



The wind-up-merchant



Little Johnny and his sister Jane have been trusted to ‘play nicely’ while Mum gets the tea ready in the kitchen. All is well until Johnny gets bored and turns his mind to more interesting entertainment – like annoying his little sister. She is playing quietly by herself. He prods and pokes, and generally makes a nuisance of himself. She doesn’t respond so he pushes harder. After keeping her cool for a remarkably long time, finally, she snaps and lashes out – just as Mum peers into the room to make sure all is well! ‘Jane, how can you be so unkind’ Mum exclaims. Poor Johnny, obviously he needs sympathy while Jane loses her treats for the evening and ends up in bed early.

I’m sure you will recognise scenarios like this. The problem is how we can discern who really is the culprit. It’s good to reflect on these situations and to recognise the frequency of such encounters. Is the same child always getting into trouble and, in the same manner, is the same child standing there being all innocent?

This is a problem common to parents and school teachers. It would be helpful if we had eyes in the back of our heads and ears that are more sensitively tuned to little people’s conversations. In reality, we only have our understanding of who a child is and a good dose of wisdom and insight.

Hindsight is too late if justice has already been metered out and found to be incorrect. Repeated injustice can lead to a child growing up with a negative view of themselves and becoming an underachiever as well as developing resentment and even a desire for revenge.

What can we do to try and avoid these situations? Firstly, we need to become more astute in our observations and this means that we may need to be nearer to where the children are playing, being within earshot and readily available at the first hint of trouble.

Secondly, it’s important to hear both sides of the story and, if you can’t discern the truth, don’t mete out justice. Err on the side of encouraging the children to say sorry to each other.

Thirdly, set a standard where you expect them to get on with each other. Children need to learn to play together. For example, a boisterous child needs someone to enjoy their love of life with as much as a quieter child needs someone to share their ability to be quiet and comfortable in their own skin. We rarely have two children alike, but they can learn so much from each other. Teaching them to put the other first will limit the ability of the wind-up-merchant to use his sibling for sport.

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