

SUSPENSION LEARNING PACKET #: 6

TRUANCY

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 were truant. This means that you were supposed to be in school but were away without a proper excuse.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH TRUANCY

Being away from school without permission is wrong for a number of reasons.

First, it's against the law. Every primary and secondary school in the United States operates according to school attendance laws. Unless you have a valid excuse, you must go to school. If you don't, you can be in trouble and so can your parents. An illness, a family emergency, and a doctor's appointment are often considered valid excuses for an absence.

Your parents are supposed to make sure that you go to school. The law holds them responsible for your school attendance. So if you stay out of school without permission, you are breaking the law, and getting yourself and possibly your parents in trouble.

Second, truancy laws aren't meant just to force you into school. The purpose of such laws is to make sure that everybody takes advantage of his or her opportunity to get an education. The United States is among the few countries in the world with laws that guarantee every young person a free education, from kindergarten all the way through high school.

Third, the best way to be successful in life is by going to school and learning what you need to know to be an adult. There was a time when young people were used as cheap labor in factories in this country. Children by the thousands worked 12-hour days for pennies an hour with no hope of advancement and no chance for an education.

Today, there are child labor laws and truancy laws. Without them, you might still be living under those conditions. You have a great advantage over other young people all over the world. It's not smart to miss getting an education when your future depends on it.

Fourth, when you are truant, you aren't where others think you are. So if anything happens at your home and your parents need to get in touch with you right away, they won't be able to find you.

Truancy is another way of being irresponsible, both toward others and towards yourself. To be where you are supposed to be is to fulfill your obligations to others and to yourself. People who stay out of school are thought to be unreliable.

Fifth, when you are not in school, you fall behind the rest of the class. This means that you may lose your chance for a good education. If you stay away from class because you have trouble doing school work, the solution is to ask your teacher for help, not to stay out of school.

Every day you are truant, it's that much harder to catch up. Eventually, you'll reach the point where you can't catch up. Your classmates will simply leave you behind.

THREE STORIES ABOUT TRUANCY

HAROLD PLAYS HOOKEY

Harold has never liked going to school. He needs glasses and doesn't know it. He has trouble reading, and can't keep up with his classes. When he gets so far behind he can't catch up, he just doesn't go to his classes. On sunny days, he heads for the beach or the lake. Harold is big for his age, so he gets away with being out on the streets during school hours.

On rainy days, Harold heads for the mall, and stays all day, shuffling from one mini-theater to the other. He loves action films, so his education is limited to stories about terrorists, superheroes, space wars, detectives, policemen, and all the other characters who inhabit movies with titles like "Beast Warriors from Beyond the Stars," "Drop Dead II," "Lethal Injection," or "Crazed Zombie Nerds Destroy the Universe." In short, Harold knows more about movie versions of comic books than he knows about the real world and real people.

Harold just leans back in his seat, drifts away into filmland, and lets it all wash over him. He doesn't have to think; he just watches the images go by. While Harold is fantasizing about starship warriors, his classmates are learning the math they may someday use to design those starships. While Harold is in fantasyland, his classmates are getting an education so they can operate in the real world.

Someday, if Harold doesn't straighten out and get started with his education, it will be his former classmates who'll take care of him, and carry the load that he should be helping to carry. If the earth had to be abandoned, as in one of the movies he loves, you can bet that Harold would not get a seat on the spaceship. After all, what contribution could he make to anything?

MELANIE, MUFFIN, AND THE MINI-MALL

Melanie and Muffin like to hang out at the mall. It's like a giant toy box to them, although they've never thought much about why they go there. Melanie likes to window-shop and try on new outfits. Muffin likes the food, especially the gooey muffins they sell at the Mini-Mall Muffin Maker shop. The two of them could spend the entire day at the mall and never get tired of looking, listening, drinking pop, and eating.

They are perfect consumers. They spend their time taking in all the clothes, food, movies, magazines, shoes, handbags, swimwear, music videos, tapes, and all the other things they find at the mall.

Melanie once wanted to be a teacher, but she isn't willing to put enough effort into studying. It's easier just to hang out at the mall. Muffin wanted to be a model, but she can't control her appetite. When she has to decide between a slim figure and a honey-chocolate donut, she can't turn the donut down.

Sometimes, Joey and Mickey meet them at the mall for an afternoon of popcorn, sodas, candy, and holding hands in the back row at the movies. Last month, they saw five horror flicks in twelve hours. The same day, between the four of them, they ate four tubs of popcorn, eight king-size packs of peanut butter cups, and drank 16 cherry colas.

They came out of the movies sick, but ready to do it again the next day. For them the mall is a giant playpen. They are still little kids and don't know it. Eventually, they will have to grow up. When this happens, they won't be prepared for it.

LONE-WOLF WILLIE

Willie never learned how to interact with others. At first, he was just shy. In the first grade, he was quiet and didn't have much to say to his classmates. As he grew older, his shyness turned into anger, and he frequently got into fights.

Now that he's in middle school, Willie keeps pretty much to himself. He doesn't play team sports because he can't work with a team. He doesn't belong to any school clubs or groups, because he can't do what others

want to do. It's not that he isn't smart. If he tried, he would be an excellent student. But his shyness and anger keep everyone away.

Last year, Willie got a part-time job at a gas station. He likes mechanical work because he doesn't have to work with people. If he had his way, Willie would spend all of his time under the hood of a car. Because he never learned how to study, he'll never make the change from mechanic to engineer. But that's okay with Willie. Just so he doesn't have to deal with people.

Since he got the job at the gas station, Willie spends more and more time away from school. He has fallen so far behind in his studies, he'll never catch up. He'll be lucky to finish eighth grade. His classmates gave up on him a long time ago. They got tired of trying to include him when he didn't want to be included.

Eventually, Willie will drop out of school and disappear under the hood of an automobile. Years from now, when his classmates are in college or have businesses of their own, Willie will still be working in somebody else's gas station. What a waste, since he could have been an excellent student.

REASONS FOR TRUANCY

Truancy has many causes. Here are a few:

- Fear of failure in school work
- Too many outside interests
- Inability to work with others
- Poor background in school subjects
- Shyness and/or lack of self-esteem
- Short temper
- Ignorance of the value of an education
- Lack of encouragement at home to get an education
- Peer pressure
- The need to hold a part-time job
- Undiscovered emotional and/or physical problems

- Not willing to work hard

All of these causes of truancy are both real and serious. For whatever reason, fear of failure can be disastrous. School is social in nature, so lack of social skills and inability to work with other persons can prevent you from doing school work.

Shyness or lack of self-esteem may get in the way of a student's ability to do school work, especially if working with others is necessary. A short temper may be the result of feeling inadequate and hurt a person's chances for success at school.

Outside interests may take up all of a person's energy and affect a person's progress in school. If a person receives little encouragement to get an education, he or she may not feel that school is worth the effort. If money is a problem and the student has to hold a job to help pay family expenses, he or she may feel torn between school work and the job.

Each cause of truancy constitutes a problem that must be dealt with if the student is to break the pattern of staying out of school. They can be dealt with if only the student will discuss them with his or her teacher or school counselor. But if they go unattended, these problems can pile up until the student simply walks away from what looks to him or her like a hopeless situation. Staying out of school is the first step to dropping out.

CONSEQUENCES OF TRUANCY

The first and most obvious consequence of truancy is being in trouble with the law. Remember, it isn't just you who will be in trouble. Your parents can be in trouble, also. This won't help life at home, and it can only hurt your life at school. Don't become an enemy of your own education. An education help you through life. It's not meant to hurt you.

The second consequence of truancy is getting behind everyone else. Classes are taught so that what you learn today, you will need to know tomorrow. Education is a process--one of the most exciting processes you can imagine--but each bit of knowledge builds on other bits. If you stay out of school, you'll

miss the connections. If you miss the connections, then you won't know what makes things happen. This will place you at a disadvantage.

The worst consequence of truancy is that it creates bad habits that may eventually lead to a student's becoming a dropout . Even if you are doing poor work, as long as you are still in school, the possibility of getting help is still there. Once you drop out, that hope is gone.

Like it or not, without at least a high school education, the chance of fulfilling your potential is slim. The more you know, the more earning power you have and the greater your chance for success. Every day you spend away from school, you get farther away from the truth and closer to accepting whatever appealing lie people may throw at you. The truth will make you free, but you have to learn how to find it.

One last consequence: it has been said that the truth shall make you free. The purpose of education is to learn the truth, to learn the skills necessary to find the truth for yourself after you graduate, and to learn what you need to know to lead a productive, meaningful, and rewarding life.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO IN THE FUTURE

What you need to do is break the pattern. Before you can break it, you have to realize that the pattern is there. Look at Harold. He's so far removed from life that he can't tell the truth from fiction. He's no longer operating in the real world. He lives in the movies. He's trapped in a behavior pattern that consists of sitting back and letting the movies take him over. If he doesn't break this pattern, he'll drown in his own fantasy.

Look at Melanie and Muffin. They both have goals, but they lack the discipline to reach them. It's too easy to hang around the mall. They don't live in the real world, they live in the mall--which for them is a giant playpen, with all the toys and goodies they want to make them happy. It's just as it was when they were small--everything is provided for them.

Finally, look at Willie. He lives within himself. He will become more and more alone as he grows older. And his life will become more narrow.

SO BREAK THE PATTERN! Don't let your problems run your life. Solve the problems and run your own life. If you can't solve them by yourself, ask for help. Whether you know it or not, you're fighting for your life. **DON'T GIVE UP!**

STUDENT RESPONSE PACKET # 6.1

TRUANCY

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. How much time did you miss when you stayed out of school? Where did you go? What did you do?

2. Is this the first time you have been truant? If your answer is "yes," tell us why you were truant. If your answer is "no," list the number of times and the reasons you have been truant in the past.

3. Look at the list describing the causes of truancy. Do any of them apply to you? If your answer is "yes," write which ones, and tell us how they apply. If your answer is "no," tell us what you think causes you to be truant.

4. What are some other causes of truancy? Try to think of at least two.

5. Why does society have truancy laws? How do they protect you?

6. When you are truant, who can get into trouble with the law, and why?

7. You've read Harold's story. Why was he truant? Do you know anybody like Harold?

8. Write two goals that will help Harold break his pattern of truancy.

9. Why were Melanie and Muffin truant? Do you have anything in common with Melanie or Muffin?

10. Write a goal for Melanie and Muffin that will help them break their truancy pattern.

11. Why was Willie truant? What seems to be his problem? Do you know anybody like Willie?

12. Write two goals that will help Willie break his pattern of truancy.

13. You've read about the consequences of truancy. Explain two of the consequences.

14. In your opinion, what is the worst consequence of truancy?

STUDENT RESPONSE PACKET # 6.2

TRUANCY

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. Explain why you were truant. Give all the reasons.

2. What have been your reasons for being truant in the past? Include all reasons.

3. What is it about school that makes you not want to be here on a regular basis?

4. Describe how you get along with your teachers. What about other students? Remember that getting along with others can effect our attitude about school.

5. When you stay out of school, what do you do? Why would most people say it would be better for you to be in school?

6. What makes doing these things more enjoyable for you than going to school?

7. What are the real reasons that Harold stays away from school?

8. How grown-up are Melanie and Muffin? Do you know anybody like them? What's your reaction to Melanie and Muffin?

9. How about Lone-Wolf Willie? What's seems to be his problem? Why does he do what he does?

10. If you were Harold, what would you do to get back on the right track?

11. What does it mean when we say that the mall is a playpen for Melanie and Muffin? How can they get out of the playpen?

12. Is there any hope for Willie? If you were Willie's counselor, what would you suggest to him?

13. We listed many reasons for truancy. Which ones best apply to you? Explain.

14. What other reasons are there for truancy? Try to think of two others and explain them.

15. What are the real reasons for your own truancy? Think hard and try to be honest with yourself.

16. We talked about the consequences of truancy. Given what you know about yourself, do any of these consequences apply to you? Explain.

17. If you were a counselor and someone like you came for advice, what would you give that person to help him or her improve his or her school attendance?

18. What do you want to do with your life? What role does education play in your goals? What do you think you need to do to reach these goals?

