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# **SURVIVAL KIT** *FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS*

S E C O N D E D I T I O N

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A Division of Social Studies School Service  
10200 Jefferson Boulevard  
Culver City, CA 90232-0802  
*www.goodyearbooks.com*  
(800) 421-4246

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Collins, Myrtle T.

Survival Kit for Teachers and Parents/Myrtle T. Collins. Susan J.

Benjamin—

2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p. ) and index.

ISBN 1-59647-069-0

1. Classroom management—Handbooks, manuals, etc. 2. School discipline Handbooks, manuals, etc. 3. Human behavior—Handbooks, manuals, etc., 4. Child rearing—Handbooks manuals, etc.

I. Benjamin, Susan J. II Title

LB3013.C55 1993

371.1'02—dc20

92-43037

CIP

Book Design by Melissa Cutting Ackermann, Highgate Cross+Cathey

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Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN 13 978-1-59647-069-9

Previous ISBN 0-673-36035-0

Reprint 2006

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# ABRASIVENESS

**SEE**  
Acting Out  
Talking Out

**ALSO**

**CAPSULE:** Abrasive personalities rub us the wrong way and make us want to scream or set our teeth on edge to such an extent that we find ourselves trying to avoid close contact with them. One person may be abrasive because of pompousness, another because of a rasping voice that never ceases, another because that person does not exemplify what he or she exhorts others to do—and that person is always exhorting! Some describe their most abrasive acquaintance as “one who has all the answers.” Coping with abrasiveness is like chasing a phantom, but perhaps some of the following will at least help you live with the abrasive one in your classroom.

## OPTIONS

- 1 Allow students to feel they have some control over the situation—perhaps by drawing up a simple agreement that focuses on diminishing the abrasive behavior.
- 2 Analyze reasons for a student’s abrasiveness. This means getting to know something about his or her abilities, experiences, background, and physiological and psychological drives and consulting those best qualified to help. For instance, a speech teacher might help the student with a voice problem.
- 3 Anticipate and check the undesirable behavior with a diverting comment. (“Jim, you were about to \_\_\_\_\_.”)
- 4 Ascertain whether the student patterns the behavior



after someone. Then talk to the student about the effect this “imitation self” has on others.

- 5** Ask yourself questions such as the following: Does the student’s abrasive personality really interfere with the student’s or others’ performance? Am I magnifying the effect the abrasiveness has on the group? Should I talk this over with another teacher to gain some perspective? What kind of attention is the student seeking? How much does he or she deviate from the norm?
- 6** Assign responsibilities that require attentiveness and merit praise—preferably solitary activities in a strategic location.
- 7** Group the abrasive one with students who can help. Your sixth sense must tell you whether to place the student with the quiet, thick-skinned students who will put up with the behavior or the testy, vocal group that will tell the abrasive student why he or she rubs them the wrong way. If you choose the latter, be ready to move in with dispatch and capitalize on your information: “Mary, I couldn’t help overhearing the group putting you down because you upset their work by \_\_\_\_\_. Let’s talk about that sometime when you drop by after school.”
- 8** Make brief notations of the child’s abrasive behavior. Does a pattern appear?
- 9** Reinforce nonabrasive behavior, making no mention of abrasive deportment.
- 10** Try using bibliotherapy (see Appendix). Several prominent athletes and politicians are accused of being abrasive; perhaps stories about them may give the student some insights.

# ABSENCES DURING TESTING

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**CAPSULE:** Teachers can become very testy about having to accommodate students who miss exams! School administrators, aware of the inconveniences incurred by absences at such times, often help by systematizing make-up schedules. If the make-up testing is left to the discretion of the teacher, the following suggestions may be helpful.

## **O P T I O N S**

- 1** Arrange for private testing, mutually agreeable to you, students, and others.
- 2** Communicate with parents so that they are aware of examination dates and the student's attendance record. Make sure that parents understand test policies and procedures.
- 3** Establish a make-up policy whereby the student takes the initiative to make up the exam.
- 4** Formulate, *with the class*, the procedure that will be followed throughout the year with regard to make-up tests. Establish limitations and consequences that are fair. Be sure that students are not penalized for circumstances beyond their control.
- 5** Give an oral examination. (This provides an excellent opportunity to get to know the student better.)

# ABSENCES *FOR RELIGIOUS REASONS*

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**CAPSULE:** Apart from national holidays (Labor Day, Fourth of July, etc.) observed throughout the year-round or nine-month school year, religious holidays are dictated by a person's faith. Some families are stricter than others within their own denomination.

## **O P T I O N S**

**1** Accommodate students who will be absent for religious reasons by planning ahead before the absence about how they will handle make-up work.

**2** Handle the absence as excused if prior requests have been made by the parents or guardian.

# ABSENTEEISM

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**SEE**  
Truancy

**ALSO**

**CAPSULE:** Absenteeism and truancy are not synonymous. Truancy connotes idleness and conscious, willful absence of a sporting nature, while absenteeism is simply excessive absence for any number of reasons, ranging from school phobia to parents' demands that the student stay home to help with the family's business. Often the problem is related to sickness and finances. Most schools, for liability reasons, have established procedures for recording and reporting absences, and can survey and analyze each student's pattern of attendance.

Chronic absentees soon distinguish themselves among faculty and students. If illness is not the cause, a high number of absences probably indicates a potential dropout. One thing is sure, the student needs some help because the consequences of long periods of absence are major, even for the ablest scholar.

## **O P T I O N S**

- 1** Confer with the absentee regarding the real reasons he or she chooses to stay away from school. (“Bill, it’s pretty clear that staying home is more pleasant than coming to school, because your mom is gone and you can watch TV all day.”)
- 2** Discuss the absentee in a staff meeting (see Appendix). The pooled information may be used to construct a behavior change program for him or her.
- 3** Individualize and personalize the absentee’s instruction so that long periods out of school take less of a toll.
- 4** Work with parents, the student, and other school professionals (a counselor, if available) to develop a plan ensuring the student’s regular attendance.

# ABUSED CHILDREN *OVERTLY*

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**SEE**  
Abused Children,  
Sexually **ALSO**

**CAPSULE:** Although the extent of child abuse in our society is impossible to know, much has been written about the significance of the problem in the past few years. According to some studies, the highest incidence of child abuse occurs among boys in grades one through six, after which the greatest incidence is among girls. Speculation regarding the factors that give rise to child abuse include (1) a long-standing pattern of physical abuse, stemming from a parent's upbringing, (2) substance abuse in the home, and (3) rising costs of living and the frustrations of feeding and clothing a family.

The child who comes to school with welts on his or her body, who hangs around before school or after everyone else has gone home, or who speaks of beatings at home may be an abused child. The quiet, subdued, frightened child may be the object of abuse, too, but that child's deportment is less arresting. As you become acquainted with your students, you may catch hints of abuse. The following ideas suggest possible courses of action if there is an abused child in your class.

## O P T I O N S

- 1 Assign an abused child to an older student of the same or opposite sex (see Junior Counselors, Appendix). If abused by his mother, for instance, a youth may need a satisfying relationship with another female so that he doesn't feel all women are bad. The junior counselor can function as a confidante and/or a surrogate parent.
- 2 Deal with the child in a friendly, caring manner. Your warm, fair approach may convince him or her that not all adults are cruel child-beaters.
- 3 Help the student judge adults in perspective, including the one who beats him or her: "List ten things adults do that annoy you; list ten things adults do that please you. By each item put the initials of the person you immediately identify with that thing. Now make statements that include the item listed, plus a 'but' statement, such as, 'I am annoyed (or I hate) being beaten by \_\_\_\_\_, but I like him when he's not drunk'." *Note:* Such an exercise can be used with a group or on an individual basis.
- 4 Initiate contact with the parents of the abused child, not to complain or scold them, but to get acquainted. Most parents who violently abuse their children refuse to come to the school. They may ask for help in coping with their child. Be prepared to recommend information sources, such as parent-education courses and free or inexpensive counseling on handling problems with children.
- 5 Report the case to the proper authorities. Consult your administrator for advice regarding the procedure to follow. Most, if not all, states now have reporting laws.
- 6 Use sentence completion (see Appendix) to learn the child's feelings. (My mother always . . . , My father is . . . , Adults are . . . , My stepfather . . . .) *Caution:* Use this technique judiciously: remember, you are not a moralizer or a judge. However, knowledge of how the child feels toward adults can be helpful in dealing with the problem.