Love and Logic®

What's More Important: GPA or Character?

Are you more interested in your child's grade point average or his or her character and sense of personal responsibility?

Give yourself a big pat on the back if you answered character and responsibility! Children who grow up in a home where character and responsibility are modeled, valued, and enforced often have little trouble being successful in school and in their adult lives.

Even so, many parents find themselves in situations where the answer seems less than obvious. I recently had a call from a parent who was concerned about her teenager's behavior. After some discussion, mom admitted the teen had stolen a credit card and purchased items through the Internet. However, mom's major concern was about her daughter lying about the purchases, not the criminal behavior itself.

Several times the mother said, "I just don't want her to have a record." In desperation, I finally asked, "Are you saying you don't mind that she is a criminal, as long as she doesn't look like a criminal?"

"Well, no," she replied. "But this is going to be so hard for her. What do I do?"

After spending more than 30 years as an educator and a parent, it was clear to me this mother needed to treat her teenager's mistake as an opportunity for her daughter to learn how to face the consequences of her choices. While it will cause some short-term pain, the long-term benefits will be a stronger, healthier sense of personal responsibility, the foundation of a solid character.

Of course, it's much easier to know what other parents should do about their misbehaving children. This mother is struggling with a trap many of us have fallen into. We love our children. When they are uncomfortable or hurting, we hurt even more. We want to protect them; it's only natural. However, our attempts to save children from the consequences of their mistakes have a great deal to do with comforting ourselves, instead of solving the problem.

Mom has fallen into another trap. She has bought into the belief that a child's self-concept is damaged when kids experience the consequences of their mistakes. Nothing could be further from reality. In fact, the opposite is true: Self-concept is reduced every time a parent excuses bad behavior.

The Love and Logic® philosophy gives us a great solution for this dilemma. There is a way of holding kids responsible for their actions without appearing mean or authoritarian. This wonderful technique leaves kids thinking, "My parent is not the problem. My problem is my bad decision."

Give children a heavy dose of empathy or compassion before laying down any punishment or logical consequences. This opens their minds and hearts to learn from their mistakes without blaming you. Then hold the line in a loving way to allow the consequences to teach an important life lesson.

In the case of the stolen credit cards, let's see how this teenager's mom might help her daughter face the natural consequences of making illegal purchases. Mom needs to resist the temptation to react in anger, which will only make her youngster defensive.

A Heavy Dose of Empathy

Mom: "Oh, sweety, what a bummer. My heart goes out to you. What a problem. I bet you feel awful. Would it

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help if I went to the police with you and held your hand while you explain this?"

Daughter: "But, mom, it's not fair! Can't you just get me a lawyer?"

Hold the Line In a Loving Way

Mom: "Sweety, I love you too much to let you pass up this opportunity to learn about how the real world works." (Mom needs to repeat this statement for each new argument the child tries.)

This is a sad story about a mother and a daughter who are paying a huge price. Neither of these people would be in this situation had mom started early handling the little problems and misbehaviors in this way.

Life provides a limited number of opportunities for children to build character and learn how the real world works. Make the most of them!

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Jim Fay is one of America's most sought-after presenters and authors in the area of parenting and school discipline. His background includes 31 years as a teacher and administrator, over three decades as a professional consultant, and many years as the parent of three children. Jim's sense of humor and infectious spirit have made his interviews, audios, videos, and books popular with educators and parents as well as the national news media. Jim has discovered that fun stories are the most powerful way of helping people learn. He often comments, "People seem to learn best when they giggle." You will find this delightful quality in many of our Love and Logic products.

People who are really successful implementing this skill purchased From Bad Grades to A Great Life!

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