a pre-selected place--maybe another teacher can provide a time out corner if you don't have a time out room). 2. You may stay here and make changes in your personal choices. 3. You may stay in the room, but change your seat to an area where you agree there will be fewer problems.---When you give students choices, they have power--power to make a good choice and continue receiving instruction.
2. A positive classroom will accomplish much more than a classroom that is filled with negativism--don't threaten your students.

Each child is given a small paper star at the beginning of class. If the child continually misbehaves you collect their star. All children that have their star at the end of the class get to choose a piece of candy.

If you have problems with getting the kids to behave and pay attention, this is an idea that works great for me. I give each child 6 gold coins at the beginning of class. (poker chips spray painted gold). We have certain rules like "don't talk unless you raise your hand", "stay in your seat", etc. these rules can be written and hung up on the wall if you want. If a child breaks one of the rules they lose a coin. They have chances to get more coins by saying their memory verse, bringing their Bible, answering questions about the lesson, finishing their activity on time, etc. At the end of class the child (or children) with the most coins gets a special prize. They turn their coins in at the end of class to use again next week. They lost a lot of coins the first couple of Sundays but then I was amazed at how well behaved the children became about the third Sunday after I started this. They do not want to lose coins!
-from sundayschoolcrafts.com

- ◆ At the beginning of Handbook Time, give each child a keychain with their name on it or their picture in it (clear plastic with their picture in it would be nice).
- ◆ Children keep the keychain all through Handbook Time as long as they cooperate and are quiet.
- ◆ The keychain must be given back if the leader notices the child being disruptive, or not cooperating.
- ◆ At the end of Handbook Time, all those who have a keychain put them in a bucket for a drawing.
- ◆ The prize might be a little trinket, a sticker, a pencil, a piece of gum, etc.
- ◆ Use the drawing to help your clubbers want to behave properly.

Positive Discipline. Use classroom rules that describe the behaviors you want instead of listing things the students cannot do. Instead of "no-running in the room," use "move through the building in an orderly manner." Instead of "no fighting," use "settle conflicts appropriately." Instead of "no gum chewing," use "leave gum at home." Refer to your rules as expectations. Let your students know this is how you expect them to behave in your classroom.
-honorlevel.com