

SUSPENSION LEARNING PACKET #: 11

MAKING IMPROVEMENTS

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.

WHY YOU ARE IN SUSPENSION

You have been suspended because your behavior is not acceptable by your school. You have broken the rules and are being punished. You need to change how you act at school. To do this, you must start thinking about why you behave the way you do and what improvements you should make to the way you act.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH BEING THE WAY YOU ARE

People change as they grow up. Most people make it through their teens and become adults who lead successful and satisfying lives. Others go in the opposite direction. They get lost or sidetracked, and never experience the kind of life they could have had. These are the people who have stopped changing, stopped developing, and stopped discovering new ways of looking at the world.

You are at a crossroads in your life. What you do right now may determine what you will be able to do for the rest of your life. Right now, you're in trouble--but there is still time to change your life. However, before there can be improvements you must want to change. If you want to change, you'll be

surprised at the number of people who will help you. Everyone wants to help people who want to help themselves.

THREE STORIES ABOUT PEOPLE WHO NEEDED TO MAKE IMPROVEMENTS

BAD NEWS BENNIE

Bennie was jealous of his older brother, John. Their grandmother loved them both, but John was the first child, and she always seemed to favor him over Bennie. There were only 18 months between their ages, so Bennie quickly became resentful about the extra attention John got from Grandma. Meanwhile, John just settled down and enjoyed being grandma's pet.

In addition to resenting John because of the attention he got from their grandmother, Bennie also had a problem with his younger sister. When Teena was born, it seemed to Bennie that the world had conspired to prevent him from getting any attention. John got all the attention from his grandparents, and Teena got all the attention from his parents.

Bennie became less and less friendly with his brother and sister. He got into fights with his brother. As he got older, he turned out to be a little stronger than his brother. So the time eventually came when Bennie could beat John in a fight. Whenever John got attention from grandma, Bennie would pick a fight with him. Whenever Teena got attention from his parents, Bennie would break something she liked. Bennie's jealousy was getting the best of him.

Bennie also discovered that losing his temper was a good way to make people leave him alone. When somebody teased him or scuffled with him, he would go into a rage and tear into the person. Even bigger boys learned to leave Bennie alone.

When Bennie started school, he seemed to be in trouble from the first day. By the time he made it to middle school, he was known as a trouble

maker. "Here comes Bad News Bennie." Classmates avoided him. That suited him just fine. He didn't want any friends.

By the time Bennie left middle school, he had a bad reputation. The police finally stopped chasing him. They would just drive out to his house and wait for him to come home. The teachers, counselors, and principal tried to "reach" Bennie, but he didn't want to listen. Even the coach, who had been successful in counseling many boys like Bennie, finally gave up. Bennie had become the least-liked boy in school.

Bennie was in trouble all the time. He received many detentions and suspensions. His older brother was friendly with all the teachers, and his sister was the darling of the swimming team. Bennie was an outsider, even in his own home.

Shortly after graduation, Bennie went to work at a local gas station. He had always been good with machines. But Bennie was so rude to the customers, his boss had to fire him. His temper got worse, and he finally got in trouble with the police. Bennie's bad start in life never got turned around. He always thought the other person was at fault. He never wanted to make changes. Is it now too late for Bennie?

NOTHING NEEDLES NORBERT

Norbert never got angry at anybody. Norbert never got excited about anything. But he was always getting into trouble. He wrote some graffiti in the restroom once. He smoked a few cigarettes on the school yard, but nobody seemed to notice. Occasionally, he stole books out of the library, but never got caught.

When he got old enough to drive a car, his dad bought him an old Ford Mustang. It wasn't exactly a classic, but it was in good shape and free of rust. Norbert could have fixed it up, but he didn't seem to have the energy to work on it. The car was always a mess. Norbert just drove it. He didn't clean it or take care of it.

Norbert always seemed to take the easy path. If he wasn't interested in school on Monday, he wouldn't show up. He always found an excuse. When he took biology, he managed to get someone else to take the test. He got caught and was given a suspension, but he didn't seem to care. When it happened again the next semester, nobody seemed surprised. By getting others to do his work, by copying other people's papers and tests, and by doing just enough to get through his classes, Norbert managed to get all the way through school without ever doing much work. He seemed to be in trouble all the time, but he was so likable, he talked his way out of most of it. Norbert never did anything really bad, but also never seemed to do anything very good.

Norbert made passing grades, and eventually met all the requirements for graduation except for the last semester. About three weeks before he was supposed to graduate, he dropped out and went to California to get into surfing. When he got there, he realized that the surfing scene wasn't as good as he had thought it was. But he eventually found others who weren't particularly interested in anything, so he felt right at home.

Norbert still comes home for Christmas, but he doesn't stay long. His parents try to get him to finish school, but he isn't very interested. He picks up work now and then, but never anything with a future. Norbert doesn't worry about the future. Norbert doesn't worry about much of anything. His parents give him a little money, and he doesn't need much. When you aren't particularly interested in anything, it doesn't cost much to live.

When Norbert is 50 years old, he'll be much the same as he is now, only a little heavier and greyer. Norbert always felt that something was missing in his life, but never figured out what it was. Actually, he never gave it that much thought.

CRAFTY CRISSY

Crissy has a problem. She never wants to do the work she has been assigned to do. If she is told to read a book passage by Thursday, she'll wait until Wednesday night before she looks for the book. If she has a

test on Monday, she'll spend the weekend going to the movies instead of studying, and then try to get someone to take the test for her. If she has to do a book report or a theme, she'll try to find someone to write it for her or copy someone else's paper.

If Crissy knows she can't avoid taking a test, she'll write information on a piece of paper and hide it up her sleeve. She has been caught with answers written on her wrist and on the palm of her hand. One time, she glued chemistry answers to the bottom of her shoe. It rained that day, the answers were blurred by the water, and she failed the test.

Try to think of new ways of cheating on school work, and Crissy will already have thought of it. If Crissy has a choice between spending an hour learning the assignment or spending three hours finding someone to do it for her, Crissy will always try to find someone to do it for her.

It's not that she can't do the work. When she wants to, Crissy can read, write, do math, and perform with the best students. Her problem is not lack of intelligence. It's lack of motivation. She has her own interests, and school is not one of them. She is not motivated to do well in school. So when it's time to learn something in which she has no interest, Crissy looks for a way out.

Crissy has trouble dealing with problems. Her first impulse is to let someone else solve the problems while she does whatever she wants to do at the time. Wherever she goes, Crissy finds people who will do her work for her. In fact, Crissy has to have the help of friends. She has never learned to be self-sufficient.

Right now, Crissy has been suspended for cutting a detention. She was given the detention for cheating on a quiz. When she was given the detention, her first thought was to find somebody who serve the detention for her. When nobody would do it, she just didn't show up. Now, she's suspended.

Crissy has set up a behavior pattern that could follow her throughout her life. When she gets to college, she'll pay others to do her term papers.

When she graduates from college, she'll move from one job to another, as each new employer learns that Crissy can't turn out the work. She'll spend her life trying to find ways to avoid doing the work she is supposed to be doing.

Crissy cheats. She cheats on her tests, her papers and her assignments. She thinks she is getting away with it. In the end, Crissy will cheat herself out of a life.

WHEN YOU NEED TO MAKE SOME IMPROVEMENTS

You need to make some improvements when:

- your behavior stops helping you reach your goals and starts preventing you from reaching them
- you've developed a habit that keeps you from doing what you ought to do
- your behavior has become self-destructive
- you are in a rut and don't seem to make any progress
- you get into trouble all the time and don't know why
- you can't get along with people
- you have trouble taking suggestions or doing what is expected of you.
- you hear from people you respect that you have a bad attitude
- you want to change but can't do it by yourself

All of these situations call for a change in the way you behave. Some of them call for a change in the way you approach your life and problems. Let's look at our three stories for a moment to see what kinds of changes were needed.

CONSEQUENCES OF NOT MAKING IMPROVEMENTS

In Bennie's case, several things happened during his childhood that may have influenced his development. He was jealous of the attention his older brother got from his grandparents. He was jealous of the attention his younger sister got from his parents. Bennie was the middle child, and felt left out of the affection that he brother and sister got. As he grew older, the resentment became a pattern of behavior. He resented everything and everybody. He lashed out at those with whom he was angry.

It wasn't Bennie's fault that he was the middle child. But not all middle children turn out the way Bennie did. Bennie didn't try to understand what was going wrong. He didn't step back and see what needed to be changed. Bennie wasn't motivated to change, and he wouldn't accept help when it was offered.

Norbert was never a really bad person. So why did he need to change? Because he will never realize his potential. Norbert may drift through life until he dies, without ever knowing the joy of achievement, the feeling of success or the satisfaction of helping others.

It would be easy simply to say that Norbert is happy, so leave him alone. But Norbert is neither particularly happy nor sad. He just drifts along, letting his experiences wash over him. Sometimes, even when a person is not a bad person, he needs to change. In Norbert's case, we have a smart person who never lets his light shine.

Crissy's case is different. Crissy doesn't lack initiative. Her motivation is in the wrong direction. By always trying to find someone else to do the work for her, Crissy prevents herself from learning how to deal with life's problems. If she continues on the path she's following, she will always be dependent on others to do the work that she needs done. She'll always be playing the role of a child, looking for someone to come and bail her out.

WHAT YOU MUST DO TO MAKE IMPROVEMENTS

Look at these three people. Bennie developed problems when he was a little boy. Anywhere along the line as he was growing up, with some help and with a desire on his part to change, Bennie could have overcome his problems. But it didn't happen. His resentful, and sometimes violent, behavior didn't change. He never took responsibility for his actions.

What Norbert needed was to examine his life, to catch on to himself, to gain some idea about who he was, where he was going, and what he was going to do. He never did it. Now he's the Unintentional Man leading an unintentional life. He's never taken responsibility for his life. What a waste!

Crissy must learn to do her own work. She must learn that in order for her ever to have any sense of accomplishment in life, she must first learn how to do things for herself instead of relying on others to do things for her. Crissy thinks that she is in control. She is not. Life is passing her by and she doesn't even know it.

Why should each of these three persons take responsibility for his or her actions? Because you must learn to take responsibility for your actions, even if there are circumstances beyond your control that have added to your problems. And when you need to change your life, you have to take responsibility for making that change.

If a person's father or mother is an alcoholic, it may help to explain why he drinks, too. But overcoming what could become a drinking problem is that person's own responsibility. It's a copout to say, "I can't help drinking. My parents drink too much."

What steps should you take if you are going to change? Here are a few:

The first step toward changing your life is recognizing that you are having difficulties and admitting that you need to make some changes.

The second step toward changing is taking responsibility for your actions.

The third step is having the courage to ask for help when you find that you can't do it alone.

The fourth step is learning to accept help when it's given.

The fifth step is being honest with yourself every step of the way. Without honesty, especially with yourself, you'll never make the other steps, and you'll never make the changes.

The next step is never to give up hope.

All the rest of the steps depend on your determination not to let life defeat you.

If you take these steps and make the changes you need to make, your reward will be the freedom to create your own life.

It's up to you.

You just have to make up your mind to start.

Let's start now.

STUDENT RESPONSE PACKET # 11.1

MAKING IMPROVEMENTS

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. You have been given this packet because your teacher or counselor thinks you need to change some of your actions. What things about you would your teacher like to see you change? How about your parents? Use the back of this sheet if you need more writing space.

8. What do you think Norbert's problem really is? Have you ever felt like doing what Norbert did?

9. How could Norbert's parents have helped him change?

10. How could Norbert himself have broken his bad habits and made something out of himself?

11. Why does Crissy try to get others to do her work?

12. Crissy is not learning how to do her school work. What else is she not learning how to do?

13. What advice do you have for Crissy? How can she overcome her problem? Should you try to help her, or should she help herself?

14. How do you know when you need to change? What are the reasons? List some reasons that we didn't name that may apply to you.

15. What does it mean to say that you have to take responsibility for changing your own life?

16. Why are people generally more willing to help someone if that person shows an interest in helping himself or herself?

17. Name the steps that will help you change for the better.

18. Now tell us what you are going to do about making some changes.

STUDENT RESPONSE PACKET # 11.2

MAKING IMPROVEMENTS

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. What have you done that got you suspended?

2. Explain your reason for doing what you did.

3. Why do you think you have been given this packet to read?
4. Explain why wanting to make changes is necessary before any real changes can take place.
5. Describe two or three changes that could affect your life in a positive way.
6. Describe Bennie's childhood. Pick out the things that you think contributed to making him the way he was.
7. Explain why you agree or disagree with this sentence. "Making changes is a lot of work, but it's worth it."
8. What's wrong with being the way you are? Remember, most people work to make improvements in themselves.

9. Explain why you agree or disagree with this sentence. "What you do right now may determine what you will be able to do for the rest of your life."

10. If you don't make some changes, what could be the consequences?

11. What are some signs that a person needs to make some improvements? (Look on page 6).

12. Explain what the following sentences mean. "The fifth step is to be honest with yourself every step of the way. Without honesty, especially with yourself, you'll never make the other steps, and you'll never make the change."

13. What will happen to Crissy if she doesn't change?

14. What can Crissy do to make the changes she needs to make?

