

Please Don't Pee In the Parking Lot

Educators are expected to teach students table manners ... to love broccoli ... to tie their shoes ... to take their cell phones out of their pockets before the phones fall into the toilet ... and not to pee in public. You think I'd kidding? Hell no! Let me share a true story to illustrate just how lazy and crazy our society has become.

It was the day of the last 5th grade field trip. The students were very excited to be going to a nature center where they would explore the area and conduct several experiments. The teachers had reviewed the day with all students and sent home detailed information to parents. The staff's preparation included everything from what to do if they saw scary animal life to where to dispose of trash. What they hadn't reviewed was the necessity of using the bathrooms and not the outside areas. It didn't even register on our radar that we'd have to warn ten years olds about appropriate urination spots.

A day without one of the grades in a school is a bit of heaven for a principal. It means that the hallways are that much quieter; the cafeteria has one less lunch duty; there is one less recess to monitor. But just as I was savoring the day, I got a call from the lead teacher. He was returning with one of the fifth graders. I had six possible gray hair causing students, and indeed it was one of them. Conrad was on his way back to me. The prime adjective to describe Conrad was defiant. If a teacher asked him a simple question, such as "Do you have your math work?" The wait for an answer could be hours. Conrad would simply not answer, regardless of the way in which a teacher presented the question. But then in the middle of the cafeteria, he would stand up and shout, "No, of course I don't have my stupid, #@\$(*)\$* math work!"

I could image hundreds of ways Conrad would have defied the leaders of the nature trip. Did he strangle a snake? Maybe he found poison ivy and wouldn't stop rubbing it all over himself. Could he have pushed a chaperone into the lake? No matter which scenario I mentally played, I did not come close to what he had done nor the subsequent parental reaction.

I didn't have to wait long, because soon an arm-crossed, sullen boy stomped into my office and wiped the papers off of my conference table. With papers floating in the air, he threw himself into a chair and flashed a smile at me, "Hey, Ms. C. How's your day going?"

Right behind him came one of my favorite teachers with a look that could kill. "That's right, smirk all you want now, Conrad. Just wait. Wait until Mrs. Curtis hears what you did."

So what did Conrad do? Well, he peed in the public parking lot in front of a group of students and chaperones. Yep. As Conrad stated, "Yep, I whipped it out and peed. What's a guy to do when he has to go?"

Apparently, there had been a bathroom break mid-way through the field trip. The students were reminded that they were going to hike a distance and there were no public bathrooms out in nature. After only a few minutes into the hike, Conrad started in. "I gotta go pee." "I'm going pee my pants." "What's a guy gotta do to take a piss around here?"

The teacher finally told Conrad to find a private place and take care of business. He made the decision that having Conrad pee behind a tree would be better than trying to get him to stop the urination announcements. Rather than go behind a rock or tree, Conrad ran back to the parking lot and wrote his name in urine right in front of the last group to leave the bathroom area, a group of six fifth grade girls and two adults. With whoops and hollers, he announced each letter that he sprayed into the dirt. The lead teacher heard the ruckus- ruckus as only six preteen girls can make! He got there just in time to see Conrad tuck his privates away and heard him say, "Whew! Boy that was an award winning piss."

The case seemed open and shut when Conrad confirmed everything the teacher related to me. I wrote up the offense with all the details and had the teacher and Conrad sign the statement. Then I called his parents and asked them to come to school. I felt that this would be an easy case. We'd come up with an appropriate consequence and carry it out. I didn't expect Conrad to acknowledge that his actions were wrong, but the other students and parents would know that the situation had led to an investigation and "punishment". At least that was what I thought would happen.

When Conrad's parents arrived, his mother was already wound up. I had spent many hours with his parents throughout the years and knew to expect her to come in like a tigress. I offered some coffee or water and had them both read the signed statement. Immediately after reading, Mom went on the offensive.

"OK, so he peed in a public parking lot. Lots of people do that. I guess just because you were raised in the city, you don't know that not everyone can get to a bathroom in time. Here, people use what's available. In fact, at home we only have one bathroom. So Conrad often has to pee outside off the deck. It's just the way we do it. You can't punish him for that."

I wasn't going to share the shock I experienced when I witnessed a large group of men facing into the trees during the break of my son's soccer game. It seems that this was a tradition in rural New Hampshire; the men all walked over to the tree line together and had a community pee. So I merely explained that I understood that sometimes people need to relieve themselves out in nature or even a parking lot. But to do so in front of people, especially young girls, and with such verbal celebration was not acceptable.

Then I got the one-two punch. "Was it in the rules for this trip that no one could pee in public?"

"No, in all my years as a teacher and principal I have never had to outline where a child couldn't urinate. It was something that they had been taught at home. This is a first for me."

OK, ready for the second part of the punch? "Well, I'm a working mother with three kids. I don't have time to teach my kids everything. That's what we pay you for. You are the one to blame. You didn't teach Conrad what you expected him to do if he had to take a piss." With that statement hanging in the air, she walked out of my office.

Throughout all of this, Dad sat quietly and stared at the top of the table. When his wife left, he softly said to me, "I'm so sorry that we put you through so much trouble. Whatever you need Conrad to do, please, just do it. I'll support you the best I can. It's not like Conrad listens to anyone."

So, Dad and I wrote up the contact. Conrad would need to write letters of apology to those who witnessed his scene, to the teachers who had coordinated the trip, and to the staff of the nature center. He would also have to produce a statement on appropriate bathroom usage for the field trip rules section of the handbook. All of these would be approved by Dad and me before Conrad regained his school and home freedom.

I spent the next two days working with Conrad on his writings. Well, I spent one and a half days waiting for him to get over his "just try and make me attitude" and a half day encouraging and editing the final products. Since he was confined to my office and I had to observe him for two days, I also gave him tips on how to eat with his mouth closed ... how to clean up his lunch mess ... how to get paper into the trash can ... and how to keep his feet off my furniture. I thought about sending his mother a bill for these lessons and a copy of my job description. It seems that the taxpayers don't really pay me to teach individual children basic manners, but decided that she wouldn't even get my point. I would have to be satisfied with the fact that this was the last field trip that Conrad would be going on prior to moving to middle school. I did write a note and printed on bright red paper; then I clipped it to the front of Conrad's file for the middle school principal.

"Be advised that on May 20th and 21st Conrad received individual instruction in appropriate urination practices while at school, on field trips, at concerts, during any release time (such as recess), and on school buses. He also was instructed on appropriate bathroom practices while waiting outside the school, in the hallways, at lunch, and other generic locations and events. He, nor his mother, can no longer use the excuse that he was not taught the appropriate way to relieve himself at school or on a school sponsored event."

I heard the new principal filed for early retirement the day after the files arrived on his desk.