

Case Studies

HELP FILE

Stealing

"We have a second grade ESL student who is very crafty and slick at stealing. To compound the problem the parents do not speak English which makes it difficult for the teacher to correspond with the home. We are looking for strategies that will make an impression and will be effective with this child. Thank you."

Jenny Replied

Have you read our other file on stealing in the behaviour strategies section?

It is not the stealing that you must primarily focus on here. Of course this is not acceptable behaviour and I will refer to consequential learning but the behaviour will not change until you have found the cause or reason for the stealing. It could be a result of just being unhappy, unknown, not having a sense of belonging at school, feeling hurt (unconscious goal of revenge) and wanting others to "feel hurt as I do - makes me feel better" - unconscious motivation --- all these and more - even just not having things others have, at this age can be reason enough to steal.

Forget the crafty and slick - those are labels. Rather focus on the possible cause and making this little one feel accepted, able and worthwhile and it is quite possible that you are taking away the need to act out in this way.

Dealing with the stealing itself, it is important is that the child be given the opportunity to right the wrong s/he has done in stealing and encourage him to acknowledge what he has done and how he can put it right - make the other person feel better and safe - s/he needs to do this or the behaviour will not change if he thinks he can get away with it.

In the second grade he is very young and why he is doing it I feel would be the key to changing the behaviour. Living in a new country, adjusting to a different culture - for those who have not done this - I don't know that they can understand the upheaval and the difficulties and adjustments that one goes through. I have moved countries and cultures and it can be very tough. Just remember behaviour is a message of how a person / child is feeling and coping with his world. This little one isn't coping / maybe feeling unhappy etc. and needs your understanding, help and guidance to get it right - consequential learning and putting it right yes, but be careful one always needs to ask oneself if feeling a need to punish - what would punishment really teach - is there not a better way?

Good luck and let me know how you go.

Jenny Mackay