

A Redemptive Model of Christian Discipline



Developed by the
Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Office of Education

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GEMS FROM THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY REGARDING DISCIPLINE

Many youth who are thought incorrigible are not at heart so hard as they appear. Many who are regarded as hopeless may be reclaimed by wise discipline. These are often the ones who most readily melt under kindness. Let the teacher gain the confidence of the tempted one, and by recognizing and developing the good in his character, he can, in many cases, correct the evil without calling attention to it.

Education, p. 294

When it is necessary to give reproof, their (the teachers') language will not be exaggerated, but humble. In gentleness they will set before the wrongdoer his errors and help him to recover himself. Every true teacher will feel that should he err at all, it is better to err on the side of mercy than on the side of severity.

Education, p. 294

He (the principal) will not expel a student until every effort has been put forth for his reformation. But when it becomes evident that the student is receiving no benefit himself, while his defiance or disregard of authority tends to overthrow the government of the school, and his influence is contaminating others, then his expulsion becomes a necessity.

Education, p. 293

Dealing with human minds is the most delicate work ever entrusted to mortals, and teachers need constantly the help of the Spirit of God, that they may do their work aright.

Counsels to Parents, Teachers, Students, p. 264

The true object of reproof is gained only when the wrongdoer himself is led to see his fault and his will is enlisted for its correction.

Education, p. 291

In dealing with their students, teachers are to show the love of Christ. Without this love they will be harsh and dictatorial, driving souls away from the fold. They must be minuteman, ever on guard over self and improving every opportunity to do good to those in their care.

Counsels to Parents, Teachers, Students, p. 269

SECTION I

GUIDELINES: WHEN CONSIDERING PROBATION

The following guidelines apply to a student who has been placed on **probation**. (These guidelines do not apply to students involved in a serious infraction in which the safety or welfare of other students was **seriously** violated. Such students may be immediately withdrawn from school, subject to school board action).

At the time a student is placed on **probation**, there should be a joint conference in which the school administration, disciplinary committee (if applicable), student and parent(s) are present.

- A. At this meeting, the student and parent(s) should be informed of the school rule(s), which was violated. The rule should be specific enough so that the student can understand **very clearly** the seriousness of the situation.
- B. The nature of the evidence supporting the charges and the potential consequences of the charges, if proven to be true, should be presented accurately, factually, and in a Christ-like manner with a warm, kind heart, sound sense, and unbiased judgment.
- C. A **written intervention plan** (contract between the student/school/parent(s)) is to be formulated to help assist the student through the problem.

The Contract:

- 1. Should identify with specificity each area where improvement must be demonstrated as well as the consequences if rule(s) continue to be violated.

2. Should have a recommended action plan that addresses each irregularity, such as:

<p>Identification of Irregularity</p> <p>Aggressive behavior resulting in fight with classmate</p>	<p>Action Plan</p> <p>Lists effective ways of controlling aggressive behavior</p>
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3. Should contain the following elements:

- a. Claim ownership to the problem. (Several adults will help the student walk through the problem areas.)
- b. Set realistic goals for the student.
- c. Establish an ongoing communication system between home and school.
- d. Set concrete goals that are measurable and can be reached in a short time (i.e., being in class on time 10 consecutive days in which all classroom assignments/homework were completed and turned in).

4. Should be dated and signed by school principal, student and parent(s).

D. A **mentoring program** should be established in which the student is matched up with an adult (i.e., principal, teacher, staff member, etc.). The adult assigned this task should be someone who has good rapport with children and preferably is someone who the student already holds in high esteem. The adult is to counsel the student in a nurturing, Christ-centered supportive manner. Through effective communication it is hoped that the mentor will assist the student in learning how to behave in responsible ways, not only in the context of the classroom or school, but in other situations as well.

For the mentoring program to be effective:

1. The mentor should meet regularly with the student (recommendation: minimum of once per week for 4–6 weeks).
 2. The bonding between the mentor and the student should get stronger with each passing week. One-on-one, heart-to-heart talks can be a very effective tool in winning the heart of the student.
 3. The student needs to feel that the mentor has a genuine interest in his/her welfare.
- E. **INTERCESSORY PRAYER** should be an integral part of the student's rehabilitative process. The school faculty should pray intercessorily together on behalf of this particular student. Based on personal conviction, various staff members may also desire to pray with the student individually. Such an action can send a powerful message to the student that this school faculty **really** cares about him/her. The principal and/or teacher may also desire to pray with the parent(s). Such prayers should be based on conviction not an administrative assignment.
- F. The **SCHOOL PASTOR** (normally the person assigned to this task is the constituent pastor) should serve as an essential link in the rehabilitative process. He is to approach the student from a pastoral perspective. It is recommended that the pastor has at least three counseling sessions with the student. The purpose of these interactions is for the student to develop a better understanding and appreciation for self-control and self-discipline, as well as to empower the student to appropriately resolve conflict. At each session (which should be up to a maximum of 30 minutes) the conversation/discussion should focus on selected themes, such as the following found in the book *Education*:

1. "Let the child and the youth [student] be taught that every mistake, every fault, every difficulty, conquered, becomes a steppingstone to better and higher things. It is through such experiences that all who have ever made life worth the living have achieved success."

Education, p. 296

2. "Many youth who are thought incorrigible are not at heart so hard as they appear. Many who are regarded as hopeless may be reclaimed by wise discipline. These are often the ones who most readily melt under kindness. Let the teacher gain the confidence of the tempted one, and by recognizing and developing good in his character, he can, in many cases, correct the evil without calling attention to it."

Education, p. 294

3. "The object of discipline is the training of the child for self-government. He should be taught self-reliance and self-control. Therefore, as soon as he is capable of understanding, his reason should be enlisted on the side of obedience. Let all who deal with him be such as to show obedience to be just and reasonable. Help him to see that all things are under law, and that disobedience leads, in the end, to disaster and suffering. When God says, 'Thou shalt not,' He in love warns us of the consequences of disobedience, in order to save us from harm and loss."

Education, p. 287

- G. The coordination of the intervention/rehabilitative process for the student is to be done by the school administration. Assignments need to be given as to:

1. Who will write up the contract? Who will discuss the contents of the contract with the student/parent(s)?
2. Who will serve as the student's mentor? When and how often should the mentor meet with the student?
3. When will the school pastor meet with the student for pastoral counseling?

The principal or person assigned to write up the contract should work closely with the mentor and school pastor. This assignment should be a team effort, in which several individuals are working cooperatively, blending together ideas, which will help disciple the student.

H. Follow-up conference with student/parent(s)

1. At a follow-up conference, in which the principal, teacher, mentor and school pastor are present, a progress report is given to the student/parent(s) to determine what, if any, growth has taken place relevant to the goals identified in the contract. If little progress has been made toward the targeted goal, the student/parent(s) need to be aware of the serious consequences; if progress has been made, the student is to be commended and encouraged to keep up the good work. Therefore, student progress should be monitored carefully and the student/parent(s) are to be aware of the benefit the student will receive if the student adheres to the contract (remains in school) and the potential consequences of violations of the contract (expulsion).
2. A follow-up conference should be held within 2–3 weeks after the student has been placed on probation sooner, if the contract has been violated. Additional follow-up conferences may be scheduled, as needed.

SECTION II

GUIDELINES: WHEN EXPULSION IS BEING CONSIDERED

- I. The following guidelines identify a process which should be followed before expulsion of a student. As a general practice, before a student is recommended to the school board for expulsion, he/she has been placed on **probation** and should have gone through each of the following “hoops”:
 - A. Was a joint conference held in which the school administration, disciplinary committee (if applicable), student and parent(s) discussed the school rule(s) which was violated? The rule(s) must be specific enough so that the student/parent(s) can understand very clearly the seriousness of the situation.
 - B. Was a written intervention plan formulated? Did the plan include an action plan to correct each irregularity? Did the principal, student and parent(s) sign it?
 - C. Was a mentoring program established?
 - D. Was intercessory prayer included as an integral part of the process? Did the faculty pray collectively for the student, as well as individually with the student and the parent(s)?
 - E. Was the school pastor considered as an essential link in the rehabilitative process?
 - F. Was the process effectively coordinated by the principal so that the school administration, mentor and school pastor worked effectively as a team with the student?
 - G. Was there at least one follow-up conference in which a progress report was discussed with student/parent(s)?

- H. If each of these questions identified in Section II, A–G was answered “yes,” and the student continues to demonstrate at risk behaviors, and has made little or no effort in reformation, as well as shown continued defiance or disregard for the standards outlined in the contract [signed by the student/parent(s)], then the student makes expulsion a necessity. The final step, a hearing before the school board [if requested by the student and/or parent(s)] should be just a formality.
- I. If the student and/or parent(s) desire to make an appeal before the school board, the following guidelines should be adhered to as part of the process:
1. The student and parent(s) should be notified several days in advance when the school board will be meeting. (Recommendation: Five day’s minimum).
 2. Prior to the school board meeting, the student and parent(s) are to be reminded of the rule(s) which the student violated as well as evidence to substantiate that claim. The proof against the student should be clear and convincing.
 3. The school administration is to identify to the parent(s) the entire rehabilitative process (a written contract, mentoring, pastoral counseling, intercessory prayer, etc.) as well as the rule(s) violated. This should be presented in a Christ-like manner with a warm, kind heart, and unbiased judgment.
 4. After meeting with the parents, the school board is to meet in an executive session (only board members may be present) to determine the outcome. If the decision is made by the school board to support expulsion, it is recommended that the following counsel in the book, *Education*, p. 293, be adhered to:

“... [W]ith many the disgrace of public expulsion would lead to utter recklessness and ruin. In most cases when removal, is unavoidable, the matter need not be made public. By counsel and co-operation with the parents, let the teacher [school administrator] privately arrange for the student's withdrawal.”

SECTION III

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE TAKING A DISCIPLINARY ACTION

Superintendent's Note: Although the material presented in this section was developed for a large school setting (i.e., schools which have a Discipline Committee, a large school with a principal and several faculty, as well as in a college/university setting, etc.), the **principles** can be utilized in any school. **This entire section was authored by George Akers, Ph.D.**

Before you as a principal and/or teacher determine a particular disciplinary action, you should consider the following guidelines:

Some Questions a Discipline Committee Member Should Ask Him/Herself Before Taking a Disciplinary Action:

1. Have we prayed intercessorily together about this case? Have any of us counseled and prayed with this student beforehand about his/her problem? How much one-on-one, heart-to-heart talk with this student has preceded this administrative meeting?
 - ◆ Is a report of such an interface welcome here?
2. What word best characterized the collective spirit present here in our committee? Write it here: _____
 - ◆ Getting closer home, what word best describes **my** spirit right now? Parental? Objective? Spiritual? Is there any irritation or annoyance, or disposition to “get even” going on here?
 - ◆ Have there been any “hidden committee agenda” dimensions to our deliberations here? Is everything on top of the table, all the facts and circumstances presented?
3. Does this proposed course of action accurately reflect our corporate philosophy of school discipline:
 - ◆ Do we really have one? One that has been consciously formulated by our faculty and affirmed by our board? Or has an ad hoc policy been imposed by a strong personality somewhere along the way?

- ◆ Are there any invisible persons present here, not officially designated to serve, yet who are “calling the shots” backstage, influencing our thoughts and actions? To whom we feel we will be called to account, properly or improperly?
 - ◆ So, if this action is not really representative of our officially accepted philosophy, then what additions, deletions, or modifications are specifically in order to make it bear the impress of our deliberate purposing as an institution?
4. Does this action represent our most creative, collective thought as a group?—Our most spiritual, pastoral effort in behalf of this student? (Or is this a case of “one size fits all” policy application on our part?)
 5. Have we concluded that our course of action in this case must be largely punitive?—The only way to go?
 - ◆ Designed to cooperate with what God is doing at work in this young life?
 6. **THE BIG QUESTION:** Is this “action” we are considering here today truly **redemptive** in nature?
 - ◆ Designated to cooperate with what God is doing at work in this young life?
 7. So, is our **motive**—in our involvement in this stepping stone episode in this young person’s life—to make a life-long disciple of him/her? (Remembering that this is the overriding object of all Christian discipline: “disciple-ing,” making true believers of Jesus Christ, of Christian education, of the SDA church!)
 8. If redemptive in intent, is this disciplinary proposal also rehabilitative, with clear and focused objectives as to exactly what the student’s role is in his/her recovery plan?
 - ◆ Is this expectancy stated in our action?

9. How will this student probably perceive this action (and us!)—positively or negatively?

- ◆ Now? Next year? At adulthood?
- ◆ How will the student's family perceive it? How about the local pastor and the congregation who sent this youth to us?

10. Am I voting **my** deep-down, personal convictions in this case?

- ◆ Has the Holy Spirit communicated to my spirit about it?
- ◆ Is this consideration the final determinate in my vote here today?

A FINAL NOTE . . .

In *Education*, p. 291, it states, “The true object of reproof is gained only when the wrongdoer himself is led to see his fault and his will is enlisted for its correction.” Adherence to the above-named process, will not guarantee that all students will see their faults and be led to self-correction. It’s more complicated than that. But it does assure the student that our motives for discipline are pure and rehabilitative — and that we desire to disciple each student.

When the forgoing principles are followed, the making of school rules, the enforcing of rules and even the dealing with infractions should provide some of the richest opportunities for real character development toward the self-disciplined life.