

PUT OUT THE FIRE, THE BEHAVIOUR WILL SETTLE DOWN

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It always astounds me that many students with special needs are identified with a behaviour problem rather than a learning problem. Time and time again I have chatted with principals, teachers and special education resource teachers about this matter. I am told in no uncertain terms, that they cannot work with the learning problem until they have resolved the student's behaviour problem.

This leads me to the following analogy. Farmer Bill's barn catches fire. Fortunately, all of the animals escape unharmed. Due to the circumstances the animals are all jumping and running around. In time the fire department arrives. Now the question is what should they do first? If we believe what all the educators tell us we must first settle down the animals. Of course, this makes little sense. The fact is we need to put out the fire. Once the fire has been extinguished then the animals will settle down in time.

Ask yourself this: have you ever known a student who struggles in school? Have you sensed the pain on their face? The fact is the pain is quite real. There is nothing that I can think of more frustrating for a child than to fall behind in school. As the frustration grows, the child will start acting out this frustration. For most children it is preferable to be known as the class clown than for his peers to realize that he is falling behind.

I have worked with numerous students at my center who were identified with a behaviour problem. In some cases, the parents told me on the phone, prior to the child coming in to meet me, that he or she was very difficult to work with. When I asked why, they told me about their behaviour. Regardless of this warning, I've proceeded to meet with the parents and the child. Upon meeting the child the first thing I have noticed is a total lack of self-esteem and self-confidence. This is a result of the struggles that child has encountered trying to do his or her schoolwork.

When I begin to work with the child I make certain that the very first task that I have him or her complete is something that I am confident he or she can do. Upon the successful completion of the task I acknowledge the success. Inevitably the child's head rises up and his or her chest fills out. Nothing succeeds like success in raising one's self-esteem and self-confidence. In most cases, from this point on the child is eager to learn. All the negative behaviour is replaced by positive behaviour.

In conclusion, I highly recommend to all parents that they advocate on the behalf of their child and make certain that the child's behaviour is not the number one thing identified on the IEP. If it is, talk with the principal about changing the identification and make certain that the appropriate accommodations or modifications are put in place for your child.