

Subj: [REDACTED]
Date: 11/9/05 2:04:15 PM Eastern Standard Time
From: [REDACTED]
To: drfrkwalton@aol.com
Sent from the Internet (Details)

Dr. Walton,
I am the Lower School Dean at the [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] is a student in our third grade class.

[REDACTED] has difficulty staying on-task within the classroom. He is sent to me several times a week due to the fact that he will NOT do his classwork. Often, he will not do his work for me either, choosing instead to play with his shoes, crawl under his desk, stare out of the window, etc.

He has been prone to "meltdowns" in the past, which include crying and screaming hysterically, repeating phrases for over an hour such as "this is not reality," and talking about depression. Fortunately, these episodes have been minimized only due to the fact that the teacher can read the signs and send [REDACTED] to me so I can intercede.

I desperately need advice/strategies to help [REDACTED] work productively within the confines of a normal classroom. Our school does not have a resource faculty in place, nor anyone who is trained to deal with a student one-on-one on a regular basis.

Any advice you can offer would be appreciated.

Thank you.
[REDACTED]

Ms. [REDACTED]
Dean, Lower School
[REDACTED] Schools

Dear Ms. [REDACTED]

Thank you for contacting me with regard to [REDACTED]. Here are some of my thoughts with regard to [REDACTED] and some suggestions that may be of use to you as well as to Ms. [REDACTED].

It appears that [REDACTED] was the center of the universe during his earlier years. I believe he learned then to expect special service and attention. As he grew older and continued to expect to have his way and special attention, his parents, not knowing what else to do, would meet malingering and other inappropriate behavior with verbal coercion, threats, and punishment and occasionally even physical punishment. In any case, whomever wishes to provide leadership or guidance for [REDACTED] needs to understand that the person who is in a position to say "no" is in the strongest position. Sometimes adults are in that position, often young people are in the position to say no.

I realize teachers may expel him from class or from school and seem to have the last word in that fashion with [REDACTED], but I doubt that such techniques will stimulate [REDACTED] to cooperate. I suggest the classroom teacher have a private talk with [REDACTED]. A valuable communication may be: "[REDACTED] sometimes it seems as though you want to show me I can't make you do your work or behave the way I would like you to behave. You know, you are right. I can't make you. In fact, I don't even want to try to make you any longer. I think I have made a mistake. I've been acting as if you couldn't make a helpful decision unless I forced you. I realize, you have what it takes to decide how you handle school work and behavior. You will decide how fast or slow you will do your school work. The only time I might ask you to leave the classroom is if your behavior is making a problem for our class. If I do ask you to go to Ms. [REDACTED]' office for a while, please understand you are welcome to come back to our class whenever you think you can be a helper or be cooperative. Does this make any sense to you? Good, [REDACTED]. I look forward to having you in class."

I offer the above communication as a means of stopping the use of misbehavior. The use or goal seems often to be to demonstrate to the teacher or administration that they cannot make him change. He is correct. You cannot. However, he may find that it is pointless to attempt to defeat a teacher who is clearly not going to fight with him. Yes, it may be true that he does little or nothing academically for a while. He may even fail the year. But, if in the process he finds, "No one is against me." There is no point in trying to be stubborn when no one is trying to push me. Class goes on. I am falling behind, I am sitting in the office showing no one can make me do it their way, yet that is kind of foolish, because no one is trying to make me do it their way. Class goes on, School goes on, and I am going to have to repeat the same grade next year.

Mrs. [REDACTED], I should add, when [REDACTED] does come to your office, I suggest you not make much of it. "Hello, [REDACTED]. Have a seat. Let me know when you are ready to go back and join your class."

The above represent some techniques that have proven helpful in side stepping power struggles. Such techniques also greatly reduce disparaging or potentially discouraging comments from teachers or administrators.

Now, I am also working with the parents to reduce use of coercion or punishment, to avoid being servants, and to encourage the boy. [REDACTED] probably is exceptionally bright. He certainly is exceptionally articulate. I would attempt to invite him to play some significant role occasionally at school such as making some announcements or helping with some tasks that are somewhat adult-like. If he feels pushed around or criticized, he may fight the system forever. Unfortunately, such a child can usually find some adult who will try to coerce or conquer him. In that situation, the child always wins, (in his own mind) even if he is thrown out of school. I have been in practice in schools and in private practice for over forty years. While I cannot predict the future, I can say very confidently that the approaches I have mentioned have enjoyed remarkable success when used with such youngsters as [REDACTED]. I am willing to continue to work with you and Mr. and Mrs. [REDACTED] with regard to [REDACTED]'s welfare. I am willing to talk by phone if it seems as though it may be helpful. Again, thank you for inviting me to be of help.

Sincerely,

Francis X. Walton, Ph.D.
Licensed Counseling Psychologist