

I thought maybe I would write about a little snippet of my day in hopes that everyone else, when having a hard time with a student, might think how lucky they are. I am currently sitting in the room next to our classroom, outside of a smaller room we call the quiet room. In the quiet room a student mumbles to himself and spins around and around. He is bleeding, I am bleeding, my mentor teacher is now back in the classroom with the other students and she is bleeding. Each time the student quiets for half a minute to a minute I ask him if he is ready. He says "sorry sorry" as he charges the door with his hand extended trying to scratch me. Did I mention I am soaking wet from the pitcher of water he threw on me in the heat of "battle"?

How did we get here? Was there a trigger? We don't know. Transitions are hard for this student and we were trying to go to recess. Our playground has been closed for a week now and our students just don't understand the change to the routine or when things will be back to normal. We don't know when the playground will reopen so we can't tell them and if we could would it help?

The hardest part of my job is the physical aspects. No one who goes into teaching wants to have physical altercations with their students. We do everything we can to avoid it but for us it is occasionally inevitable. I feel sad at this moment because I am allowing myself to think about it. I learned a long time ago to turn off that emotional part of the physical altercations but right now, writing this I am forced to deal with the emotion. I can't help but cry. I feel bad for him. I feel bad for the other students who have to see the violence. I feel bad for us. I feel bad for his mom.

For about fifteen minutes we tried to redirect this student without returning his physical aggression. We used all the defensive moves in the book. We put chairs in between us and the student but he continued to aggress and found ways to get us. We tried to deflect him away from us and wound up being scratched on our hands, arms and face. When we tried to hold him a therapeutic hold but that only led to him trying to bite, head butt and dig his nails into us anywhere he could reach.

I always try to respect my students. I always try to stay calm and even but there are times, when I let myself think about it, that I have to wonder how long can we do this and what will happen to these kids? This kid is still small enough that we were able to carry him next door and utilize the quiet room but what will happen to him high school when he cannot be carried? What will happen to him in life when he goes after someone in the grocery store or at McDonalds?

As I finally transitioned him out of the room, determined to make it work this time, I showed him my bleeding and said "ouch." He took my hand and kissed my arm saying "sorry." I know it is inappropriate for my student to kiss my arm but it happens so quick and there is such a fine line for him and others like him. How do you teach nice touch and interaction? We can't jump or be afraid of him or the behaviors will only worsen. He can be so sweet and kind at times but he is so unpredictable. Twice last week he was being sweet, trying to hug an adult and then, out of nowhere, bit. Once was with a staff member, the other time, his mother. Where is the line drawn for us? It is always so unclear and changes from student to student.

I don't like allowing myself to feel the emotion that comes with this. I sit here shaking a little, tears in my eyes, freezing cold. I am probably cold and shaking from being wet and coming back to reality as the

adrenaline slows. After such a battle we are always so tired and quiet, within ourselves. We ask each other over and over “are you okay?” and we almost always answer “I am fine” but we are always very aware that this response is as rote and learned as the “sorry, sorry” we get from the students. We have to be okay because we have to move on. We have nine other students to worry about for another four hours.

The agitated student has to go right back to his routine so he doesn't learn that aggression can lead him to a place where he wants to be, left alone in a room to stim in his own little world where he is happy and content. This student will not be suspended. He will not have detention. He will simply go check his schedule and see what is next and so will we. We will move on to interact with the next student and try our best not to jump when they reach to touch us. At the end of the day I will want to crawl in bed and cry over the sadness of it all. I will want to be lost in my own world but I won't. I will go to class and talk about diversity and maybe try to get people to have a glimpse at what it must be like to take a kid like this into the real world. After class I will go home and cook dinner and try not to jump when my partner tries to touch me or kiss me. I will try to not cringe as she reaches out to me.

I think I will never write about this again because it is too hard to think about. The emotion is too overwhelming yet I am acutely aware that turning it off the way we have all learned to do is probably not good for our long term well being or success at this job. There has to be a happy medium.