

The Dreaded Phone Call from the Principal

One day, while at work, you receive one of those dreaded phone calls that only happens to someone else. It is the school Principal and he is informing you that your child was involved in a fight with another student. He is requesting that you come to the school to discuss the situation. Your mind reels. "This can't be possible", you think to yourself, "My child gets good grades and is usually respectful. Our family upholds good values and we don't drink, or smoke and we have always campaigned against drugs and violence."

Yet, all kids can make mistakes. Part of growing and learning is from making mistakes. We only need to concern ourselves if we keep making the same mistake repeatedly. However, sometimes parents compound their child's mistakes by refusing to believe they did something wrong, by looking for loopholes in the case, or by blaming the problem on someone else. It is important for parents to focus their attention, care and concern on their own child when they get 'in trouble' at school. A potentially harmful message is sent to their child when parents focus the blame or attention on the other student as opposed to their own child, and that message is, no matter what you do and no matter what mistake you make, it is never their fault. By saying 'what about the other guy?' the parent minimizes the role of their own child, and when this happens over and over, the child never really learns to accept responsibility for their actions.

Often referred to as "enabling", this teaches kids not to accept responsibility for their actions. By not working with the school to address the real issue, the enabling parent does not allow the child to learn from their mistakes. "I did it. I'm sorry. I will never do it again", are words seldom spoken by children of enabling parents. In the long term, the child will repeat their mistakes and get into more and more trouble. Sometimes well-meaning parents attempt to be supportive but end up enabling the child. The long-term result can be disastrous.

If your child gets into trouble at school, a wise, supportive parent might consider the following:

- **Stay calm and listen carefully with an open mind to all sides of the story.** The school isn't always right but usually their information is objective and based on thorough investigations. All schools must follow school board policy and procedures on matters of discipline. Principals do not get to make arbitrary decisions. Make sure you are aware of the established procedures, which can be found on our school's website.
- **Express genuine disappointment in your child's behavior, but don't overreact.** Also, express your unconditional love and support in the face of adversity (I love you, but I disapprove of your behavior).
- **Don't get hung up on what the other student involved is 'getting' as a consequence.** Focus on your child. Fair is not always equal. Every student is unique, and each offense will be dealt with individually depending upon its severity, frequency, student's age and maturity, circumstance, discipline history, special needs, if any, and other factors (is the student interested in changing, do they show remorse, are they respectful of the process and school etc.).

If your child was involved in a verbal or physical altercation with another student, and he/she feels that the conflict was started 'by the other student,' don't buy into this line of thinking. Reinforce with your child the wise advice that we can't control what other people say and do, we can only control what we do.

Every report of misbehavior, no matter how minor, has a consequence. Moderate and severe misbehaviors and repeated minor misbehaviors are also documented in the office, especially in cases where student safety is a concern. You may not be privy to that information as matters of discipline are confidential under privacy laws. In some cases, where a student is injured as a result of a physical altercation with another student, a report to the school's insurance provider may be filed.

Consequences

Possible consequences may include, but are not limited to:

- Verbal redirection or written reprimand
- Problem-solving discussion
- Time Out (supervised removal from class)

- Time In (kindly invited to sit somewhere, near by a care giver to express their feelings and eventually cool down.)
- Reflection activity (written summary of what happened and what they will do differently next time)
- Verbal or written letters of apology
- Community service: grounds clean up – garbage detail, wash desktops, clean floors or windows, chores
- Email home from staff/admin
- Phone calls home from staff/admin
- Parent meetings
- Alternate work areas outside of classroom
- Restrict play and eating time at lunch and recess
- Referral to School Based Team
- Loss of privilege to ride bus
- Loss of privilege to stay for lunch
- Pay for damage or cost of replacement
- In-school suspension
- Out of school suspensions
- Counseling at school and/or community
- SD 23 Threat Assessment Protocol
- RCMP contacted



The following factors are considered when assigning discipline and suspensions:

- the student's age and maturity level
- the intent of the behavior – was it malicious or designed to inflict harm (a formal threat assessment protocol may be used)
- the severity, intensity and frequency of the behavior
- the student's previous record involving similar behaviors
- the student's level of cooperation in the investigation
- the student's level of remorse
- the student's cognitive functioning – were they aware of what they were doing and the possible impacts to others and the school? Is the student a designated special needs student?
- were previous school-based interventions implemented (counseling or in-school suspension)

It's all About Trust and Relationships

At the end of the day, we ask parents to trust the school. All discipline processes are laid out in policy and schools do not 'turn a blind eye' to discipline matters. Sometimes there is a perception that 'nothing is being done' to address certain behaviors or that behaviors are 'downplayed.' In most instances, what is happening is that some students have not yet developed the social skills needed to solve problems in an appropriate manner – and so the behaviors continue, despite our best efforts to intervene.

Support the school's position.

This isn't always easy. Sometimes you and the school may not be in complete agreement. Discuss this without the child present and try to come to a resolution which can involve the district appeal process if necessary. In the end, let your child know you support the school's decision. It will help your child in the long run, if you model respect for the school system. Use this teachable moment to revisit lessons of right and wrong and reinforce your family values.

As educators, we regularly deal with children making mistakes. They come from all age groups and from families in all walks of life. Our goal is for kids to learn from their mistakes, so they don't repeat them. We want kids to acknowledge their mistakes and face consequences honestly, apologize sincerely, and make a commitment not to repeat the mistake. Working with the school and remembering the five tips listed above will help ensure any mistake is a one-time learning opportunity and not the beginning of many turbulent years ahead.

