



# Back to Basics

## Discipline and Junior High Students: Teaching Emotional Maturity

by Janeal Krehbiel

1. Junior High students are bored with mediocrity. They want to be challenged, but they *need* to complain a little in the process. Smile and proceed.

2. High artistic ideals from the director lead to high artistic ideals from the choir.

3. Discipline problems occur when the brain is not engaged and it all falls on the director's back. Conduct instead of talk. Junior Highs can't talk when they are singing.

4. Motivate them into learning with quality literature and lots of impromptu solo/soli singing during the rehearsal. It keeps them on their toes.

5. Know how you want the final performance to sound before you begin and know the music well before you start.

6. Create a learning atmosphere that is firm with high expectations. Kids succeed proportionately to their desire.

7. As director, you must always be an example of emotional maturity, demonstrating that combination of warmth and firmness, but must never hold a rehearsal without injecting humor along the way.

8. Ruth Krehbiel Jacobs, in her book, *The Children's Choir* (Augsburg Fortress), said, "Children are clairvoyant. They know what your heart says

no matter what your lips say." Be honest, or Junior High students (especially perceptive) will not take you seriously.

9. When you handle discipline in a fair and consistent way, these kids are the most responsive of all grade levels. Reprimands and punishments need to be in proportion to the offense and good behavior also needs to be rewarded proportionately. To say "super" when the work is average is misleading and harmful to everyone's progress.

10. Empty threats lead to disaster. Set the choir rules and stick to them. They like limits and they like order. Show them at the first rehearsal who is in charge and how sincere you are.

11. Singing is hard work, physically, mentally, and emotionally. That, I believe, is one of the most exciting concepts we need to teach. When something comes easily, it doesn't "feel" as good when that goal is achieved. Lovingly re-teach that concept that nothing of lasting value is bought without a price.

12. I have a rule in my choir. No one should decide whether they like a piece of music until it is memorized. This rule eliminates negativism, which is rarely productive. It also teaches young people not to make a hasty decision based on ease and comfort.

13. Do not take rolling eyes, grunts and groans, and boredom sighs

personally. Turn that misguided energy into productivity. Junior High students are invincible when they are meeting success.

14. Love and respect are taught by offering love and respect. Kids need some non-parent adults for role models. We have an opportunity to help set patterns for living disciplined lives.

15. Equate mistakes with effort. Acknowledge the difficulty of a task and help students see that mistakes are acceptable.

16. Never love the music more than you love the singers.

*Janeal Krehbiel, noted clinician and festival director and former member of the Board of Directors of Chorister's Guild has been a featured clinician at St. Olaf College, Westminster Choir College, Montreat Music Conference, and the Guild's national seminar. She has directed children's and junior high choirs in festivals and music camps in 29 states.*

*Mrs. Krehbiel has taught pre-school through high school music for the past 27 years. She also directed the Bethel College Mennonite Church Junior Choir for 18 years. Currently in her fifth year as choral director at South Junior High in Lawrence, Kansas, she holds a clinical assistant professorship in the music education department at the University of Kansas.*