



Educators, It's Okay to be Firm with Kindergarten Students

By Educator Barnes – May 26, 2019

Class, I need you to sit on the carpet with your legs crossed with your hands in your laps. Voices should be off.

That's how I talk to kindergarteners, but I have been told that I'm too strict and too direct with them. Instead, some educators would prefer I say:

Class, sit on your pockets. Put your spoons in your bowls with a bubble in your mouth.

Yep, pockets. That's one of the most ridiculous concepts I heard when I first transitioned from the secondary setting to the elementary setting. You can't say sit on your bottom? Good grief. These are kindergarteners, not babies, and we need to move away from the cutesy language and be more direct. Direct doesn't equal fear or being mean.

I worked in a school where a teacher had been moved to an upper grade. This person was yelling at younger students and many students were frequently urinating on themselves. That's not me. I'm direct, but I'm not a yeller. I'm also not going to talk in a sing-songy voice to appease some imaginary standard of what it takes to work with kindergarten students.

We need to rethink how we are working with kindergarteners. In Indiana, at times, these conversations are not taken seriously because kindergarten is not mandatory in our state. The truth is the majority of Indiana children are enrolled in kindergarten as soon as they are eligible. If parents are choosing to send their children to kindergarten, then we need to look at how we are helping them acclimate to the academic environment and life.

I thought about this more after my fellow *Indy K12* writer, David McGuire, wrote the article, "[Should Kindergarteners be Suspended from School?](#)" I've worked in three elementary schools. The same colleagues that claim I'm too direct or strict are the same colleagues sending me kindergarten students they can't handle. In one of my previous schools, students kicked out of class the most were the five and six-year-old kindergarten students.

Clearly, what you are doing is not working because you have given up and kicked the child out of your class. In some cases, as McGuire wrote, the student is suspended. We must stop babying kindergarten students. If you treat them like babies, they will throw tantrums and not acclimate to the academic setting. You just threw a chair and you are receiving a hug and getting your backed rubbed. No! You can be firm and not mean. You don't have to speak in code and butter them up to get them to be compliant. At the end of the day, kindergartners love me except when they are visiting me because they got kicked out of class.

I will admit my favorite grades to work with are 3-12; I can work with any grade level, but I have concerns about we set the tone with K-2 children. Maybe we would have fewer discipline problems, and avoid suspensions, if we consider being more direct with kindergarteners and younger students.