

Dear Team

I had the privilege of speaking with a group of parents who wanted to hear about the restorative approach we take in resolving challenging behaviours among young people. I shared our belief that when a child is not cooperative, it is because our system or method is not working and not because we have a problem child. It is also likely that children do not cooperate when they are hurt or that they have needs that are not being met. Understanding and appreciation of a child's situation would usually lead to a clearer idea of what needs to be done and who needs to do them.

This information I shared quickly on a slide and I wish that I had elaborated more as separating the misbehavior from a child is a difficult thing to do. Disapproving a behaviour while not disapproving a child is tricky. The session was organized by a parent support group in a primary school and there was no doubt that these parents were giving their all for their children. Yet, after listening to me they wanted to know if I had any advice on ensuring that their children steer clear of delinquency. Were there risk factors they could identify early so as to nip a problem in the bud? Honestly, I was stumped as the risk factors I am familiar with are associated with families who have little resources and this did not apply to them.

I shared that on the rare occasion I had assisted children from families whom they could identify with and I suppose life in this sense, is unpredictable. Of course, I have no wish for any child regardless of his or her background to be in conflict with their family, their school or the law. All the more, I definitely have no wish for any child to be institutionalized. These parents discussed and they arrived at risk factors such as divorce and family conflicts

On hindsight, I realized that these parents were basically asking how they could be better parents. They were not ineffective parents but I suppose we can all strive to improve. As such, I would have advised them to strengthen the relationships they have with each other and to take an interest in each other's children and not just their own. Offering and receiving support will enlarge our experiences, perspectives and in the process make us a little more compassionate, generous and grateful. If we had children, they would sense and appreciate these changes in us and if not, others around us will. I will also tell them that even from a pragmatic point of view, should ever a child of theirs has the misfortune of getting into trouble, they will have a larger pool of friends whom they can draw support from.

In short, a parent support group can be a wonderful resource that brings about a stronger sense of community within a school.

Enjoy your weekend.

Gerard

*Independence...(is) middle-class blasphemy. We are all dependent on one another, every soul of us on earth. - George Bernard Shaw, Nobel Laureate for Literature*