

SUSPENSION LEARNING PACKET #: 9

VANDALISM

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 destroyed or damaged something. This is called "vandalism." The word comes from the name of a group of barbarians who lived in the fifth century A. D., who ravaged Gaul and Spain and almost destroyed Rome in 455 A. D. They destroyed so much that their very name came to stand for anybody who deliberately destroys or damages things that are beautiful or valuable.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH VANDALISM

It would be easier to ask "What's right with vandalism?" There is so much wrong with vandalism, we could devote a whole book to it. Here are just a few things that are wrong with vandalism:

- Vandalism is purely destructive: it doesn't create anything.
- Vandalism doesn't try to make a point, it just destroys.
- Valuable property is damaged or destroyed by vandalism.
- Vandalism costs other people money.
- Sometimes vandalism destroys things that can't be replaced.

- Vandalism solves nothing. Instead, it makes things worse.
- Vandalizing a school can interrupt the process of learning.
- Vandalism is against the law.
- Vandalism indicates a deeper problem on the part of those who vandalize.

THREE STORIES ABOUT VANDALISM

WILD WALLY WASTES THE WOODSHOP

Wally is not jolly. He has trouble controlling his temper. He has what some people call "a short fuse." Most people leave Wally alone. He's hard to get along with, and you never know when he's going to fly off the handle. People who've known Wally for a long time say that he's always been like this.

Some days Wally's up and other days he's down. When he gets enthusiastic about something or somebody, it becomes his whole world. But he always gets tired of things and people. Then he gets in a bad mood, and nobody wants to be around him. But the next day, everything's all right again, and Wally is on top of the world.

Wally loves shop work. He is very good at woodworking. He created several inlaid jewelry boxes in woodshop. He did all the assigned projects, and got permission from the teacher to work on some of his own projects. Nobody had ever been more interested than Wally in woodworking.

Eventually, Wally decided that he knew more about woodworking than his teacher. When his teacher tried to show him ways he could improve his work, he became angry, and told him that he knew what he was doing.

When Wally had trouble with a difficult corner cut, his teacher tried to show him an easier technique. Wally resented the offer of help. He became more and more upset, and finally threw the wood to the floor and walked out of the shop.

Over the weekend, Wally broke into the school and vandalized the woodshop. He damaged other students' projects, and destroyed some beautiful woodwork that the teacher had done. But Monday morning, Wally was cheerful and acted as if nothing had happened. When the investigation led to Wally, he didn't seem to care.

PAULA AND THE PAINT

Paula always gets even. Whenever somebody does something that Paula doesn't like, Paula criticizes him or her for it. Whenever somebody does something that hurts Paula, even if it is unintentional, Paula gets even.

There isn't a forgiving bone in Paula's body. She holds grudges and she has a long memory. She's patient, and waits for the opportunity to strike back. For Paula, the only thing that makes sense is an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Except that Paula always gives more than she takes. If someone dropped a pencil on Paula's foot, she would drop a book on his or her foot. Paula doesn't have many friends.

Paula has problems with authority figures. She doesn't like being told what to do. She doesn't know the difference between being asked to do something and being told to do it. For Paula, any request is the same as an order, and she doesn't take orders.

When asked why she reacts this way, she says, "Nobody tells me what to do." For Paula, school is a prison. She says that she wants to be free. Paula is hard to understand.

Last semester, the teacher assigned teams to work on a class project. The project involved going to the library and searching for information on three periods in American History. Everybody had to be on a team.

Paula expected to be named the leader of one of the teams, but she was not. When the leader of Paula's team asked her to work on, she refused to cooperate. She didn't do any of the work she was supposed to do.

When team reports were due, the team leader reported that Paula had not accomplished anything. The teacher gave Paula an F. Paula swore to get even with the team leader.

The following week, while the rest of the girls were in physical education class, Paula went into the locker room and opened up all the team members' lockers. She sprayed paint on the clothes, and then sprayed obscenities about the team leader on the walls. When the girls came back to their lockers, they found their clothes ruined. The paint cans had been tossed into a sink.

Since Paula was the only girl missing from gym class that day, and since she had already told the team leader that she would "get her," Paula was the natural suspect. When her own locker was opened by the principal, it smelled like the paint from the cans. Then somebody remembered seeing paint stains on Paula's fingers earlier in the day.

When Paula was confronted with the evidence, she shrugged her shoulders and said, "I'll get all of you, too." Paula was given a ten-day suspension and referred to a counselor.

FAST FREDDIE AND THE FIREWATER

Freddie is always looking for ways to make people look at him. He's the kid who would tell the girl next to him in the primary school cafeteria that he was eating goldfish for lunch. As Freddie grew older, it became more and more difficult to get people's attention, so Freddie became more and more inventive. By the time he finished primary school, he had been involved in dozens of pranks and practical jokes on his classmates.

When he started middle school, Freddie felt lost. Freddie started to dress sloppily, let his hair grow (and didn't wash it), and stopped wiping his face with a napkin when he had finished eating. When people sat next to Freddie in the cafeteria, "Oh gross!" was the most often-heard comment.

Freddie looked forward to his last prank of the year. It was to be his best ever. He and several other boys organized a raid on the school cafeteria. The school used bottled water in the cafeteria. The key to the plan was to replace the water with alcohol. Then he and his friends would start a food fight, and blame it on the others.

Freddie stole the alcohol from the hospital where his mother worked, sneaked into the cafeteria at night, poured the water out of the water bottles and replaced it with the alcohol. The next day, he took his seat at the lunch table and waited for the fun to start. He heard a crash in the kitchen, and then a scream.

A kitchen worker was carrying one of the bottles to install it in the water cooler machine, and dropped it near the stove. The cap came off the bottle, and the alcohol hit the gas stove, making a small fireball. Several people were injured. It was only the quick action of the supervisor with a fire extinguisher that saved the kitchen from going up in flames.

None of this seems funny to Freddie anymore. But then again, it never was.

REASONS FOR VANDALISM

Why do people commit acts of vandalism? Here are a few of the reasons:

- To attract attention
- Revenge: to get even with somebody
- For the fun of it
- To freak people out: to confuse and frustrate people
- The excitement of risk-taking
- Rebellion against authority

Most of the time, vandalism is done for more than one of these reasons. For example, Wally trashed the woodshop for several reasons:

- To rebel against the woodshop teacher's authority
- To get even with the woodshop teacher personally

Wally resented being told what to do. He shares this problem with Paula. Paula couldn't stand anyone being in a position of authority over her. When Wally wanted revenge, he wrecked the woodshop itself. When Paula wanted revenge, she went directly to the team members' personal property. Her revenge was more personal than Wally's.

Wally did fine on easy woodshop projects. But when he started the advanced projects, he had trouble. When his teacher tried to give him advice, Wally felt that he was being put down. The teacher was just trying to help Wally, but Wally couldn't accept criticism.

Wally has a deeper problem, which is reflected in his mood swings from being overenthusiastic to being depressed. When he can no longer control his anger, Wally destroys anything within reach. Wally just lashed out at people. Paula went out, bought paint cans, and carefully planned the timing for her vandalism. Freddie wasn't angry; he just wanted to raise a ruckus.

For Freddie, the main motive was to call attention, if not to himself, to something that he had done (even if nobody but Freddie would ever know). Freddie also liked the excitement of putting a plan together and then pulling it off successfully. The element of risk made it all the more exciting.

In each case, someone chose to destroy or damage something in order to accomplish a goal. Destruction and damage became a part of making things right again. For Wally, trashing the woodshop seemed to be justified, because the teacher had criticized his work.

For Paula, trashing the team members' clothes and writing graffiti on the walls seemed the right thing to do after being told to do something she didn't want to do.

For Freddie, the alcohol was supposed to get people drunk, not catch fire and hurt anybody. Freddie was trying to upset everyone. In a sense, however, Freddie's vandalism was the most dangerous of all. His prank involved getting people to drink something that might not only make them act and look silly, but might also endanger them.

The fireball in the kitchen showed how far a prank can get out of hand.

CONSEQUENCES OF VANDALISM

What happens when students vandalize?

In Wally's case, he got a suspension, the school had to buy new woodshop materials and the teacher lost some treasured objects. Nothing good came out of Wally's vandalism.

In Paula's case, she got a suspension, her parents had to pay for damages, the school counselor had to spend a lot of time with Paula, and the team leader had to live down the things Paula wrote about her on the mirrors. The only good thing to come out of all this was Paula's visits with the counselor. At least she is trying to learn why she acts the way she does.

In Freddie's case, it's more complicated. The school could have caught fire and been severely damaged or destroyed. People could have been killed. What started out as a prank turned out to be the most dangerous vandalism of all. Nothing good came out of it, either.

WHAT YOU MUST DO IN THE FUTURE TO AVOID VANDALISM

The most important thing you can do now about vandalism is ask yourself why you sometimes choose to destroy something instead of trying to work through the problem. If you can't work your way through a problem, why not ask for help from somebody who can teach you how to solve it? How else are you ever going to learn?

The appropriate response to an offer of help is to accept it, or at least to thank the person for offering it. Vandalism is not the logical response to offers of help.

If you can't stand anybody telling you what to do, you need help. Asking for cooperation is not the same as ordering someone to do something.

If you have trouble with authority, ask yourself "why?" How else will you ever learn to function in a world where everybody has a boss of some kind and someone will always be asking you to do something? Vandalism is not the right response to being asked to do something by a team member.

If you really enjoy playing practical jokes on people, you should ask yourself, "Why do I get satisfaction from embarrassing my classmates?" Embarrassing people is a way of putting them down. Do you feel that you are inferior or powerless in comparison to your classmates or your teachers? Vandalism is not the logical response to seeing people going about their business.

Remember: if you like to destroy or damage things, if you routinely vandalize your own and other people's property, something is wrong.

When you are young, it should be a time for creating, building, and working toward the future. When you are young, your life unfolds like a growing flower, reaching for the sun.

Vandalism is anti-life. It involves destruction, not creation. When you vandalize, you are destroying and tearing down instead of creating and building up. Your life withers and is wasted.

Whatever the reasons for your vandalism, seek advice or counseling to help you learn why, for you, vandalizing seems the right thing to do.

STUDENT RESPONSE PACKET # 9.1

VANDALISM

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 did you do? Describe your act of vandalism.

2. You've read several reasons for vandalism. What happened to make you want to do this act of vandalism?

3. What were the consequences of your vandalism? Was property damaged or destroyed? Were people hurt or inconvenienced?

4. Why does your school take a strong stance against destructive actions?

5. How did you feel when you were finished vandalizing? Describe what your thoughts and feelings were at that time.

6. How do most of your classmates react to your vandalism?

7. What do you think Wally should have done to handle his anger instead of trashing the wood shop?

8. Why do you think Wally chose to trash the wood shop instead of doing what you wrote in (7) above?

9. What do you think should be done to Wally? How can he be helped?

10. Paula sounds like somebody who would be hard to get along with. Write what you think Paula's problem really is.

11. What do you think Paula should do now? What would help her get along with others better?

11. Freddie was just trying to have fun. He wasn't trying to damage or destroy anything. Why is Freddie's vandalism the most serious of all?

12. What do you think should be done to Freddie? How can he be helped?

13. What is different about these three acts of vandalism?

14. What do these three acts of vandalism have in common?

15. What do you think should be done to you for the vandalism you did?
How can you be helped?

16. Why does destroying something seem the appropriate reaction to something you don't like?

17. Write what you think is a reasonable punishment for acts of vandalism by students.

18. Write two goals that will help you not to vandalize again.

STUDENT RESPONSE PACKET # 9.2

VANDALISM

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 a suspension for vandalizing. What did you do? Were your actions directed toward school property or someone's personal property?
2. What did you think about and how did you feel before and during the vandalizing? Why did you think it was okay to vandalize?

3. What were your thoughts and feelings after you vandalized? Were you angry, relieved, sad, regretful?

4. How did your vandalizing affect other people? Was anybody hurt? Was the damage to property small or large? Who will pay for the damage?

5. You've read several reasons why people vandalize. Write three more reasons to add to the list.

6. Why did you chose to vandalize instead of working through your problems in more acceptable ways?

7. Vandalism costs schools millions of dollars every year. What better things could schools spend their money on?

8. Wally was a good student, but he had a bad temper. He did could do most projects, but he got angry when he couldn't do hard projects. Why was he upset at the teacher for trying to help him?

9. Wally has problems with anybody who tells him what to do. So does Paula. In what other ways are Paula and Wally alike?

10. How are Paula and Wally different?

11. What were the main differences between Paula's and Wally's vandalism?

12. How did Freddie's vandalism differ from Paula's and Wally's? Explain.

13. Of the three acts of vandalism, which was the most dangerous and why? Explain.

14. What would help Wally learn how to control his vandalism? What would you tell Wally to help him?

15. How would you try to help Paula? What would be the hardest part?

16. If you were Freddie's counselor, what would be your first step in trying to help him?

17. If you were a counselor and someone like you was brought to counseling, how would you help that person?

18. Write three goals that will help you to help yourself.