

## “Ask Lynn”

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**Question: What are ways a volunteer can respond when students refuse to do what they are asked? Do we let it go at the time and notify the teacher, or is it best to address this issue ourselves.**

As adults it is not enough to just deal with the behavior. We must look UNDERNEATH the behavior. The first step is to identify the belief behind this behavior. There is a belief behind EVERY behavior. The psychiatrist Rudolph Dreikurs taught that a misbehaving child is a discouraged child. No matter what form the discouragement takes, it's always based on the child's belief that he/she does not belong and is not important. What matters is what the child believes because that is the basis for his/her behavior. Dreikurs identified four inappropriate or mistaken goals that children adopt as rationales for misbehaving. They are "*mistaken goals*" because they are based on mistaken beliefs about how to achieve belonging and significance.

### The four Mistaken Goals:

- 1) Undue Attention
- 2) Misguided Power,
- 3) Revenge
- 4) Assumed Inadequacy (or giving up)

Once children's mistaken goals are understood, they can be encouraged in various ways that help challenge their mistaken beliefs about what they have to do in order to belong and be significant.

Students may refuse to do what they are asked to do because they believe in order to belong they must keep you busy (engaged) with them (undue attention); or they may believe that in order to belong or be significant they have to be in charge of the situation by being the boss and refuse (misguided power). They may be feeling hurt about something you as the volunteer had nothing to do with, and their refusal is a way for them to get revenge. Or, they may believe that they are incapable of completing the task (assumed inadequacy).

The clues to which mistaken goal the child is acting out of are (1) your feelings, (2) your reactive actions, and (3) the student's response to your reactive responses.

### Our Feelings in Response to Student Behavior:

- Generally, we will feel annoyed, irritated, worried and/or guilty if a child is acting out the mistaken goal of Undue Attention.
- If the mistaken goal is Misguided Power, we generally will feel provoked, challenged, threatened and/or defeated.
- When a child is acting out of the mistaken goal of Revenge, our feelings are likely to be hurt, disappointment, disbelief and/or disgust.
- When Assumed Inadequacy is the mistaken goal our feelings often involve despair, hopelessness, helplessness and a sense of inadequacy ourselves.

### **Suggestions:**

If you suspect the child is acting out of the mistaken goal of **Undue Attention**, recognize everyone wants attention but there is a difference between wanting and needing attention. Help them receive attention through constructive activities. Give them jobs, let them teach you something, invite them to tutor you. Make time for the student to share his/her feelings, thoughts and ideas. Ignore misbehavior when it occurs, but flash the student a sign of recognition. This way you ignore the behavior but not the student. Kindness AND firmness are an effective combination. Kindness says, "I care about you and will give your respectful attention. Firmness says, "I don't buy into your belief that you need undue attention."

If the mistaken goal is **Misguided Power**, imagine the child telling you "Let me help! Give me choices!" Everyone wants power and children can learn to use power constructively. When adults react rather than respond to the behavior of power-hungry students instead of understanding the motivating belief that is driving it, the adult feels angry, challenged, threatened and/or defeated. One way to encourage students who seek power is to ask for their help. This is inviting to students who are seeking power. Admit to the student you have been trying to control him and declare that you don't want to do this anymore. Tell the student to stop this pattern you need the student's help. Offer choices to the student. Invite students to join you in setting up limits, rules and routines for your time together. Encourage students to bring up their concerns. When they are angry or upset, allow them to take a "positive" time out. Allow them to tutor other students, teach a lesson, and undertake other useful jobs. Kindness and firmness; Kindness- I care about you and appreciate respectful power and Firmness-I won't let you use power to dominate others.

Students who are being driven by the mistake goal of **Revenge** are students who are feeling hurt. Their belief is that "I don't belong and that hurts, but at least I can get even." Ways to deal with this is to break the revenge cycle by not retaliating. Students who engage in this cycle are used to being treated disrespectfully and have learned to expect retaliation in any form. By not retaliating we can begin to change a pattern. Deal with the hurt feelings. One way to do this is to guess as to the source of their pain. You may want to say, "I feel hurt by what happened, so I'm guessing you may feel hurt. Would you be willing to tell me what hurt you?" Students may not admit they are hurt, they may say they're made. Ask them to tell you what they are angry about. Listen carefully, state the student's feelings and explanations back to him and ask him whether you've understood correctly. Make amends if you've caused or contributed to the hurt and show your care. Share some times when you have felt hurt by others. Respond with kindness and firmness. Kindness says, "I don't want to hurt you or for others to hurt you." The firmness says, "I don't want to let you hurt me or anyone else." Give the student compliments and encourage peers to give each other compliments.

The mistaken belief is that a student feels incapable of (**Assumed Inadequacy**) doing what other students are accomplishing or behaving as other students do. They respond in a variety of ways. Some students are very quiet and try not to draw any attention to themselves; others become the class clown or use other side-tracking tactics to draw attention away from their feelings of inadequacy. The message to the adult is "Don't give up on me; show me a small step. This discouraging belief motivates the student to stop trying. Suggestions include breaking tasks down to smaller steps. Keep breaking the task into smaller and smaller steps until the student experiences success. Don't give up. Be persistent. Teach and reteach. STOP ALL CRITICISM, AVOID PITY AND FOCUS ON ASSETS. Invite the student to choose a peer tutor. Build on the student's interests. Incorporate the interests into the lesson plans to motivate her. When dealing with students who feel inadequate, it can bring out our own feelings of inadequacy. Get support and consultation. Kindness and firmness: Kindness says, "I understand your discouragement." Firmness says, "I refuse to feel sorry for you or do your work for you because I know you can do it yourself. I will help you until you experience success in small steps."

**Source:** *Positive Discipline: A Teacher's A-Z Guide* by Jane Nelsen, Ed.D, Linda Escobar, MA, MFT, Kate Ortalano, Roslyn Duffy and Deborah Owen-Sohocky, MS

## Children, Trauma and What Adults Need to Know- by Lynn Marrs

There are many children in school who have experienced some form of trauma which is not always apparent to the adults. Symptoms of trauma may show up looking like other problems such as: acting out, difficulty concentrating, difficulty with transitions, not completing and turning in work, being late, forgetting homework, frustration, not paying attention, being distracted, difficulty following directions or difficulty working in groups, to name just a few. For children who have experienced trauma, school and learning can be extremely difficult. In fact, children who have experienced trauma may be re-traumatized by their experiences in school.

Believe it or not, the child who has experienced trauma and it is showing symptoms identified above, is not trying to push your buttons. Children who have experienced trauma perceive threat and danger where none exists. They may view the actions of you or their peers as threatening when they are not and react in ways that appear inconsistent with the context of what is going on. These children are worried about what is going to happen next and they are hyper-vigilant to perceived threat or danger. Thus, having routines are crucial. Maintaining a calm, orderly and predictable environment is good for all children, but it is a must for children who have experienced trauma.

Things can happen at school that trigger children who have experienced trauma. Even if a situation doesn't seem that difficult to you, it is how the child feels that matters. They are living with chronic stress and as a result, their "window of tolerance" is very small. This is the area between where a student is and how long it takes for the student to react, act out, become defiant, etc. Think of it as a fuse. These children have very short fuses.

Trauma comes in many forms. Just a few include violence, divorce, poverty, unsafe neighborhood, moving, being overscheduled, being bullied, death of love ones, or being excluded. What may not seem traumatic to you may be highly traumatic to the child. Trauma, then, is defined by the person who is experiencing the event.

### **What you can do:**

You don't need to know the details of the trauma in order to help the child. Validate feelings, show empathy and support, and be flexible. When kids are stressed it is difficult, and at times impossible, for them to learn. You can help by creating a safe and accepting environment by letting children know you understand their feelings and are there to support them. The more the adult can do to reduce the child's stress and anxiety, the better the child will learn and act.

Self-regulation is a major challenge for children who have experienced trauma. They may struggle with not being able to self-soothe. The child depends on you, the adult, to co-regulate. They depend on your mood and energy to regulate their emotions. Provide "brain breaks" and tell the students when the breaks are scheduled. Building these in and being attuned to the student's level of stress can help maintain boundaries on behavior. Asking a frustrated, overwhelmed, angry, disengaged student, "How can I help? Is there something I can do that would help you feel a little bit better?" lets the child know you are a source of support; you are on their side. Instead of asking "What's wrong with this child?" ask "What happened to this child?"