

SUSPENSION LEARNING PACKET #3:

PROFANITY AND OBSCENITY

INTRODUCTION

This is a Suspension Learning Packet. It consists of several pages of text and a Response sheet. Your assignment is to read the text and answer the questions on the Response sheet. The text includes three stories about students who broke a school rule. The Response sheet asks questions about what the people in the stories did that got them into trouble. Reading the text and answering the questions on the Response sheet will help you understand what you have done wrong and how to avoid doing it again. Read the text first and try to remember what you've read. Then read the Response Sheet and write answers to the questions.

WHAT YOU DID

You have been suspended because you used profanity or obscenity at school. While we might hear profane or obscene words daily, on the street, on television and in films, these words and expressions are wrong for use in school. They offend other people and often are a sign that a person lacks basic communication skills. This next section will help you to understand why you use profanity or obscenity.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH USING PROFANITY OR OBSCENITY

The words you use are important. They tell others a great deal about you. For example, the words you use tell others whether or not you are educated. They can suggest to others from what part of the country you come. They tell others how you feel: confident, shy, nervous, aggressive or hesitant.

We all make judgments each day about people based on the language they use. How many times have you heard someone say, "He just runs on like a fool," or "She just doesn't know what she is saying."

The words we use also indicate our attitude toward others. They are the main way we make a first--or lasting--impression on others. People judge others, not so much on the basis of clothes or possessions or appearance, but by their words. The most fashionable clothes, the finest car or the most expensive jewelry do little for the person who speaks in an uneducated or offensive manner.

Words can be very powerful. They have the power to make people feel good or bad. They can help or hurt people. A rude or unthinking word can hurt as much as a punch or a kick. In a sense, profane or obscene words are just that: verbal punches or kicks that you may deal out without being aware of their impact.

Profane or obscene language and gestures are often associated with persons who are so angry or hostile that they can't communicate their feelings or thoughts properly. They may also suggest that you have limited communication skills--that you don't know how or don't choose to express yourself in a socially acceptable way.

Most people will respond better if you take the time to explain yourself in language that does not offend them. Inappropriate language is interpreted as a hostile gesture by nearly everyone.

THREE STORIES ABOUT OBSCENITY OR PROFANITY

FOUL-MOUTHED FRANK

Frank uses foul language all the time. No one knows exactly why. His grades in English are average or better. His parents don't use bad language and neither do his older brothers.

But Frank does. A year or so ago, when he was in another middle school, he fell in with an older crowd of boys who liked to use four-letter words. Everything was "#\$!%" or "@%&*." These boys didn't use foul language to make up for the lack of other words. They thought the four-letter words sounded "cool" and adult.

Now Frank is in a new school, with a new crowd. Nobody in this new crowd uses bad language. At first, they accepted Frank even with his obscene language. They even thought it was cool--for a while.

Then baseball season came around. Frank began to play with the team. Every time the students on the team would gather for a game, Frank would be there with his foul language. "I can't find my #@%& glove!" he would say. "Where is that #&*+ Pete, anyway? I can't stand it when people don't show up on time for a game."

Every time Frank misses a home run, he shouts "\$#@%*" at the top of his lungs. Everybody hears it. Friends and parents often come to watch practice after school or work, and they are embarrassed by Frank's language. Eventually, the other students asked Frank to cool it or get off the team.

Frank continued to use his four-letter vocabulary--until the principal came out to watch practice one afternoon. Frank said one "#\$%@" too many times. Now Frank and his foul mouth are off the baseball team and suspended from school.

SUSIE SWEARS AT THE TEACHER

Susie is an attractive girl. She is always well-dressed and makes a good impression. That is, a good impression until she opens her mouth. Then people look away in embarrassment. Susie swears a lot. In fact, she can hardly speak a sentence without swearing.

Susie knows she swears too much. Her mother and father constantly correct her at home. When she is with her family, she holds down the swearing to a minimum. But at school, Susie sounds like a sailor.

One day Susie was sitting in math class. The teacher, Mr. Anderson, was returning the math quizzes the students took last week. Susie hadn't studied for the test, but she thought she had passed it. Mr. Anderson handed back her paper and Susie opened it. There was a big black F!

"%\$&*@ it!" Susie exclaimed. "I hate this "%^&*!@# class! What the \$#%* am I going to do now?"

"Is something wrong, Susie?" Mr. Anderson asked. "Can I help?"

"No! Just get the \$#%& out of my way!" Susie said as she stormed out of the classroom.

GEORGE MAKES A GESTURE AT THE COACH

George talks with his hands. He comes from a family that is very expressive, so he gestures a great deal.

Recently, George's grades have been falling. He hasn't been studying as he should. He hangs out with a crowd of other students who don't study. They go to the mall every afternoon instead of doing homework. George's mother recently began working. There's no one home at George's house until later in the evening, so he goes along to the mall with them.

One of the people they see at the mall is a high-school student named Vince. Vince works at the sporting goods store. He is a big guy and likes to act tough. Vince uses profane words. Often, he makes obscene gestures at the customers and at his boss behind their backs.

George thinks this behavior is cool, so he tries to imitate it. Vince is his hero, anyway. George studies Vince's gestures and tries to copy them.

One day George and two of his friends were hanging out behind the school after lunch. They were smoking cigarettes and talking, even though they were late for class.

The coach happened to walk by. "What about it? Don't you guys have class now?" he asked.

George made one of Vince's "cool" gestures at the coach. Now George is suspended from school.

REASONS FOR USING OBSCENITY AND PROFANITY

There are many reasons why students use obscene language and gestures. Let's try to make a list of some of these reasons:

1. They feel hostile toward others or toward a situation (or maybe toward themselves). Susie was angry at Mr. Anderson in our second story, but she was also angry at herself for having failed the test. When she swore at Mr. Anderson, the anger was partially directed toward herself too. Often hostility comes out in the form of obscene language or gestures because students think they have no other way to express what they feel.
2. Students may think it's cool, sophisticated or adult to use obscene language. They equate using profanity with being adult and grown-up. Actually, it's anything but mature behavior, as we'll see in the next part of this lesson.
3. Students may lack adequate vocabulary or communication skills. Have you ever noticed that people who swear a lot use the same two or three words over and over? Everything is "%\$&@" or "&*#@%\$!." Those two or three words are used to describe everything from a baseball game to an F on a test. How much more expressive you would be to think for a moment and find some more original and colorful way to express yourself!

CONSEQUENCES OF USING PROFANITY OR OBSCENITY

People who frequently use obscenity or profanity quickly develop a reputation for being offensive to others. Other people learn what to expect in the way of language and learn to avoid them.

Often, they find themselves excluded from social groups and clubs at school because people are made uncomfortable by their bad language, just as Frank's teammates were.

People in authority understand bad language or obscene gestures as a sign of disrespect. Whether or not you intend it in that way, that's how people will take it. As a result, they will take disciplinary action, just as the coach did with George.

The main person hurt by excessive use of profanity or obscenity is YOU. You hurt yourself by reducing everything in your life to the level of two or three swear words. You don't try to express subtle or interesting shades of meaning in your speech; you just explode with the same bad language to express everything from joy to sadness to anger or disgust.

You are depriving yourself and the people around you of a chance to express precisely what you are feeling. Instead, you explode with a "\$%&" or "&*+@" and others around you have to interpret. They can't tell from your language what you are feeling.

HOW TO SOLVE PROBLEMS WITHOUT OBSCENITY OR PROFANITY

Breaking bad habits can be difficult. Swearing and making obscene gestures can be difficult habits to break because they seem to come so automatically. If you're used to doing these things, it takes a great deal of determination and concentration to stop.

But you CAN stop! You can eliminate profanity and obscenity from your speech and gestures if you want.

Start by listening closely to someone you admire--maybe a musician or a movie star or a sports figure. Listen closely to parents and teachers as they talk. Watch television and notice which newscasters, reporters or politicians you admire.

Now notice something about their speech. People in powerful positions or positions of authority don't swear in public or make obscene gestures. They control themselves. Presidential candidates or Senators don't swear at one another in public debates, no matter how angry they get.

Your teacher and principal don't make obscene gestures when they get angry. The school counselor doesn't swear when she's speaking with students.

All these people speak for a living. They know that their best asset is their language and they use it. They don't offend or make others uncomfortable with their speech. You shouldn't, either! You can break the habit of using obscenity or profanity if you want. You'll have a chance later to write a goal that will guide you toward better ways to communicate.

STUDENT RESPONSE PACKET # 3.1

PROFANITY AND OBSCENITY

NAME _____

DATE _____

GRADE __ HOMEROOM _____

WHAT TO DO

Below are some questions about what you just read. These questions will help you learn why what you did was wrong and how you can avoid such problems in the future. Your teacher, a counselor, the principal, or your parents may read your answers. Your answers will not be graded.

For most of the questions, there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. The answers depend on you. Be honest with yourself as you write the answers. Take time to think before you write. The work you do on these Response Packets reflects your willingness to improve your behavior and attitude.

Write your answers in the spaces below the questions. If there is not enough room, write on the backs of these sheets. Be neat, spell correctly, use good grammar, and write in complete sentences.

1. Look back at the story about Susie and her comment about the test. Let's imagine that Mr. Anderson calls her into his office to talk about the test and what she said to him. Mr. Anderson agrees not to refer her to the principal this time if she will apologize to him. When she tells her mother and father, they suggest that she write a letter of apology to Mr. Anderson.

You are to put yourself in Susie's place and write a three-paragraph letter. The first paragraph you are to write will be a short sketch about Susie: her age, her school, her family and so on. The second paragraph will explain the reasons why she made the comments using the swear words and what caused her to use bad words. This might be her chance to

explain her side of the problem--maybe she didn't have enough time to study, the test was too hard, she was upset about something and so on. Then the third paragraph is her apology to Mr. Anderson.

First paragraph:

Second paragraph:

Third paragraph:

2. If you were Mr. Anderson, how would you react to the apology?

3. Why do you think Susie spoke to Mr. Anderson the way she did?

4. How can being in the habit of swearing be a problem? Do you think that Susie has a habit of swearing?

5. Why is Susie unfair sometimes?

6. What do you think the other students in class thought of Susie when she made the comment to Mr. Anderson?

7. How would you describe Susie, based on the story you just read?

8. Would you describe Susie as an "attractive" person? Is she someone that most people would feel comfortable being around? Why or why not?

9. Is Susie someone you would like to have as your friend? Why or why not?

10. Do you think Susie is an angry person? Why or why not?

11. How do you think Mr. Anderson felt when Susie yelled at him? Did Mr. Anderson handle the situation well?

12. What will the parents of the girls in Susie's crowd think when they hear what she did? How will they feel about their daughters being friends with Susie?

13. Why does George (in story #3) admire Vince so much?

14. Is Vince an admirable person? Why or why not?

15. Why does Vince make obscene gestures behind his boss's back?

16. How does this behavior make other people in the store feel?

STUDENT RESPONSE PACKET # 3.2

PROFANITY AND OBSCENITY

NAME _____

DATE _____

GRADE __ HOMEROOM _____

WHAT TO DO

Below are some questions about what you just read. These questions will help you learn why what you did was wrong and how you can avoid such problems in the future. Your teacher, a counselor, the principal, or your parents may read your answers. Your answers will not be graded.

For most of the questions, there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. The answers depend on you. Be honest with yourself as you write the answers. Take time to think before you write. The work you do on these Response Packets reflects your willingness to improve your behavior and attitude.

Write your answers in the spaces below the questions. If there is not enough room, write on the backs of these sheets. Be neat, spell correctly, use good grammar, and write in complete sentences.

1. Go back and read the story of Frank and his foul language. Now imagine that you are Frank. Your parents have asked you to write a letter of apology to the principal who heard you use the bad language. What will you say in the letter? It should have three paragraphs: one introducing yourself (explaining who you are, your age and level in school); a second explaining the situation and why you used the bad language; and third, the apology itself.

First paragraph:

Second paragraph:

Third paragraph:

2. Explain why Frank is being disrespectful toward people when he uses bad language in front of them.
3. Should Frank have been taken off the team for using bad language so often? Explain your answer.
4. Do you consider Frank's swearing more or less serious because it took place outside of school? Why?
5. Explain why schools have rules against students using bad language.
6. Explain how swearing at someone can result in a fight.

7. Why do you think obscenity or profanity is used in films, television and radio? How do you feel about permitting such words to be a part of a television show or film?

8. Besides school, in what other situations would profanity not be allowed? Why?

9. How should Frank be punished by his parents for the problem at school?

10. Should parents exercise control over the way their children talk at home? Explain your answer.

11. Should schools exercise any control over the way students talk on the school bus? Why or why not?

12. Do you feel disappointed about what you said that resulted in this suspension? Why or why not?

13. How can a person break the habit of swearing or using obscene gestures?

14. How can Frank change the way he expresses himself? What are some specific things he should work on?

15. Have you ever apologized to someone you swore at? Has anybody ever apologized to you for swearing? Why might apologizing be a good idea?

16. Would you feel strange swearing before a small child--maybe a younger brother or sister? Explain your answer.

17. Do the people you most admire swear? If not, why do you think they don't?

18. Write three goals that you can use to help you to stop swearing.