

- Be specific about what kind of behavior you expect. Don't generalize.
- Be sure the agitator knows that you are not going to forget his/her past actions. Tell the student you want to support positive behavior, and that any time there is even the slightest indication that he/she is beginning to agitate again you will confront him/her about it and stop it immediately.
- Assign special duties to the agitator—such as passing out papers, erasing boards, etc. This helps to meet the need for attention and power.
- Use group and peer pressure in sincere and straightforward ways to help motivate this student to change his/her behavior. This is easily done by making the agitator the appointed leader. Remember, he/she wants influence, but not responsibility. Yet, responsibility is what will change the behavior.
- Set up a contract with the student. Make specific agreements about what should be done, when and where it should be done, and how it should be done.
- Try to remain objective and emotionally neutral.
- Remember, the student who resists authority knows where the power is, yet has chosen a course which he/she knows offers severe consequences. It's almost a form of suicide for the student. Look at such resistance for what it really is a cry for help. It says everything from "I don't understand" to "I don't know what to do but fight."
- Rather than fearing such occurrences or regarding them as horrendous episodes, look upon them as opportunities to help a student work through a problem that can only cause trouble for a lifetime. Begin by showing a willingness to listen and talk privately.
- Fully understand that behind every student rejection is an overwhelming feeling of failure or frustration. That's why teaching rather than forcing is the best course to take. Any other road leads toward a destructive kind of confrontation and puts a teacher on the same level as the distressed student. Hopefully, this is not the road we would choose to take just to prove our power.

IV. MISTAKES:

Common misjudgments and errors in managing the child which may perpetuate or intensify the problem.

- Openly and publicly accusing certain students of being agitators.
- Failing to see the real fear of being discovered that underlies the agitator's behavior.
- Believing the agitator's actions are directed personally toward us and, therefore, reacting personally toward the agitator and his/her behavior.
- Getting into an argument, causing division among the class.
- Issuing punishments to the group, causing strong student reactions.
- Jumping to the conclusion that the agitator is responsible for a current situation, based on past history.
- Overreacting to all incidents of criticism and calling them agitation.
- Making threats to stop the behavior and backing ourselves into a corner.
- Feeling that "I must have the last word if I am to be the winner."
- Becoming involved in a power play.
- Openly confronting the student in class. This action can only cause serious difficulty for all. And our concern about losing respect may readily become a reality.
- Accusing a student too harshly and/or in the presence of class members.
- Playing detective, and acting unfairly when we aren't able to pinpoint the culprit.
- Attacking the followers rather than confronting the agitator.

THE ALIBIER

I. BEHAVIOR:

Specific attitudes and actions of this child at home and/or at school.

- Doesn't fulfill responsibilities.
- Always offers an excuse regarding why he/she didn't do something.
- Feels that the fault lies with someone else.
- Often presents highly creative excuses; can offer a spontaneous excuse which may even seem very probable.
- Tries to get support from friends, other students, and parents.
- Tends to feel he/she is

- treated unfairly by adults at school and at home.
- Approaches every task as a certain failure before making any attempt.
- Usually finds faults in teachers and parents quickly.
- May fall behind in class work.

II. EFFECTS:

How behavior affects teachers, classmates, and parents in the school learning environment and the home family situation.

- Teacher is worn down.
- Teacher may begin to dislike student personally, may treat alibis as a character defect and start to think of alibier as a liar.
- Time is wasted listening to alibis; hence, teaching and learning time is lost.
- Classmates may feel a sense of unfairness and inequity in the classroom if teacher accepts an alibi they know is untrue.
- Classmates may try offering alibis too.
- Classmates and teacher may turn against the alibier totally.

III. ACTIONS:

- Identify causes of misbehavior.
- Pinpoint student needs being revealed.
- Employ specific methods, procedures, and techniques at school and at home for getting the child to modify or change his/her behavior.

Primary cause of misbehavior:

- **Self-Confidence:** This student has such a lack of self-esteem that he/she is afraid to attempt anything.

Primary needs being revealed:

- **Escape from Pain:** This student has experienced a lot of failure, and has adjusted by alibiing; he/she may be very successful with the behavior.
- **Sexuality:** He/she has experienced a lot of failure with adult and peer interactions.

Secondary needs being revealed:

- **Gregariousness, Affiliation:** This student needs to belong to a group and/ or have a close friend.
- **Achievement:** He/she needs to experience various levels of success.
- **Status:** Finding a sense of worth without alibiing may change his/her behavior.
- Spend time outside class trying to solve this problem—privately. Go to a neutral ground where the environment will be comfortable and pressure-free to talk more openly about the behavior.
- When you talk to the student, get to the root of the problem. Don't move around the problem or call it by another name. Rather, talk specifically about the problem of offering alibis, and share instances when the problem has occurred. The student must be very clear about what you are feeling and what you are talking about.
- When he/she gives an excuse, set a deadline for completion of the task. Don't let the student walk away "free." To change the behavior you must make the excuse more difficult than the performance he/she failed to complete.
- Try to make the student evaluate the habit, and see what's really happening.
- Make the consequences for offering alibis consistent for all students, regardless of the alibi.
- Let the student know that his/her behavior is human. We all make mistakes, but we also must always accept the consequences of our mistakes rather than think an excuse should relieve us of responsibility.
- Remember, personal problems at home and with peers are often the reason behind alibi behavior.
- Prepare a plan (contract) with this student and allow opportunity for the plan to succeed. Let the student know your expectations and make it clear that repeated alibis will not be accepted.
- Inform parents if behavior continues—especially if the student makes no effort to adjust the behavior.

IV. MISTAKES:

Common misjudgments and errors in managing the child which may perpetuate or intensify the problem.

- Considering this student an out-and-out liar and personally disliking him/her.
- Always accepting the excuse of the alibier.
- Refusing to listen to any excuses.
- Refusing to accept any excuses.
- Trying to deal with an alibi and the student who offers it during class time.
- Criticizing the excuse offered by a student in front of the class.
- Setting up unrealistic goals in an attempt to alter the behavior of the alibier.
- Lowering expectations for him/her.

NEXT SEEKER: "The Angel" and "The Angry"

