

Hirshberg Consulting
2926 Rocky Oak Street
San Antonio, Texas 78232

October 4, 2004

Dear Ms. Jones:

Thank you for your note dated October 1, 2004. We understand your concerns about Will's grades. However, we are thrilled with how well he is handling the increased responsibility, increased social demands, and that he is being exposed to more challenging material. He is progressing exactly as we predicted in his IEP meeting, and we couldn't be happier that he is growing in self confidence, making friends, and no longer proud of his ability to "trick" his teachers into believing he can't do the work. For mentally healthy kids, getting good grades is a matter of honor. For a child with RAD, getting bad grades and "tricking" authority figures is a matter of survival.

As you know, Will suffers from a mental illness called Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD). RAD occurs when a child's brain "wires" wrong due to early trauma. Essentially, everything routes through the fight, flight, or freeze part of the brain instead of the thinking part of the brain. Our clients' job, in utilizing therapeutic parenting techniques, is to force Will's brain to "re-wire" correctly and route all information through the thinking part of his brain, where he will be able to make rational, logical choices that will bring his happiness and success. Unfortunately, Will's parents are re-wiring a brain that has had 11 years of trauma and reinforced bad behavior, so it is going to take some time to undo all the damage. That said, Will's refusal to perform in school is a direct behavioral representation of his mental illness.

Since moving in with his family 1 ½ years ago, Will has gone from a boy who couldn't speak in complete sentences, dress himself, or follow more than one direction at a time to the chatty, capable, happy boy who continues to improve every day. People who are not familiar with the therapeutic methods required to successfully treat RAD encourage his parents to cut him some slack, lower expectations, coddle him, and reward any effort no matter how meaningless. When a normal child is coddled and rewarded for not performing, they turn into a brat. When a child with RAD is coddled and rewarded for not performing, they turn into a serial killer.

With that in mind, when one becomes the parent of an attachment disordered child, one's view of success and priorities are forever rearranged. This is why we ask the school to understand that our clients' priorities deal with developing Will's conscience, teaching him to make responsible choices, and drilling into him the concept of cause and effect. When his maladaptive behaviors are no longer working for him, he will be motivated to change. No amount of cajoling, bribing, or explaining the value of school work will change Will's mind. He will perform when not performing stops being an effective method of manipulation for him.

The concept of choice is very new to Will. From his chaotic birth home to his many, sudden moves in foster care, Will was taught that everything is out of his control. Nothing was ever the same. Every holiday was spent in a new place. There was no telling if there would be any care, food, the same bed to sleep in, or the same parents there in the morning. He is still struggling with the idea that his decisions will be respected and that he has the right to choose how his life will be. Will's parents would rather see him fail 4th grade when the consequence is taking it again, than see him fail at life later, because he never

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learned the real life lesson that refusing to perform does not bring rewards. In Will's academic past, he was offered passing grades, when he didn't pass. Teachers wrote for him when he refused to write. Moms dressed him when he refused to dress himself. These false experiences of success lowered his self worth because he knew, in his heart, that he had not really accomplished anything. Denying Will an opportunity to achieve (or even fail) by his own choice is, in effect, robbing him of an opportunity to learn some very valuable lessons. If we protect Will from experiencing the consequences of his choices, then he will not have a clear understanding of cause and effect. It is cause and effect thinking that will enable him to break the cycle of violence taught to him by his birth family. It is cause and effect thinking that will motivate him as an adult to get out of bed in the morning and get to work on time.

Will is not a normal child. Where other children were fed, loved, and cared for, he was neglected and abused. For us to expect him to behave, respond to stress, and develop like the normal child of loving parents would not be rational. Also, sympathy will not help his brain development. In fact, sympathy, "going easy on him," and lowered expectations only serve to reinforce his dysfunctional behavior. For example, thus far in school when Will has refused to perform, the curriculum has been "dumbed down," and he has been given special attention and privileges. When he continued to fail, everybody then looked for a reason to explain why he appeared unable to complete his work. They decided he couldn't see, was retarded, has a learning disability, had ADHD, or didn't receive enough help from his family, et cetera, instead of focusing on the already professionally diagnosed true cause of his behavior: RAD.

As we already have a diagnosis, and we already know what methods work to ensure that he will perform (and have seen those methods work 100% of the time), why waste anyone's time by trying techniques that have been shown to only make his mental illness worse? Why try to find a reason that is more comfortable and more familiar, when we have the solution to the puzzle right in front of us? Denying the truth does Will no favors. Yes, it would make everyone's life easier if just brushing Will's hair could cure his illness, or giving him Ritalin, or have someone give him the right answers and write them down for him. But these things will not make him better. They will not make him an academic success; he will just look like one on his report card.

We suggest following the tried therapeutic methods proscribed by Will's therapist to achieve the desired outcome, passing grades. We know these methods are time consuming, emotionally draining, and seem overly strict, but they are necessary if we hope for Will to have a truly successful and happy year. Just as we would not offer a cookie to a diabetic or withhold insulin because we don't understand how it works, we cannot deny Will the appropriate treatment to cure his mental illness. In our clients' time parenting Will, they have followed the attachment therapist's advice and have seen truly amazing results. We suggest that you set up a meeting with Will's therapist to learn more about RAD and therapeutic teaching methods. We understand that we are asking a lot, but Will's success in the future lies in the foundation we create for him now.

Please contact Will's therapist at your earliest convenience, and he will provide you with effective strategies for managing Will's RAD.

Sincerely,

Sean Hirshberg
Chief Operating Officer