

Seeking the Faith Quotient

Trust

Some students are "stress receivers"* and some students are "stress transmitters." (However true they may be, these terms are entirely fabricated for this discussion.) Some students seem to worry about everything and others aren't bothered by anything at all. Instead they find ways to create stressful lives for their teachers. And even though we only have anecdotal evidence to the fact, we all know that stress transmitters rarely miss school. Perhaps their immune system benefits from their lack of stress.

Children who do not seem to feel stress are often those who do not self-regulate well. Their behavior shows they are not aware of acceptable behavior. They need more supervision and frequent reminders of the rules and of what they are responsible for. On the other hand, children who do not cope well with stress are often overly aware of every behavior. Sometimes they worry about the response to a mistake, sometimes they worry about the misbehaviors of other children and sometimes they worry about not being able to control what will happen next.

This dichotomy of student behaviors can make it difficult to teach. If you make too much of a point of warning students about their responsibility the students who don't cope well with stress will take it to heart and worry needlessly. If you do not make a strong enough point of warning, then the students who do not self-regulate will be oblivious to what is expected of them. It really is a matter of checks and balances. It is a matter of Law and Grace.

There is a well known joke on the topic of trust: A man was in his house when the police came by to tell him to evacuate due to a pending flood. The man replied, "I trust that God will take care of me." Later, he found himself on the roof because his house was full of water. A rescue worker came by in a boat but the man refused to get into the boat insisting that God would take care of him. Still later, a helicopter flew by and tried to rescue him but the man refused to grab hold of the rope. When he drowned and went to heaven he asked God why He hadn't taken care of him. God responded: "I sent a police man, a boat and a helicopter, what more did you want?"

Trust is not about being oblivious to danger and just doing what we want. But trust is not about taking control of our own lives either. When we teach children to trust in God we are teaching them how to cope with stress and how to use stress to cope. God has the master plan. We do not have to make anything happen or control each and every aspect. God gives us gifts for service and he provides us with a fellowship of believers who surround us ready to help. He also guides us with His Law.

In American Sign Language the word trust is signed by pointing to the head and then using both hands to grab hold of an imaginary rope between you and God. To trust is to know that God holds the other end of the rope. And trust is believing this truth enough to hold on to the rope.

Some children need to learn to trust that God has the plan. Worry over details does nothing to make the plan go more smoothly. Children who can learn to trust God can learn to trust their parents and their teachers, also. We need to

Trust in the
LORD with all
your heart
and lean not on
your own under-
standing.
Proverbs 3:5

help them accept that they are not responsible for everything that happens and that God can bring good out of anything that happens (*Grace*). If they think good things only happen when they follow the rules they will not understand the beauty of *Grace*.

Some children need to learn how to grab the rope. They need to learn to pay attention to the rules (*Law*). They need to understand their responsibility in the whole scheme of things. If they cannot learn the rules, follow them and accept responsibility for their actions they will not appreciate the gift of *Grace*.

It all begins with learning to trust in God. He has a plan for our good. He sets out part of that plan in His *Law* which He writes in our hearts. He finalized the good in His plan when He sent His Son to die and rise again on our behalf. We can trust this. It is true. When we can help children keep this balance, we will be giving them the gift of trust that will foster wonderful coping skills.

Group Discussion

1. In which areas of your life is it hard for you to trust? Does this affect your relationships with others in your life?
2. When you were a child were you a "stress receiver" or a "stress transmitter"? Have you changed?
3. How do you cope with stress?
4. When we teach children and find ourselves needing to remind them of their responsibilities, how can we keep a balance between *Law* and *Grace*? In other words, how can we get one group to "wake up and smell the coffee" without putting the other group into a panic?
5. What are some ways to help the "stress transmitters" to better self-regulate?
6. What are some ways to help the "stress receivers" to cope?
7. Are there ways to use the children who demonstrate a healthy sense of trust to help the children in the other two groups?

Putting it into practice

Teachers

Think about how you relate the rules in your classroom. What have you already learned to do that calms the students who have coping issues?

What have you already learned to do that reinforces rules for the students who do not self-regulate?

What characteristics of the group of children who have a healthy sense of trust have you noticed?

Have you thought of any changes as a result of this reading/discussion ?

Putting it into practice

Administrators

Any teacher, at any point in his/her career can develop trust issues. This is especially true of a teacher who has recently been wounded by a parent or another issue within the school or church. Rebuilding that trust takes time and work. A teacher who struggles with trust needs extra care from those around him or her. With encouragement and reassurance, the trust can be rebuilt.

If there is a trust issue between two staff members then there is probably an issue that needs repentance and forgiveness. When trust is broken the healing process is more efficient if the wound is not covered or buried. A conference between the two teachers and yourself, possibly including the pastor, can go a long way to promoting healing. A wound left hidden away will most likely fester and reappear as a different issue.

Examine the trust relationship you have with your staff and the trust relationship they have with you. If there is defensiveness, or if a staff member has built a wall around him/herself, then there may be a trust issue. Pray for guidance, be willing to admit to a mistake, and with God's help begin anew with the staff member in question.

Assessing learning with follow-up discussion

These questions can be used for a follow-up discussion after teachers have completed classroom observations:

1. Share with the group your observations regarding trust.
2. How does learning to trust in God teach children the emotional skill of coping with stress?
3. How does learning to trust in God teach children to self-regulate?
4. What happens between adults when trust is compromised?
5. How can that be remedied?

©Kim Marxhausen 2008