

Behaviour Strategies

HELP FILE

Stealing

Stealing is unacceptable in a school or classroom and the behaviour requires zero tolerance as it infringes the right of pupils and staff to feel safe. Children steal for a reason and you need to uncover this to be able to take corrective action. The commonest causes are listed below.

To fulfil a need for attention, - usually only inconsequential things are taken. However I remember one girl who was praised greatly at home for finding her father's lost pocket-knife. This child was expected to do most of the housework and never received any praise or thanks. She unconsciously associated "missing" items with praise and subsequently developed compulsive stealing at school.

Envy and jealousy: In my experience these are fairly common causes of stealing at school. The behaviour is often caused by seeing someone flaunting some highly desired item. A key feature and indicator of this reason for stealing is that the stolen item is often found quite quickly, and sometimes found damaged or even completely broken.

There may be a need to make others angry or a need for revenge. Feelings of powerlessness drive this passive-aggressive stealing behaviour.

The need for peer acceptance – i.e., to impress peers.

Occasionally they will just steal just because they want it, or they don't have one and it makes them feel better to hold /have it. (And the opportunity was there). The reasons behind the stealing of money are legion. I remember one little girl who stole money at school to be able to buy sweets to give-out, so that she would be popular, which would make her parents proud of her.

It must be remembered that the action of stealing can be daring, exciting and it can give them a buzz – it can meet a need for excitement. This must be re-directed.

Sometimes a child will steal because they believe that, "It's okay to steal if I don't get caught". Something they have learned from those around them.

The reasons are many and varied and these must be revealed and understood in order to stop on-going stealing. However, the message that must be clearly given and heard, that there is zero tolerance for stealing.

SCHOOL ETHOS

Establish a POSITIVE ethos in the school. Statement by children, teachers, all school members ... "We are a safe school, we respect people and their belongings and nobody takes what is not theirs in our school." Implying pride in themselves and their school.

This is put into action by establishing a process for things left around, so taking them is not a consideration – rather finding un-owned property requires that a person either give it to a teacher or take it to the lost property box/room.

PREVENTION

RULES: Set ground rules in the school and the classroom about taking, borrowing, damaging others property – individuals and the school community.

FOLLOW THROUGH: Consequent Action must be established along with the rules requiring that children/students return/replace goods, materials etc. plus they are required to do something additional to make amends to that person or the community.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION: Can be a valuable process for students to consider the implications of stealing, taking, or damaging others' property – individual or community, and best given through case studies. e.g. Peter found some money on the school ground and popped it into his pocket. Lizzie wanted a pretty scarf she saw everyone admiring on the new girl. She stole one from the shop. They discuss such issues and then state what they have learned from their discussions.

FOLLOW THROUGH WITH CULPRIT

REPARATION – putting right what they have done wrong, plus being required to do something additional for the person to show / make up for their misdeed.

COUNSELLING: In order to prevent the stealing continuing, the perpetrator needs to face the possible reasons for their misbehaviour.

A teacher is able to counsel a student if they enable a child to see what is behind their stealing – but that is only the first part. They need to enable to the child to find another way through acceptable behaviour to achieve that "feeling", "acceptance" or to teach them the skills to communicate , assert themselves, so they feel better about themselves.

Try...

"Could it be that you want"?"

"Everyone admires you/ looks up to you/are wary of you / respect you, when you....."

"Is it that people take notice of you only when you"?"

"Maybe you are angry because"

THIS must be followed up with leading the child/student to find for themselves other ways of achieving what they want – e.g. What could you do that would make your teacher, parents etc., notice you and for you to feel proud of your actions, words? Or there may need a family discussion or conference.

AGREEMENT: Either verbal or written to undertake behaviour change. With follow up so the child has ongoing support to achieve the change and to be encouraged and acknowledged for the positive actions they take.

For stealing to stop there must a clear message of zero tolerance for the behaviour. There must be clear rules and consequent actions that are fully understood by all and always held to, so that each child learns to take responsibility for their actions and put right the wrong. There must also be correct counselling to enable the child to meet their needs through positive actions that respect the rights of others.

WHEN THE CULPRIT IS NOT CAUGHT

There are times when people do not own up and it is difficult to discover who the culprit is. In such cases: confront the group / your class with,

The problem - e.g. we have a problem in our class. Money and small articles – state what items are going missing. State that this is not acceptable, “We have always believed in everyone’s right to feel safe in this class and that includes people’s belongings.”

I am angry and upset (whatever you feel), that someone is breaking our trust in each other and some children are upset and hurt and a couple of children had no bus money to get home. This is an unkind act.

I would like your ideas on what we should do about this and how we can stop this happening? (Take everyone’s ideas and write them up for all to see).

Which of these ideas do you think will work? Let’s just cross off those that wouldn’t really work. (You allow them to decide – you also have a say).

Right we agree, we will do

Okay everyone we will meet again indays, at the end of the week and see how well we have gone.

Jenny Mackay