

SUSPENSION LEARNING PACKET #7:

CUTTING DETENTION

INTRODUCTION

This is a Suspension Learning Packet. It consists of several pages of text and a Response sheet. Your assignment is to read the text and answer the questions on the Response sheet. The text includes three stories about students who broke a school rule. The Response sheet asks questions about what the people in the stories did that got them into trouble. Reading the text and answering the questions on the Response sheet will help you understand what you have done wrong and how to avoid doing it again. Read the text first and try to remember what you've read. Then read the Response Sheet and write answers to the questions.

WHAT YOU DID

You have been suspended because you failed to serve the detentions assigned to you. Refusing to serve your detention is a serious violation of school rules. This packet will help you better understand why you cut your detentions. It will also help you rethink your behavior for the future.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH CUTTING DETENTIONS

Occasionally, when something happens, we ignore it. We like to think it will go away if we don't pay attention to it. Unfortunately, most unpleasant things don't just "go away" on their own. You have to pay attention and do something about them before there can be improvement.

This is the case with serving a detention. Most people would rather not serve a detention. Almost everyone would rather be doing something else. You might have thought there were good reasons for cutting detention. Maybe you were angry at the thought of having to serve time in detention. Maybe you felt that the detention was not fairly given. Maybe you just don't like to do what you are supposed to do as a student.

But think of this: if you had served the detention--if you had simply showed up at the assigned time--you would not be suspended now. You had the option to change an unpleasant situation into a better one. Instead, you made it worse. We call this "compounding a problem."

All of our actions have consequences. Regardless of the person's age, what he or she does will have an effect on that person and on others. If a toddler eats medication intended for an adult, he or she could get sick and perhaps even die. If a teen shoplifts something from a store, he or she will probably be caught and punished. If an adult cheats on a tax return, he or she will have to pay a fine or go to jail.

So when you fail to show up for a detention, you have to face the consequences. Your punishment is a suspension. One of the reasons that students are suspended is to make sure everyone understands that a person can't just do what he or she wants in school. Rules must be followed; otherwise, school would not be a good place to learn.

If all students felt that they could do as they pleased, there would be little chance to learn in school. Everyone would make his or her own rules. School rules exist so that students can study and learn in a safe, stable environment. Nobody, including you, wants to spend time in an environment that is disorganized or dangerous. Rules prevent our school environment from being that way.

THREE STORIES ABOUT CUTTING DETENTION

SANDY SMOKES HERSELF INTO SUSPENSION

Sandy is in the eighth grade. She recently moved here from another school. She runs around with an older crowd, many of whom smoke. Sandy is bored with school. She thinks school and everything connected with it is a waste of time. She thinks school activities are childish and silly. All of that "stuff" is beneath Sandy. Sandy sees herself as very grown-up.

Sandy's last class of the day is history. She usually meets some of her girlfriends in the washroom or on the school grounds and they share a cigarette before class. Today, as Sandy was standing in the washroom with a cigarette in her hand, her history teacher walked in.

Ms. Lewis asked Sandy why she was smoking in the washroom. "You know it's against school rules, Sandy," the history teacher explained.

"Oh, I was just holding it for someone else," Sandy exclaimed. "I wasn't actually smoking."

Ms. Lewis gave Sandy three detentions for being in possession of a cigarette on school property. Sandy became very angry. "What's the big deal over holding one stupid cigarette?" she wanted to know. "I think it's unfair to give me three detentions just because of this one cigarette!"

Ms. Lewis wouldn't change her mind even though Sandy argued with her. Instead she asked Sandy when she was able to serve her detentions. Sandy objected to every time she suggested. She couldn't stay after school because she had to go home and watch her younger brother. She couldn't come early because she had to wait for her older brother to drive her to school.

Sandy stormed out of the washroom, cigarette in hand. She didn't show up for history class that afternoon. She didn't show up for her first detentions, either. She even got another detention for cutting classes, but Sandy didn't show up for that one either. Finally, the principal had no choice but to suspend Sandy from school.

ALAN ACTS HIS WAY INTO DETENTION

Alan loves acting. He comes from a theatrical family; both his father and mother are in theater. Alan wants to be an actor when he grows up.

Alan is already talented at doing voices. He can sound just like your favorite cartoon character or TV newscaster. As a result, he plays the lead

in many of the school plays and musicals. This fall, he has the lead in the school play and has to spend many hours in rehearsal.

Last week, Alan was sitting in his social studies class. The principal had sent a memo to be read to all students about conduct in the lunchroom. Alan thought the memo was silly. He was asked to read it aloud to the class, so he read it in the principal's voice. He also threw in a little Daffy Duck and Roger Rabbit for good measure.

Everybody was laughing, but the teacher wasn't amused. She asked Alan to stop reading midway through the memo. Then she asked Mark to finish reading the principal's memo to the class.

Alan made faces and noises all the time Mark was reading. When Mark finished reading, Alan commented, "That sounded just like that old principal of ours, Mr. Roberts, didn't it?" Everybody broke up with laughter again.

Alan's history teacher gave him a detention. Alan was outraged. He went to her and complained that he couldn't possibly serve it; he had to be at rehearsals every afternoon until opening night of the play--nearly six weeks away. He even went to the drama coach to get him out of detention. Instead, the drama coach advised Alan to serve the detention.

Alan decided then and there not to serve the detention. It was just too humiliating and degrading to a talented actor like him. Alan cut detention and received another, which he also cut. He lost his part in the fall play. Now, instead of going to rehearsals, Alan is suspended, and wondering what happened to his great theatrical career.

MISSY MAKES A MESS

Missy is a talented and popular girl. Her teachers and the other students say that she is a "model student," bright, pretty and a natural leader. She gets high grades and is in a number of school activities.

Missy and her friends have formed a private club called "The Brunch Bunch." They meet on weekends at the local mall. They have lunch and then go window shopping or try on outfits at a store owned by the mother of one of the girls. Sometimes they go to a movie together. Missy and her friends see the club as something very special and exclusive. Not just anyone can get in "The Brunch Bunch."

Recently, two new girls, Phyllis and Peggy, came to the school. Phyllis and Peggy live in a different suburb. They shop in different stores and wear different styles from Missy and her friends. Missy and her friends laugh at Phyllis and Peggy behind their backs. When Phyllis and Peggy heard about "The Brunch Bunch," they asked if they could come. Missy didn't have the nerve to say no, but she didn't exactly say yes either.

Phyllis and Peggy were at school on Friday afternoon. They were excited about coming to brunch the next day. They both had bought new sweaters and jackets to wear. Missy and her best friend Jana poured shaving cream and honey into Phyllis's and Peggy's lockers.

Their new jackets and sweaters now had to be taken to the cleaners. Someone had seen Missy and Jana with the shaving cream by the lockers and reported it to the principal. Missy and Jana were given detentions.

Missy went home in tears. She had never even thought of getting a detention before. Besides, she had a ballet lesson the afternoon the detention was to be served. Her father called the principal, who finally agreed to move the detention to another day so Missy could serve it.

The Wednesday afternoon of the detention, Missy just "forgot" to show up. She thought that the whole thing would blow over and go away if she acted like she just forgot about it. After all, she was the president of "The Brunch Bunch." It was her club! How dare they give her a detention? She was just trying to keep those newcomers out of her club!

Missy got another detention the following week for cutting the first one. She conveniently "forgot" about this one, too. Now Missy is suspended, and realizes that she had better do what is expected of her the next time.

REASONS FOR CUTTING DETENTION

Sandy, Alan and Missy all had their own reasons for cutting detention. Sandy hated school and was bored with it. She felt she was too old and grown-up for all the "silly" school rules and regulations. She didn't respect her history teacher's right to give her a detention.

Alan was the class actor and class clown. He felt he was too talented and smart to live by the rules of the school. Those were for the "others," the students who were less gifted than he. Rehearsal for the school play was more important than any detention he might have to serve.

Missy had formed her own exclusive club and was used to doing what she wanted to do. She thought of herself as a model student and simply couldn't believe she'd been given a detention. When she got one, she decided to ignore it. She thought that the whole incident would go away. Later, when questioned, she shrugged her shoulders and said "I forgot!"

Were any of these three reactions justified? The answer is NO. None of the excuses in the three stories above was a good one. All three students should have met their responsibilities by serving the detention assigned them. Each one got into deeper trouble as a result of not serving the detention.

CONSEQUENCES OF CUTTING DETENTION

Each of the three students in the stories above made his or her life more difficult by not following the school rules. Each one made the situation worse by not showing up for the detention that was assigned.

Students often don't realize that when they cut a detention, the information can go on their records. When they enter high school or apply to a college or for a job, these records can follow them. A number of cut detentions, a couple of suspensions, and a college or a future employer begins to see a pattern. They suspect that this student may not be reliable and may not take his/her responsibilities very seriously.

HOW TO SOLVE PROBLEMS WITHOUT CUTTING DETENTION

There are other ways to handle a problem without cutting a detention which has been assigned you. Even better, you should try to solve the problem which caused you to get the detention in the first place.

In all three stories, other solutions could have been found. Sandy, Alan and Missy might have gone to the school counselor to ask for help and advice. If they felt that the detention was given out unfairly, they might even have gone after class to the teacher who gave the detention and talked about the problem with her/him. If the detention was scheduled for an inconvenient time, they might have asked in advance if it could be changed. In fact, Missy's WAS changed--she just "forgot" to show up for it!

The point of finding an alternative solution is not to have the detention taken away--that's not usually possible. The point is to reach an understanding with your teacher about why the detention was given in the first place and to look at your own unacceptable behavior. Then you can avoid similar mistakes in the future.

How about you? Have you taken the time to talk with someone and tried to understand why your detention was given? Have you tried to change the time of the detention if you couldn't make it? Of course, you should ask for the change in advance; you shouldn't ask for a time change right before you're to serve the detention. In all cases, taking the time to talk with someone and making the effort to serve your detention would have been a better choice for you.

Now a simple solution (serving the detention) has grown into a major problem: a suspension. Think about it next time you're tempted to cut detention!

STUDENT RESPONSE PACKET # 7.1

CUTTING DETENTION

NAME _____

DATE _____

GRADE __ HOMEROOM _____

WHAT TO DO

Below are some questions about what you just read. These questions will help you learn why what you did was wrong and how you can avoid such problems in the future. Your teacher, a counselor, the principal, or your parents may read your answers. Your answers will not be graded.

For most of the questions, there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. The answers depend on you. Be honest with yourself as you write the answers. Take time to think before you write. The work you do on these Response Packets reflects your willingness to improve your behavior and attitude.

Write your answers in the spaces below the questions. If there is not enough room, write on the backs of these sheets. Be neat, spell correctly, use good grammar, and write in complete sentences.

1. When did you receive your last detention?

2. Why did you receive it?

3. Did you feel that it was fair for you to receive a detention? If so, why? If not, why not? Be honest!

4. Why do schools give detentions as a form of punishment when students break rules? Can you think of a better form of punishment? If so, explain.

5. Explain why the person who assigned the detention increases the punishment when a student disobeys by not showing up for the detention.

6. Why is it not a good idea to cut a detention?

7. About how many detentions have you been given this year? Are you concerned about this? Are the dean, the assistant principal, or the principal concerned?

8. What is the usual reason for your detentions?

9. Look back at the story about Sandy. Was Sandy justified in not showing up for detention? Why or why not?

10. Imagine that you are Ms. Lewis. You have been asked by the principal to write a report of the incident with Sandy, explaining the detention you gave her. What would you say in your report as a reason (reasons) why Sandy should have received--and served--the detention?

11. Now imagine that you are Sandy. You are writing a letter to a friend telling your side of the story. What were your real reasons for failing to serve the detention? Be honest!

12. Are school rules, such as the rule about smoking, ever supposed to be ignored or bent? Explain.

13. How do you feel about Alan's refusal to serve his detention? Were his theater rehearsals a good excuse for cutting detention? Why or why not?

14. What could Alan have done to get around the problem of serving the detention when it was scheduled at the same time as the rehearsal?

15. What was the real reason Alan felt so insulted by getting a detention?

16. Agree or disagree with the following statement: "Failure to serve a detention shows that a student is defiant and just doesn't care." Give reasons for writing what you wrote.

17. Name at least two good reasons to avoid getting assigned a detention.

18. How do you plan to avoid receiving detentions in the future? Name at least two ways you can accomplish this goal.

STUDENT RESPONSE PACKET # 7.2

CUTTING DETENTION

NAME _____

DATE _____

GRADE __ HOMEROOM _____

WHAT TO DO

Below are some questions about what you just read. These questions will help you learn why what you did was wrong and how you can avoid such problems in the future. Your teacher, a counselor, the principal, or your parents may read your answers. Your answers will not be graded.

For most of the questions, there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. The answers depend on you. Be honest with yourself as you write the answers. Take time to think before you write. The work you do on these Response Packets reflects your willingness to improve your behavior and attitude.

Write your answers in the spaces below the questions. If there is not enough room, write on the backs of these sheets. Be neat, spell correctly, use good grammar, and write in complete sentences.

1. Sometimes students say that they "forgot" to serve their detentions. Is this a good excuse? How often do people really forget to serve detentions?

2. What should you do if a detention is assigned at a time or day of the week when you have other obligations? How should you handle this situation?

3. Look back at the story of Missy and her club. Now imagine that you are Missy, writing in her journal the night before she serves her suspension. The journal page is entitled "Nobody Understands Me." Write at least three paragraphs that Missy might have written about herself and her friends. Your first sentence begins "Nobody understands me because I am" Use the back of this page to write your paragraphs.

4. How might Phyllis and Peggy feel about Missy's being suspended? Would they think her punishment is justified?

5. Did Missy really "forget" to show up for detention? Explain your answer.

6. If you were Missy's principal, what would you say to her now? How would you help her understand the value of serving her detentions?

7. Help us evaluate the idea of being suspended for cutting detention. Imagine that you are a junior high school or middle school principal. You have to write about how valuable detentions and suspensions are in helping students deal with unacceptable or inappropriate behavior. Maybe you have a better idea about how to discipline students. If so, present it here! You can argue either side of the issue you want. Just make sure you support your position.

8. Now imagine that you are the teacher (or other person) who originally gave you the detention. Explain how you would handle a student like you. Was it fair to make this student serve a detention? Will he/she learn anything by it? Are there different or better ways to handle this student?

9. What might a college admissions officer think about a person with a long record of cutting detentions and receiving suspensions?

10. What might a future employer think about such a person?

11. How can a student who has problems with meeting responsibilities learn to be more responsible?
12. Why do schools have rules?
13. Name five important rules of your school.
14. Are there ever times when any of these five rules can be broken? Explain your answer.
15. Why is cutting a detention against school rules?
16. Being responsible and being cooperative are said to go hand in hand. Explain why.
17. What will you do the next time you are assigned a detention?
18. How can you avoid receiving detentions in the future? State this as a goal.