



You Have to Teach Behavior Just Like You Teach Academics

By Educator Barnes – March 6, 2019

Recently, my fellow *Indy K12* writer David McGuire wrote about how schools can make parents feel like their children are bad. This school year, I have not felt this way, but I have felt this way in the past. It's annoying to have your children's school constantly call you. It is frustrating because you are away from your children and cannot be there to motivate and encourage them to behave better. At some point, the school has to figure out how to help the children they serve meet the behavioral expectations they have set. No amount of phone

calls home will do this for the school. Here are a few suggestions on how schools can teach children to modify their behavior.

Don't call home for every behavior.

Schools staff lose their power when they constantly call home. At some point, parents will either not pick up the phone when the school calls or will answer the phone but won't take the concern seriously. Every offense isn't worth calling home.

Model the behavior you want to see.

When I was coaching teachers, I would observe teachers engaging in the behaviors they wanted their students to stop. If you don't want students to be on their cell phone throughout your class, you shouldn't be on your cell phone constantly during class. If you don't want students to yell in class, you shouldn't yell at them.

Target one behavior at a time.

Some students are on the behavior struggle bus. You can't fix every issue at once. If a student is roaming around the classroom, refusing to do work, and bothering other students, start with one behavior. Talk to the student about the behavior, brainstorm with the student ways to avoid the behavior, and praise the student as he or she improves.

Listen to students.

Before giving a consequence, listen to the student's side of the story. Students need to be heard. It helps build relationships. Hearing out the student does not mean you take away the consequence. It just means you have an opportunity to understand why the student did what he or she did and you have the opportunity to provide alternate actions for the future.

Avoid reliance on Class Dojo and clip charts

Most of my career has been in secondary schools. When I transitioned to the elementary level, I immediately grew a deep disgust for classroom management systems that centered on apps like Class Dojo or clip charts. Giving a student a dojo down or yelling, "Clip down!" or "Flip your card!" does not teach the child what to do differently the next time. I know some teachers will argue they need to use these methods to collect data on behavior. You can collect behavioral data without making a public display of asking a student to clip down. Most students don't even care they had to clip down, so the system isn't working; it just gives the teacher a false sense of control.

What really ticks me off is when the school calls me and teachers and staff have not made a sufficient and sustained effort to help my children. When you feel the school isn't putting in the effort needed, it weakens the parent and teacher partnership. If students need direct instruction to learn how to use a semi-colon correctly, they also need direct instruction on how to improve their behavior.