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4-26-2021

S4 E20: Challenging Questions

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STARS Citation

Hines, Rebecca and Dieker, Lisa, "S4 E20: Challenging Questions" (2021). *Practical Access Transcripts*. 74.

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Transcript

Lisa Dieker

Welcome to Practical Access. I'm Lisa Dieker.

Rebecca Hines

And I'm Rebecca Hines, and in this episode, Lisa, I know we're going to kind of flip this a little bit and ask one another some challenging questions, so I'm going to let you go first and I'm going to give you my best off the cuff response and I know you'll do the same.

Lisa Dieker

Yeah, you'll be surprised that my question for you is about behavior, and I think I wanted to ask you a good problem of practice I often see for both parents and teachers. So, I'm an administrator and I walked down the hall, and a kid is laying on the floor and someone else is drawing and my phone is ringing. I want to ask you how to help instead of judge teachers. And the same is I'll take my own real scenario that'll have a good laugh for our crowd. Imagine you're at Kmart. I know those are closed now and you're with your best friend and you're in a community that's different than your own normally and your child is holding completely in the middle of the Kmart close rack, and you have both their feet and you're trying to pull them out. And you're pretty sure everyone around you is judging you as a bad parent. How do we help people not judge when behavior is a problem but either to help or to put a great lens on it for an administrator or just to community member when we see that kid on an airplane, we see kid at the mall having that temper tantrum. I think we often make assumptions instead of having empathy, sympathy or whatever you might suggest.

Rebecca Hines

Well, that was like 14 questions in one, so I'm going to try to sort that out, let me give you a few specific responses to the myriad of behaviors you just listed. First of all, if I'm a school leader and I'm walking down the hall and I see a kid throwing a tantrum and I see the teacher and she's exasperated. I think of an experience I had as a teacher working with kids with severe emotional disturbance, I had a boy who loudly banged on his desk all day long, and the behavior specialist walked into my room, and it was sheer and utter chaos because the drumming was so disturbing that now everyone else in the room was completely going off. And instead of telling me all of the things that I was doing wrong, instead of judging anything I was doing because I was still calmly teaching through the storm, she looked at me and said, "Have you tried planned ignoring".

I mean, she didn't say anything else. She was very clear specific with a solution. She didn't ask me why anything was happening, what was going on? What was causing him to do this? She just specifically asked me if I had tried a specific strategy and I, over the noise said what's planned ignoring and she said, "Well, right now, you're just ignoring and that's ok, but planned ignoring is acknowledging what's happening and verbally saying that you're choosing something different." She said so right now you would walk over and say to Dino, "I see that you're trying to get my attention, but I am teaching now." And then you would turn around and say to the rest of the class, "I know that this noise is distracting but look at me and listen. Thank you Mark for listening, thank you Donnie for listening." And go on with my teaching so it's a fine line between ignoring and planned ignoring, and I didn't know what it was until

someone told me and they told me on the spot, and they didn't judge and the next time they came back, I wasn't having the same problem.

So that is one question that you asked. The other question about being out in public and a child is doing something that is visibly different than expected behavior. I will reference that same group of kids. Because I was doing a project and I had one of the kids with me buying supplies from Home Depot. And he was the same kid who was drumming but he was causing a scene in Home Depot, and everybody could see it. And I walked over to him, and I stood very close and I said, "What are you doing? These people think you are my son. So, if you are trying to embarrass. Me, it's working." and he stopped.

Immediately and looked at me with this look and said, "Do you really think they think I'm your son?" Like that's all he heard, and he was so happy to think that anyone would think that, and he literally immediately stopped. I'm not saying that that is going to work with your own children or anyone else at a store. But it starts again you know; with a question you know what are you doing. It looks like you need my attention, let's find a better way. And when we in public can model the appropriate way to handle the behavior and we are calm and we address it with the best language that we can until the child deescalates it, at the very least for modeling for other people how they can manage stressful situations with kids.

Lisa Dieker

What about those people who again, I think the hardest part for me in that moment was all the people that stopped and stared. Do you have advice for people that are bystanders? For kids because we both love kids with challenges and when you have one, it's really embarrassing when you're at church and I still remember we were once enough. He's too old to sit in the kids' section, like you don't know him, he's really cognitively about a 3-year-old even though he's six, you know, when it comes to behaving and so we would sit in the quiet section. The kids' section because the rest of the place was hard. So how do we help people have better empathy or understanding, or what do we say at that moment? Again, it just feels really creepy when all eyes are on you, and it is your own child. You have thoughts there?

Rebecca Hines

No, I don't, I'm not one who thinks, again all we can do is model you know calm and reason, and I'm sure you've had this experience when I have done this in person different places, I have the opposite. I have people coming up to me and saying wow, you're really staying calm. I know that's stressful. I've never had someone who judged me when I was visibly and verbally trying to deescalate a child in a really positive way. I've never had anybody judge me for not, you know, doing something mean or more specific, but if I just I'm standing there and ignoring it, or I'm screaming at the child, you know that's when people will look. But I have only seen people be actually really supportive when I have tried a more therapeutic approach to getting a child to change.

Lisa Dieker

No, it's a great point and I but I do think it. It is hard and I just want to kind of remind parents that you know again, you can only do what you can do in that moment, and you know again the stores closing your kids hanging on to the clothing rack and is stronger than you. At some point you do have to leave the store and so you know again, de-escalation happens until 9:02 when you're locked in the Kmart for the night you have to sleep there. My friend and I still today laugh though because we both said it's the

only time, we both felt and we're both specialized teachers, we felt so incompetent in our lives, so just also thought it was a good empathy moment for parents to remind you that it sometimes sucks to be a parent.

Rebecca Hines

Sometimes it does.

Lisa Dieker

Alright, what question do you have for me after I ask you a six-part question? Be nice.

Rebecca Hines

Yeah, I'm going to ask you a simple one and you're going to laugh because you're going to know the frame for this, but I know you've also lived it. So, let's say I have a child who is in high school who does not care about grades. Is not motivated by grades, could care less about homework or pleasing anyone.

How do I get that child to do what is necessary to graduate high school? What advice do you have for parents who are in that position?

Lisa Dieker

Yeah, so well, first of all I think you know, always trust your parent guts. It goes all the way back to what my mother made choices of my brother not getting a lobotomy and you know all of that history that I have. But I think so many times we think an expert like you, or I have an answer to that. Usually, your mother or father gut has an answer to that. Maybe I pull them out of AP classes, or maybe I have them do some online virtual school. Maybe I need to go to a private charter if I can afford that. I mean, I think sometimes we always think it's about motivating them, but I think it goes back to this mantra that you and I have which is maybe we have to change our behavior to help them change their behavior. So, I think I would start by what is their strength, and how do you not punish them but use their strength to you know, again, I'll go back to my own son gymnastics, you know, can you do a little physics through gymnastics and get that homework at least palatable? And then I think the other thing is, think about what's really powerful in their life, that they value and not to be mean and punitive.

But my son had a great life coach, so that would be my second advice if you can get a free, you know pastor in your church or boys and Girls Club in the YMCA or if you have the means to pay for a life coach, it's quite a privilege. But I know that one of things he said to me that I would never thought of was let your son get his driver's license like. And I was like are you kidding? This kid can't even like brush his teeth and pick up his laundry so putting behind a vehicle at 60 miles an hour doesn't seem like a really smart thing to do, and he said, but that's the most powerful incentive you have to get him to finish his schoolwork.

Because he can't go to the store, and he can't drive, and he said so don't make it that you're going to take it away. It's just if you want to drive your grades have to be C or better, and we did the same even in college. Our son got a scholarship, but our scholarship was grade driven and I was like oh my goodness. Well, kissing that scholarship away after his freshman year and we loved him, but we knew he wasn't as a stellar student.

And so, we said, look at that money that we don't have to pay, we'll give to you when you graduate. Now again, I get that I'm a person that has the privilege of that. But again, whatever that is, that's exciting, is it finances? Is it driving? Is it friends? Is it sports? Not saying you can't do that but saying that there is a threshold to do that that you have to produce in other places of life. No different than you know we can't have our jobs if we don't, you know, renew our teaching license. Everybody has something in life they have to do. And I think teaching kids that. As young as possible is the best thing that you can do. So in middle school you know, I'm sorry you can't go to that after-school party because you didn't do your homework. But if you want, I'll take you late if you like, I think it's 10 minutes worth. I think contextualizing how long they have to do, because sometimes homework seems like it's five hours. I always find that if you know what if we did for 10 minutes, then you can go and then you'll come back and do 15 minutes. If you don't come tomorrow, we won't. So again, sometimes we make it such a big deal instead of putting it in a really small box, what is it you have to do? But I can tell you I locked my son on the back porch with his boxer shorts Monday and told him to go find a new family. Yeah, my son still says it's like his favorite memory.

Rebecca Hines

So, Lisa, let me let me ask you this. So, to kind of wrap it up, now take the same question and apply it to teachers. What would be one specific thing I'm a teacher kids won't come to school they are juniors in high school and they can drive and so they won't come, and they don't care and maybe it's a child with an IEP and you know, he or she doesn't feel like they have something to look forward to after school anyway in terms of graduation, I'm just saying there are kids who feel that way. How do you get those kids to come to school and to do the work?

Lisa Dieker

So, it goes back to the golden rule you and I both have always said: relationships, relationships, relationships. You get to know anything you can about that kid; their cat's name, their dog's name, their favorite shoes, their favorite food that they eat. And not just you, but usually when you've really got that kid. What I found in schools that do this well is, I call it, like your crisis team of five. You know five different people every day, you know the lunch lady, this is the kid when he walks to the line say "hey, would you like a little extra scoop...Oh, I saw you picked vegetables today." Like whatever it is but I think sometimes we expect, especially at high school, that they'll be the homeroom teacher. Well, they hate their homeroom teacher, or they love them, and they see them for 10 minutes. So, try to think about how throughout the day you can sprinkle something in that makes that kid feel good. And then I think the second thing is ask, is my homework why they're failing? If so, maybe I'm the problem and I don't mean that to judge you as a teacher, but I always say look for the, you know the faults in the teaching of the child, not in the child, and so if it can't, he says oh I have a friend whose child passed everything he does, but never turned any homework in and he failed, and now he's going to PhD in physics. So, I'm not quite sure why high school was so hard and getting a PhD in physics was easy because it was homework. So again, I would say can I dial back the homework? Can I change the homework? Can I make the homework something that interests you more? The only way you're going to know that is if you talk to the kid. It goes back to asking that kid where are you at? What do you want and what would you be interested in doing? You know, I had a great classroom teacher who she said, look you have a zero in my class at this point over a midterm, you know, have an A, what are you going to do now? Because like nothing, she's like, ok, well then, I'll turn back into an F. All of a sudden, the kid ended up with a C. But

again, if I'm already so deep in the hole that I can't come out, why would I show up? So again, give me some incentive, make relationships and find a way to make homework, not the reason kids are failing.

Rebecca Hines

I like it.

Lisa Dieker

Thank you vice versa. I liked your answer too. All right, so we'll wrap it up here today. That was kind of fun, and again, if you have any problems with practice, you can call us at (407)-900-9305, or you can send us a message on Facebook or on our Twitter @AccessPractical.