

DEALING WITH LATECOMERS

As a menahel of a boys school, we have to contend with students coming late. We have penalized them in a variety of ways, including reflecting their tardiness in their final grade. However, after a careful study, I have concluded that MOST latecomers are not lazy or unmotivated, but usually they are victims of their parents busy schedules or inability to keep appointments on time (at least the younger ones; most of our students are carpooled to school and a young child cannot do the walk himself). We all know such adults- why should the children be responsible? Obviously, the parents are not deterred by our disciplinary action, and only the children suffer. Is this fair? Is there a solution for lateness in children too young to help themselves get to school on time?

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In addressing your question, I think it is against our *Torah* way of life to punish someone for the mistakes of another person, even though it may be a parent. "*Lo yumsu bonim al avosum*". How then is it possible to punish a small child who you say would come on time if it was not for his parents' "inability to keep appointments"? However, if the child is old enough to walk to school or take public transportation, then the problem becomes the student's problem. It seems from your question that that is not your concern as you say that you find that the students are "not lazy or unmotivated". You are only speaking about students who rely on their parents to bring them to school and bring them late because of their own personal concerns. To punish the students, for something that is not their fault, is a miscarriage of justice and teaches them a horrible sense of what *erlichkeit* and *emes* are all about. "*Yotzo sechoro b'hefseido*" – you have lost much more than you have gained. The student's sense of what is fair has been tampered with and his character could be somewhat tarnished.

I would most definitely have meetings with the parents to find an alternate way of having the students come to school either by switching carpools, (easier said than done), or having the parents adapt their schedule (also much easier said than done), etc. Working with the parents is the major factor in finding a solution. Try to impress upon the parents that they are teaching their children irresponsible behavior, unreliability and that their davening and learning will suffer from coming late to class. At any rate, under no circumstances should a child of any age be punished for his parents' misdeeds.

This problem is rampant in almost every school and the schools must learn to live with the inevitable while trying to improve the situation in whatever way possible. Never give up. Being complacent will only cause the situation to deteriorate further and will ultimately lead to complete *hefkerus*.

Positive reinforcement and rewarding the students for perfect or near perfect on time attendance, will go a long way toward encouraging your students to assure that their parents will have them in school on time. I tried it in our elementary school and it worked wonders. A "lollypop letter" was mailed to students who had no lates for a few months. The letter praised their wonderful middos and a lollypop was enclosed. Those students who maintained this record for the entire year, received a special gift at the closing assembly. The parents and students coveted the receiving of this award and/or letter and tried very hard to maintain their promptness. In today's technologically savvy culture, almost all schools have complete records on computer which lend themselves to producing such letters very quickly.

As an example of the effectiveness of rewards on the high school level, I would like to tell you about my grandson, a tenth grade student in Rabbi A.C. Glustein's shiur at the Yeshiva Gedola of Montreal, whose entire class went on a Shabbaton to the Laurentians as a reward for being on time to davening for a period of a few months. They had a great time and will remember this reward for many years to come.

Never underestimate the value of positive reinforcement, no matter how old the students are. Try it!