

Let the Natural Consequences Reign

While listening to idle chatter in the boy's dorm one evening, it became clear that one of the senior students had acquired some things from a shop without paying for them.

I quietly spoke to Andrew about what I had heard. He was honest and upfront about what had been taken. It was a wide range of items from a variety of shops.

As we chatted, I realised this was a habit that he had developed over months. He was keen to break the cycle and needed the responsibility of paying back all he had taken. Together we compiled a list of things he had taken and shops he had taken them from.

After assembling the complete list and talking about options with him, I went to chat with the principal. The school could arbitrarily deal with it and expel Andrew. His behaviour warranted that action. However, we felt that there was a better way.

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Finally we agreed that two things were required. Firstly, he would sit in my office with me while he called his parents to explain what had happened, and how it would be dealt with. Secondly, he would work the entire six week school holiday to earn enough money to pay back all he owed.

It was a challenging phone call, but one that, to their credit, his parents accepted and supported. He had already planned to work the six week block with his dad in his business. The net outcome of his wages would now be very different!

I transferred at the end of that year and Andrew agreed to send a letter confirming it was all sorted out. I received the letter several months into the new academic year.

I still have that letter today. One that I treasure. The last paragraph captures the value of letting natural consequences take effect. “I would like to again thank you for what you did for me last year. I worked hard last Christmas holidays, earned the money and paid my dues.”

Sometimes we want to protect our children and students from the natural consequences of their choices. However, does that really help them learn from their mistakes? God guarantees forgiveness if we will just ask, but He also says “what you sow – you will reap.” Clearly God sees the benefits of working through the consequences of our actions. It would be remiss of us not to take that approach with our students or children. We should provide natural consequences and let them learn from their mistakes.

A powerful statement in the book *Education* (Ellen White, p. 296) reads, “Let the child and the youth be taught that every mistake, every fault, every difficulty conquered, becomes a steppingstone to better and higher things. It is through such experiences that all who have ever made life worth the living have achieved success.”

We need to care enough for our students and children to say “No” at times and point them in a different direction. That is why God could not simply ignore Adam and Eve's sin. That is also why we should not cover up students' mistakes, but use them as a learning experience. Then the student or child can address the issue and grow through the experience. Discipline is not about removing the consequences – but rather learning from them to avoid the same mistake again.

Read: Jim Roy, *Soul Shapers: A Better Plan for Parents and Educators*, amazon.com/Soul-Shapers-Better-ParentsEducators/dp/0828018316



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