

Case Studies

HELP FILE

Anxious Boy, Generally Troublesome (5)

"Hi Jenny, I attended one of your behaviour management units at university last year. I really enjoyed the sessions and have put into use many of your recommendations. I am teaching a prep class and have a difficult student and I thought you might be able to give me a little advice. He is an only child with parents who are away a lot through work commitments. His parents have told me that he is very difficult at home and works himself into rages.

At school he began by calling for my attention in many ways. For example he would ask to go to the toilet just after he had been, and when I said no he would then state that he really needed to go and wriggle around. I would not give in and he has subsequently settled down quite a lot.

If I did let him go to the toilet with two other students he would play up in the toilets and not want to come back. I think that he even did a pee on the toilet floor. What I do now is I take out the whole class to the toilet at the beginning of the day as well as and after play so that I supervise the student and give him no opportunity to go on his own.

He has tried to take toys from the class and has taken money from another boy. He hits and pushes other children in the playground and takes any opportunity to draw peoples' attention. When he is working on a task he will call me to look at his work many times. I tried the "could it be that you want to be noticed by me," question and he agreed and then called to me even more.

Do you have any suggestions? Regarding the stolen money, I discussed this with his parents that he should repay the money from his own pocket money and he wrote "sorry," on the envelope.

I have noticed that when he is asked about something that he has done he will always deny it, even if I have caught him in the act.

If you have any advice please let me know."

Jenny Replied

The key to managing him is in maintaining firm boundaries, being consistent and most importantly, for him to know you care. You can already see the positive effect of what you have done to date on his behaviour. You are managing well. Overall he needs to know you care and to have consistency in his life.

I would say you are facing quite a bit of acting-out caused by his feelings of insecurity. It is very hard for parents whose work takes them away but it does have an impact on a child's behaviour. I wonder who looks after him when they travel? It would seem that instead of having one constant person in his life - usually it is a mum or dad, he may have more and it is quite possible that each has different expectations etc for behaviour, and the school has another set of expectations too.

This possible lack of consistency is probably confusing and making him anxious, - resulting in general acting-out behaviour at school.

You can do little about what happens outside school - you need to focus on what you can do to make him feel cared about, secure and safe when he is with you - consistency and boundaries are important for him. Equally important is feeling valued and cared about at school.

A small child like this has no way of communicating to his parents how much he hates them going away ... and how he hurts and feels rejected ... every time they leave ... this has all to do with his developmental stage - the only way he can express it is through anger .. tantrums and general acting-out. If you are in communication with his parents about his behaviour you could maybe ask if they could organise their trips so that there is always one parent with him, or to explore ways of creating more consistency in his life. I personally feel this is terribly important for him ... but you can only suggest. Sadly a lot of parents do not understand child developmental needs and the adverse effects when these are not met. But let's rather focus on what you can do for him at school.

Firmness given in a caring manner with empathy ... e.g., "I can see you would really like to but we need to wait ... I know you can do that for me ... etc." And then acknowledge when he has.

This is training in good habits. Occasionally you will come across a child with a urinary problem ...or really high anxiety ... just keep an eye out for that (needs referral), but this little chap just needs a firm guiding, caring hand. Looking at the unconscious goals sheet I gave you I am sure you can see what is happening here ... a need to be noticed and he has a strong need to make others feel like he feels .. hurt. I would think he is carrying quite a bit of anger, - this needs to be managed by acknowledging the feelings but limiting the behaviour.

When taking things from others, hurting others ... the most important thing is learning to put this right - reparation. In balance, try and provide opportunities for this little chap to take care of others ... this can be a profound experience ... e.g. to look after someone else ... e.g. when they have hurt themselves ... involve him in the caring.

For his parents perhaps you could recommend the book, "How to talk so kids can listen and how to listen so kids can talk," by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish.

When you give him some attention and he then demands more, carry your first response one step further and chat about the things that he can do that will bring a smile not sad or growly face from you. Teach him positive behaviours so he can use these to get positive attention and then feel better about himself. As he builds these experiences, the need to act-out through misbehaviour will diminish.

He has learned to behave in this way because it works for him, - in the sense that he does get a lot of attention which then reinforces his behaviour. To begin satisfying those needs in positive ways, focus not on what he has done but on what he can do to put it right, - which always elicits positive responses, and he will feel better about himself.

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I hope this helps. Don't hesitate to come back to me with other behaviours should they occur. Please let me know how you go and I hope that the Faber and Mazlish book may help his parents.

What may be useful although intended primarily for teachers, is My book, *"Coat of Many Pockets, Managing Classroom Interactions"*, published by ACER:- [Book Link](#)

Jenny Mackay