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Metro Lutheran
Positive Parenting
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WRONG NUMBER

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

It was a wrong number. A mother in West Virginia accidentally called me. She intended to call a local radio personality, who offers to pray for those who call and leave a prayer request. Wrong number.

This mother was deeply concerned about her six-year old son's change in behavior at school. He was enrolled in a Christian school. The teachers reported problem behaviors - making faces, misbehaving, not taking their correction well. This little boy had conflict with another classmate. Her son reported both verbal and physical bullying by the other child, but neither principal nor teachers listened to her son's side of the story, and he received a 10 day suspension from school. It certainly felt like a wrong number.

The parents decided to find another school. The day before I spoke to her was her son's first day in the public school. He emerged from the school building, dancing and sporting a "green apple," which he reported meant that his behavior had been perfect! He had had a wonderful day and declared the change in school was "the best thing you ever did for me!" Mom was elated and relieved. But when she delivered her son to school for his second day, the principal stopped her ... and stopped her in her tracks ... with the news, "Your son had a terrible day yesterday. His teacher had to give him a green apple, which means his behavior was seriously wrong. A yellow apple would have meant that it had been a mixed behavior day. A red apple is for a wonderful day. I'm not sure he'll be able to stay in this school. We'll have to see." Wrong number.

This woman dialed the wrong phone number, but she may have gotten the right person. I am a Certified Family Life Educator, a mom, a grandma, a teacher, and someone passionate about all God's children and families. Here was my advice to her desperate "what now?"

- Contact the pediatrician whom she trusts and explore any medical reasons for her son's change in behavior.
- Meet with school district personnel and ask for help. Her son may need some testing and a diagnosis of what has gone wrong. Ask for support and help with her son's education and with learning pro-social behaviors toward adults and his age peers.
- Connect with the teacher and principal and request that they teach her son those behaviors, then catch him doing well and improving.

- At home, where his behavior has not been a problem, affirm to her son that he can do it, that he can be the kid God created him to be!
- Separate personhood from behavior. Personhood is “child of God,” immutable, unchanging. Behavior can be changed, and parents can help kids do just that.

The day she called, I had received an email devotion on Philippians 4:6-7. It was the perfect word of God for us both that day, so we closed our conversation, praying for her, her son, the school, and all who will help. God turned a wrong number into a right number!

FAMILY ACTIVITIES

1. Listen deeply and lovingly to your child, as he or she tells you about life, at school, at home, in the neighborhood. Support your child. Listen deeply and respectfully to adults, when they express concern about your child’s behavior. Don’t automatically believe another adult, but don’t discount them either.
2. Search for support. Ask for help.
3. Separate your child’s behavior (which can change) from personhood (which is immutable and always anchored in being a child of God, made in God’s image). Let your child know that you love and affirm who they are and will help change the behavior that is a problem.
4. Celebrate good days and progress in your child’s behavior and accomplishments.
5. Pray like Jesus is listening. He is! Prayer is never a wrong number!