



Letter to Teachers

Lesson 2, Counselor Resource

Dear Colleague:

I have to tell you – I’m just so struck by this lesson. You’ll note that my parent and student letters key in on the word **justification**. I stressed that because I see that as a crucial sticking point in the whole bully conversation. This is one of the first curricula that I’ve seen that truly hones in on that concept. Frankly, we all “justify” or “rationalize” our behaviors at times – most especially when we know deep down that certain choices we make are wrong. Justification gives us permission to put integrity aside and that’s never a good thing.

I’m hoping that together we can team up and help to make our students take a step forward developmentally and try to wrap their minds around this concept. I know that I’ve been using it with my kids in an advisory class that I have. I’ll give you an example of a conversation that we’ve been having that has to do with bullying on our school buses. We know that buses are places where age domination occurs. My school is a junior high – grades 7 – 9 – and it happens that there is a kind of *de facto segregation* that occurs on the bus. Ninth graders claim the back of the bus – 8th graders routinely are delegated to the middle and 7th graders are expected to sit towards the front of the bus. As a school we’ve been trying to change this culture and let all our students know that each and every student has a right to sit in any available seat. Our entire teaching staff was firmly behind this point and gathered one morning last week to meet all the buses. Teams of two boarded each bus and delivered what we thought of as a positive and challenging lesson about this new plan. We let the kids know that we would be having class meetings about this subject later that morning during homeroom. We all went off to begin our day with a renewed sense of community and purpose. We were excited about the chats we would have.

Whew – did we get an earful! To a one, our 9th graders let us have it. It came down to justification and entitlement. Let me share some of their thoughts.

- We have a right to sit at the back of the bus. We’ve been waiting three years for that privilege.
- The 7th and 8th graders time will come; they just have to wait.
- They need to respect us and treat us as people in power.
- You (the teachers) are making a big deal out of nothing.
- You’re giving them power to challenge us; they’re getting “uppity”.
- We had to wait – and so can they.
- Why are you picking on our class? Don’t you know this is how it’s always been?

We were all pretty flabbergasted by the emotion that fueled their come back to us. Clearly, changing a school culture was going to be met with strong roadblocks and obstacles. I confess that I spent a considerable amount of time examining their responses and analyzing the strong emotions behind their arguments. Some of the teachers felt so discouraged that they just wanted to throw up their hands and concede to them. Here are some thoughts I had:

- Change of any sort is difficult; changing status quo that gives power to those who wait is very difficult – especially if it is your turn to wield the power.
- Developmentally, some students do not have the moral or emotional maturity to see beyond their own egocentric needs and wants.
- Kids both justify and rationalize their behaviors based on a perceived sense of justice.
- They do not use empathy in their thought processes or decision making.

Empathy is the key. I know that empathy is a key part of the violence prevention work that is done with this age group. Clearly, empathy is going to be a major piece as we continue to go forward with the cyberbullying lessons as well.

Cheers!

Chris