



Mrs. Belk taught first graders in a neighborhood public school for several years. She Decided to upgrade her skills by taking a graduate course in psychology at a nearby university. She had only been enrolled in the class for a few weeks, but the professor had already lectured on operant conditioning. What a great idea, she thought: ignore the negative and reinforce the positive.

Mrs. Belk was eager to try some new guidance techniques with several of her more challenging children, especially Chad, a 6-year-old who tended to be her groups ringleader for inappropriate behavior. He seemed to be in a constant state motion although, he took medication for hyperactivity.

The past week of school had been particularly stressful for Mrs. Belk. Chad had been even more out of control than usual. It had rained

so much that the children had not gotten to outside. The sun come out but there were still large mud puddles. When the room was clean, Mrs. Belk asked “How would you like to go outside?”

To the children’s gleeful shouts of “Yes!” Mrs. Belk answered “We can go outside on one condition. Everyone has to agree to stay in the dry areas.” The children eagerly agreed. As Mrs. Belk walked out into the bright sunlight, she took a deep breath of fresh air and felt a great sense of relief to be outside the stuffy classroom. In seconds, she saw Chad running backwards to catch a ball, and splat, he stepped right in the mud. Mrs. Belk stood with her hands on her hips, glaring at Chad and thinking about whether to have him sit on the bench for 10 minutes for breaking the rule she just made.

She knew that it was a real effort to keep Chad sitting for 10 minutes. Mrs. Belk dreaded a confrontation and decided she did not have the energy to deal with Chad at the moment. She started to think about what her professor said about it being helpful to ignore inappropriate behavior-and besides, she thought, maybe his stepping in the mud was really an accident-so she looked the other way and decided to ignore Chad. Within seconds, eager children pulled at her shirt sleeves and saying “Mrs. Belk, Mrs. Belk, look, Chad is in the mud!” Mrs. Belk told them, “Go play and don’t pay any attention to Chad.”

Within minutes, two of Chad’s favorite cohorts, Eddie and Jayden, shrieked as Chad stamped his foot in the mud, splattering mud on them. They, of course (after they nervously looked back to make sure that Mrs. Belk was still ignoring Chad), stamped their feet in the mud, splattering Chad from head to toe. The chase was on with half of the class frantically telling Mrs. Belk “Look, look, look!” and the other half squealing and laughing as the three boys chasing and sliding in the mud.

Mrs. Belk realized that her “ignoring” strategy was not working. With a look of daggers in her eyes she shouted “Okay, everybody, line up at the door to go inside.” All the children (except Chad, Jayden and

Eddie) hurried to the door and made a straight line. In an angry voice, Mrs. Belk stared straight at the three boys and said “I am waiting. Not everyone is ready to go inside.” She thought, “There is no way I am going to chase those three in the mud.”

The muddy boys tried hard to look tough, as if they weren’t afraid of anything. By this time, however, their shoes and clothes were caked with mud and they were beginning to feel very uncomfortable, anxious, and out of control.

The playground was a mess and the boys were a mess. The situation was no longer salvageable. The principal called the horrified parents to come and get them. There was no easy way for the boys to make amends for their behavior or to save face on front their friends, parents, and teachers. They had taken part in open rebellion, a serious and scary step for a child and a damaging precedent for the future.

#### Reflective Questions

1. Did Mrs. Belk ignore the child or the behavior?
2. What could have Mrs. Belk done that might have prevented, redirected, or stopped the inappropriate behavior?
3. What do you think the buddy boys were thinking and feeling during the scenario?

## Possible language to use...

No worries of a prereading assignment! Please have reading assignment available during the class as we will have time to read and debrief the article as a part of our time together. At the end of the article there are a couple of the reflective questions that will guide us in our journey of learning. Our time together will be filled with conversation about the best way to support school age children ages 6-12 years of age, so bring your experience and join in!