

Critical Incident

A second year teacher had a student who arrived in homeroom with a bad behavior record. This student was an African American male who received special education services for a learning deficit in reading. "Tony" was a notorious fighter and Mrs. Tough had dealt with him the previous year during lunch duty for defiant behavior. Tony walked into the classroom on the first day of school with a bad attitude about school. He was disruptive, rude and insubordinate. To make matters worse, Tony's sister was also in Mrs. Tough's homeroom. "Lori" was constantly bothering him about his behavior and his poor work habits.

Tony was enrolled in a school of about 1200 middle school students. The school was an urban public school and serves a very large community. Mrs. Tough was ware of the problems that urban teachers face and came up with a plan for dealing with Tony. Since Mrs. Tough was not male nor African American, she had to find a way to relate to Tony. At the beginning of the year, Mrs. Tough would confer with Tony about his behavior. Mrs. Tough made it clear to Tony that she thought he was a good kid and that she wanted him to reach his potential. Mrs. Tough was consistent and fair when disciplining Tony. Soon, Tony's mother was called in for a conference since Tony was not working in class and his grades were very low. Behaviorally, Tony was improving. He was still insubordinate at times but never violent.

It was immediately obvious that Tony's relationship with his mother was not good. During the conference, he would talk back to his mother, laugh about his behavior and repeatedly say that he could not wait to move away from her. Mother expressed concern for Tony since he has no father figure, his father is a drug addict and Tony is just like his father. Mother wishes Tony could be more like his two sisters who are good students. Mother adamantly refuses to medicate Tony for ADHD. The conference ended with very little accomplished for Tony. We decided that we needed to get a new case worker for Tony since the previous worker had left.

During the school year, Mrs. Tough and Tony built a good relationship. Tony was still not working in class, however, his behavior was good. Tony was still fairly disruptive in class because he is ADHD, however he had not been in a fight all year. Soon after Christmas break, Mrs. Tough made a comment about how proud she was of Tony. Literally ten minutes later, Tony had beat someone up in the bathroom. Tony had grabbed a smaller student and dragged him into the bathroom. "Shaun" was an honor student with a flawless behavior record. Shaun was asking another student to help as Tony was dragging him into the bathroom. Tony told Shaun to say "I'm a b**ch." Shaun replied that he did not use that kind of language. Tony said that he need to say, "I'm a b**ch," or he would beat him up. Ultimately, Tony beat him up and was suspended for two days. Upon Tony's return, his mother had to come in for a conference. Tony refused to enter the conference room. His mother had to chase him and threaten him before he would enter the room. When Tony entered the room he would not sit at the table even after his mother vehemently insisted that he do so. Tony had a very different attitude that Mrs. Tough had never seen before. He was mumbling to her, telling her he hated her and that he was going to leave the school, runaway or go to juvenile. When Tony's resource case manager said to Tony that he needed to talk with us and sit at the table, he agreed. When Mrs. Tough and Mrs. Resource spoke to Tony, he

would respond politely with eye contact. When Mother would speak to Tony, he would exhibit this new attitude and mumble to the floor. He admitted that he thought his case worker was gay and that he hated him and his mother. Tony only cared about himself.

Since the conference, Tony was in another fight and suspended for two days. Tony also became defiant toward Mrs. Tough, which was very unusual.