

Tardiness: It hurts students; and other students and teachers too



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Your child's teacher loves him even when he is late, just as our Savior loves us, no matter what. God gave us faith and all other gifts. Training in promptness helps to use all of God's gifts efficiently.

THE RAP SHEET READ LIKE A LAUNDRY LIST—EVERYTHING FROM VANDALISM TO RESISTING ARREST. HOW DID IT ALL START? IF YOU TRACE THE LIFE OF CRIME TO ITS BEGINNING, YOU WILL FIND IT WENT ALL THE WAY BACK TO CHRONIC TARDINESS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL. IF ONLY THE PARENTS AND THE SYSTEM HAD NIPPED THIS BEHAVIOR IN THE BUD!

OK, so that is a bit over the top, but it can feel this way when teachers or principals seemingly overreact to the "crime" of being late. What's the big fuss? So what if my child is a few minutes late? Her grades are fine, and she isn't a behavior problem. Why does the school get so upset?

Let's take a look at things from several different points of view:

Teacher

From the outside, a teacher's job may look easy. All she has to do is explain a concept, assign some homework, collect and grade it, and, *voilà*, successful learning has happened. In reality, the job is much more complicated. A large part of what a teacher does is classroom management. This involves keeping the schedule running smoothly, preventing discipline problems and handling the ones that crop up, and capturing the attention of a class of students and keeping it. The teacher instructs, re-instructs, regroups, edits, creates, soothes, redirects, and monitors the students to be sure they understand. You get the

picture.

A child enters the classroom late, even just a few minutes late, and he or she disrupts the process. Now the teacher adds something new to the list: What has this child missed, and how can I bring him up to speed? The office must be notified, directions have to be repeated, and lessons started over. Some late arrivals will stand at the door waiting, and others will make a grand entrance and further distract the class. All latecomers, even those who slip in the door and quietly find their seat, require extra work from the teacher. A late child is not just a momentary distraction.

Class

You wouldn't think learning was so much work either. We don't always remember what it was like to pay attention as a youngster. Many children who struggle staying focused find it difficult to get back on track after a distraction. When a child comes late and the teacher has to restart the lesson or take care of attendance details, an opportunity arises for behavior issues. When that happens, a

small disturbance can set off behaviors that further disrupt the class. Keep in mind that your child may not be the only one who is late, so this process of disruption can occur many times during the course of the week. When families are chronically late, this fosters an attitude that school and learning are not important. This seemingly little thing can have a big influence on the behavior and attitude of students over time.

School

Late arrivals disrupt the school also. The assembly area and school office are especially busy during the first part of the morning. Accurate attendance, and its affect on other tallies, is important to a safe and organized school day.

Child

The student who arrives late to school starts the day at a disadvantage. Other children have had time to put away coats, take care of classroom business, talk with friends, and generally prepare themselves for the school day. The time missed may only be 10–15 minutes, but it is an important time. Children who are late may not have attendance recorded or lunch ordered, and that can cause problems later on. They may miss important announcements or a fun activity that the teacher has set out to begin the day. While some children adjust to a rocky start, others find it difficult. If the child experiences stress because he was rushed or because she worries what the other students will say, the stress itself interrupts the learning process.

Chronic tardiness (more than one or two times a month) is more than just being a few minutes late. It is not just about the hassle for teachers and staff, or the stress caused to the child or others. Tardiness isn't just about what a child is not learning in the few minutes of class time missed. It is about what a child is not learning about learning itself.

Learning is not just about picking up new

information. It is an active process that involves the child's attention, intelligence, and personality. Children possessing the ability to self-regulate are far more likely to be successful in school and life, regardless of intelligence level. Self-regulation is the ability to plan ahead, evaluate strategies, regulate emotions and behaviors, and delay gratification for the purpose of learning. Children who self-regulate can think "on purpose" toward the goal of learning. The ability to be prompt is an active part of learning, just as knowing when to ask questions for clarification, writing down assignments, or finishing a project.

Missing a few minutes of school, every so often, is only part of the tardiness problem. The problem is not in the incident itself. It is in the pattern of tardiness over time. Arriving at school late on a regular, or even semi-regular basis, teaches a child that school is something we just plod through, rather than something we do with care and purpose. If a child is born with the natural ability to do something—for instance, play golf like Tiger Woods, but does not learn to work hard, set goals, evaluate progress, and think purposely, the gift will be wasted.

When you set promptness as a priority and make changes in the family routine to allow your child to arrive at school on time, you teach your child to respect learning and to take an active part in it. That learning will be part of every future test your child takes and every future project your child completes. In fact, the ability to self-regulate is a stronger predictor of future success than natural talent or IQ.

It may be hard to believe that something as seemingly insignificant as promptness can have such a great effect on your child's future. However, this is what parenting is all about: modeling and teaching healthy



behaviors and strong values in every little thing we do as parents. This is what makes parenting such a challenge. Parenting is relentless! Thankfully, the love of God our Father is relentless too. He wants what is best for our children and for us as parents. He stands ready to help us with every task.

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For Discussion:

- ▶ What will be the consequence for tardiness for your child at her next level of education? What about when she joins the workforce?
- ▶ How does developing a value for being prompt promote self-regulation skills?
- ▶ What other values can you teach your child that will develop self-regulation?

For further study:

<http://tinyurl.com/mej7df>
(Definition of self-regulation)

<http://tinyurl.com/kmnsvu>
(Parenting tips on self-regulation)