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“Firm, Fair, and Friendly”: A Model for Working with Troubled Youth

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Successful parenting may be the most difficult challenge that any of us will ever face. President David O. McKay said on many occasions, “No other success in life can compensate for failure in the home” (quoting James Edward McCulloch, 1924, p. 42). As important as this assignment is, we were not given an owner’s manual as we began our families, with fool-proof instructions on the care and maintenance of these precious spirits sent to our homes in one manner or another.

Many Latter-day Saint parents labor under some false assumptions which may cause unnecessary grief and unwarranted guilt. When guilt-laden, heartbroken parents come to my office anguishing over the fact that their best efforts are falling short of the success they had hoped for in their children, I often ask them if they know the *Book of Mormon*, and, if they do, if they can

quote the very first verse in that book.

“I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father” (1 Nephi 1:1). Were Lehi and Sariah goodly parents? Did they attempt to teach, guide, and direct their children in the ways of righteousness? If so, they should be guaranteed success--right? Nephi was as fine a son as a parent could expect. Joseph, Jacob and Sam were also fine lads who would make any parent proud. But how about the other two guys--Laman and Lemuel? What happened?

For every Nephi, there is a Laman and a Lemuel. For every Abel, there is a Cain. Even our Father in Heaven had one-third of his spirit children who did not pass their first estate and were not allowed to continue their eternal progression by receiving earthly bodies and coming to earth to be tested. Anthropologist Ashley Montagu remarked, “It is not the most lovable individuals who stand in need of love, but the most unlovable” (as cited in Mead, 1965, p. 282). Many of the finest parents have children in that category.

The Firm, Fair and Friendly Model takes into account that even the best intended parents are going to, at times, struggle with what we now refer to as “troubled youth.” We need to note at the onset that “troubled youth” come from a variety of home environments: from the most abusive and negligent situations imaginable to homes

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with goodly parents, rivaling Lehi and Sariah. Thus the principles presented for working with troubled youth may be applied in both more and less troubled families. Consistent with the K.I.S.S. principle (*Keep It Short and Simple*), the basic tenets of the model are summarized by the three "F's": *Firm, Fair, and Friendly*.

Most family breakdowns can be traced to difficulties in one of these elements. Some families focus on one aspect exclusively, to the detriment of the others; but it takes a delicate balance of all three to have a harmonious and smoothly functioning family. Most children can tolerate *firm*, demanding, and even rigorous rules if these rules are perceived as *fair* and if application takes place in a *friendly* and loving manner. Consider the young athlete who will drive him or herself to exhaustion, enduring all manner of deprivation and pain, in order to become a better athlete, a valued member of the team appreciated by coaches and other team members. If that same child is asked to help a sibling empty the garbage, he or she may call the local family services agency to report child abuse. Be firm as well as friendly toward that fair distribution of garbage. Many parents who try to be their children's best friends and neglect establishing and enforcing reasonable rules and boundaries find they have created undisciplined and unappreciative "monsters."

The Firm, Fair, and Friendly Model is being developed as a set of independent family/parenting modules that can be taught formally in a class or group, or incorporated individually in family councils. The modules are based on sound parenting principles, drawn from a variety of resources, which have been found over the years to be effective in helping develop healthy families.

For this journal article, three of the modules which have received the highest approval rating from families participating in the program have been selected to demonstrate how the Firm, Fair, and Friendly Model might be implemented.

The first module was originally entitled "Screening for Success" because it focused on three questions to ask to determine if intervention would be successful. This was later changed to "The Unilateral Gift," as the module was revised to focus on the concept that sets Firm, Fair, and Friendly apart from other theoretical models. An important aspect in this module is the use of the A and B lists, which help family members to identify and express their needs and wants and also to learn to understand the needs and wants of others in the family.

MODULE #1: OFFERING THE UNILATERAL GIFT

The concept of the unilateral gift helps individuals deal with negotiation stalemates: the "I will when you will" deadlock. It is based on the principles of sharing and understanding the needs of others in the relationship.

Asking Three Important Questions. The process begins with what I refer to as the "three screening for success questions." When couples, families, and even businesses and corporations ask me if there is any hope for success in their system, I tell them that if they can honestly answer "yes" to three questions, there is a nearly 100% chance of success. If any of the answers is "no," the therapy or negotiations need to focus in that area.

1. "Do you genuinely care about the other parties in the system?" (Substitute *family, committee, work place, etc., for system.*) I originally used the word *love* rather than *care*, but *love* has too many meanings and carries too much baggage. For example, many parents, family members, etc. claim to "love" the other parties, but the feeling is more one of duty or obligation. I find that if people genuinely like and care for others, settling differences is mainly a matter of acquiring the skills to reach their goals. If they do not really like the others, any intervention is like straightening deck chairs on the Titanic. Even those of us trained in the helping professions, with our great wisdom and bag of tricks, are not likely to be successful.

2. "Is the problem worth the effort and energy required to resolve it?" Another way of asking this question is to probe with additional questions: "Does the problem need resolving?" "Is it a problem that none of the parties is willing to live with?" Without the urgency that comes from agreement that the problem is serious and needs addressing, it is too easy to give minimum or "half vast" efforts. (The *half vast* can be spelled in another fashion, if you get my drift.)

3. "Are you willing to give a unilateral gift?" I believe that answering this question provides the breakthrough which allows major changes in the relationship to occur. First, all parties need to truly understand the needs and wants of the others in the relationship. This can be done through creating the "A/B List." Each individual writes out an "A" list--what he or she wants and needs in the relationship. Then each creates a "B" list--what he or she

thinks is on the other party's "A" list. All kinds of interesting things happen as individuals exchange these lists. Quite often people find significant misunderstandings in what they think others want and need. Important changes may begin with this clarification.

Once the needs and wants of all parties are truly understood, the assignment is for each member to select one item from the other's "A" list and agree to provide that gift unilaterally, without any strings, regardless of whether the other person "deserves it." The only discussion allowed at this stage is for each member to propose his or her gift and the recipient to merely indicate whether it would be appreciated or not. Individuals are encouraged to start low and easy so that they will be able to give a gift to someone, not because that person deserves it or earned it, but because that person is liked and the gift may help resolve a serious problem.

I have seen remarkable and almost miraculous changes in families, couples, corporations, teams and the like when they regularly give unilateral gifts. Unilateral gift giving is effective even if only one party is willing to negotiate. This model changes the adversarial paradigm of win/lose to a paradigm of win/win .

Comparing A and B Lists. The "A" list, the things Party A wants most in the relationship, and the "B" list, the things Party A thinks will be on the "A" list of Party B, must come together if expectations are to be understood. Each member reads his or her "B" list and compares it with the actual "A" list it was composed to predict. A variety of activities can be generated that help group members to learn to identify and express their wants and needs and to understand and appreciate the needs and wants of others in the family or organization. The following are examples of questions that might generate beneficial discussion:

- a. How accurate or "in tune" was the writer of the "B" list with the person whose "A" list is being predicted?
- b. What items were left off that are on that person's "A" list?
- c. What items are on that person's "B" list that are not on the other person's "A" list?

Switch roles so that each family or other group member has the opportunity to share both "A" and "B" lists. Notice the surprises that this experience provides. Why is it important to know the other person's actual needs and wants? Why is it important to be able to communicate one's own needs and wants accurately?

Giving Unilateral Gifts. First, all participants must understand what *unilateral* means. A gift which is *unilateral* is given regardless of whether the other person "earns" it or is able to reciprocate. *Unconditional* is another way of expressing the concept. To practice and reinforce the concept of the unilateral gift, each party should select an item from his or her partner's or another family member's "A" list and make a unilateral (unconditional) offer to meet that need. It isn't necessary to select the top-ranked need or want from the other's "A" list, as some may be very difficult to fill. It is the unilateral nature of the gift that is important, not its size or value. The promise of a unilateral gift might be stated something like this: "Because I genuinely care for you, and because I want our relationship to improve, I am willing to _____."

Switch roles until each partner or member of the group has offered a unilateral gift. The only response needed from the recipient is a simple statement as to whether the gift would be appreciated.

This exercise has been a powerful means of breaking through impasses in marriages, families, and organizations. When families become accustomed to giving and receiving unilateral gifts, a whole new relationship evolves as family members feel appreciated and genuinely cared for. I was recently reminded by a fellow AMCAP member that the concept of a unilateral gift is not really new or innovative: Its supreme manifestation is the atonement of the Savior, who gave us the ultimate unilateral gift of the resurrection and eternal life.

MODULE #2: USING FAMILY COUNCILS AS PROBLEM SOLVING OPPORTUNITIES

Families can be the center of the most rewarding and enjoyable experiences of our lives, or they can become dreaded associations where painful and destructive interactions occur daily. Many volumes have been written discussing how to create and maintain healthy, functional, and happy families (e.g., Clarke-Stewart, 2006; Covey, 1997; Vuchinich, 1999). Much of this information is helpful, but the sheer mass of it can be overwhelming, and approaches and theories conflict.

I often recommend an approach similar to the "Toolbox" model (Gigerenzer & Selten, 2002). For a complex task, success is more likely if we have the right set of tools. Consider trying to construct a set of furniture with a rock for a hammer and a table knife for a

screwdriver. I grew up in a home where the family's tools were about that extensive. Needless to say, very little got repaired, and those repairs were neither durable nor permanent. If you were taking your prized automobile for a major transmission repair, how confident would you feel if you saw that the mechanic's repertoire of tools was 867 hammers? Hammers are a vital tool in repair, but there are some tasks that require additional resources.

Fixing families can be like fixing furniture or repairing cars: Success depends on having *quality* tools and *correct* tools for the job. One tool that has been consistently very effective in a variety of family settings is the family council (Forgatch & Patterson, 1989; Holland & O'Neill, 2006; Vuchinich, 1999).

Family councils are regularly scheduled meetings where problems are addressed and solutions worked out with input from the entire family. Effective family councils employ a variety of communication, problem solving, and conflict resolution skills. When established and conducted effectively, they can be an excellent tool in family problem solving.

Employing the Tool. The following guidelines and suggestions can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of family councils:

1. *Employ the K.I.S.S. (Keep It Short and Simple) principle.* Sessions in which the agenda has been planned and limited, often to a single issue, are more likely to lead to effective problem solving than a "shot gun" session where many concerns are randomly addressed. Guidelines, boundaries, and basic rules of engagement should be established before discussion begins.

2. *Consider the "you can't eat an elephant in one bite" and "stuck record" approaches.* In problem solving councils, the family should stick to the assigned topic and avoid tangential discussions. Digressions from the assigned topic need to be handled gently but firmly: "That's something we need to find time to think about and discuss. But today we need to focus on _____." Be aware that one who feels his or her position is losing support may deliberately try to divert attention to another topic.

3. *Follow the generally accepted "rules of engagement."* Even warring nations (at least most of them) have agreed to conventions of warfare, such as those of the Geneva Convention, which forbid certain tactics and weapons. Such prohibitions might include armed attacks on unarmed civilians, inhumane treatment of prisoners, or

chemical and biological warfare. Fighting fair should be more important than winning at all costs.

4. *Limit the length and depth of the topic selected for discussion.* Too often the solution to the problem becomes more painful than the problem itself. Experience and research show that problem solving activities that are limited to short periods of time and followed by an enjoyable activity are more likely to be successful than conflict sessions that drag on until everyone is exhausted.

5. *Look for areas of agreement and opportunities for compromise.* Many say that most problems can be solved with the world's most important "three word message": "I love you." But in family councils the four word healing message can be even more powerful: "You may be right." This type of comment or response is referred to as a *defuser*. Other defusers work in the same way: "I can see where you are coming from," "I think we both would agree that _____," "That certainly makes sense." Defusers tend to keep emotions at a lower level and reduce defensiveness, allowing thoughtful and non-confrontive negotiations to continue.

6. *Establish rules of respect.* Another frequently affirmed conflict resolution skill is to be able to "disagree without being disagreeable" (Deutsch, 1993; Elgin, 1997; Kurcinka, 2000; Rudisill & Edwards, 2002). Common rules of respect and courtesy should be established for each family or other unit. Here are some useful examples:

- a. Do not put down, criticize, or mock.
- b. Do not bring up unrelated negative experiences.
- c. Do not interrupt. Let each person finish expressing his or her position.
- d. Engage in active listening; provide feedback to other speakers by rephrasing what they say so they know you understood what they said and meant. One way to do this is to say, "I hear you saying _____" or "I understand your position as _____" before you begin your rebuttal.

7. *Do not use the information discussed in a family council in other situations in a punitive way.* Everyone should have the right to express his or her feelings without fear of retribution or revenge.

Focusing the Discussion. It is important to focus the discussion in ways and terms that keep it from deteriorating into defensive confrontation. Professional negotiators and mediators have suggested the following strategies:

1. *Focus the discussion on the behavior, not the person.* It is

important to refer to what a person *does* rather than comment on what we imagine that he or she *is*. The focus on behavior requires that we use adverbs (which describe actions) rather than adjectives (which amplify labels) when referring to a person. Thus we might say that a person “talked considerably during the meeting,” rather than saying that this person “is loud and talkative.”

2. *Focus discussion on observations rather than on inferences.* Observations communicate what we see or hear in the behavior of another person (“you responded quickly to his criticism”), while inferences communicate our interpretations of the behavior (“you were defensive”). Inferences or conclusions may be profitably shared, but they should be clearly identified as inferences or conclusions. (“When you turn away while I’m talking to you, I feel as if you do not value what I say.”)

3. *Focus discussion on description rather than judgment.* Description is a process for reporting what occurred, while judgment is an evaluation in terms of good or bad, right or wrong, nice or not nice. Judgments occur within a personal reference frame or value grid, whereas description reports in a more neutral manner.

4. *Focus discussion in terms of “more or less” rather than “either . . . or.”* The “more or less” terminology implies a continuum on which any behavior may fall, stressing *quantity*, which is objective and measurable, rather than *quality*, which is subjective and judgmental. Thus, an individual’s participation may fall on a continuum between “low” participation and “high” participation, rather than “good” or “bad” participation. To communicate with specifically delineated labels is to trap ourselves into thinking in categories which have different values for different people and thus are barriers to effective communication.

5. *Focus discussion on behavior related to a specific situation, preferably to the “here and now” rather than to the abstract “there and then.”* Behavior is always tied in some way to time and place, and we increase our understanding of behavior by viewing it in this context. Information is most meaningful if it is given as soon as appropriate after the observations or reactions occur.

6. *Focus discussion on sharing ideas and information, rather than on giving advice.* By sharing ideas and information, we leave the receiver free to decide for himself or herself how to use the information, in the light of personal goals and current circumstances. When we give advice, we tell the individual what to do with the information and thus

take away this important freedom. In addition, giving advice makes us responsible for failure if the course we recommend does not prove to be successful.

7. *Focus discussion on exploring alternatives rather than on finding “THE CORRECT” answer or solution.* The more we can focus on a variety of choices and alternatives, the more likely we are to stimulate and maintain an active search for more effective solutions and better ways to do things. Focusing on just one “correct” solution can lead us into the “Guess what I think the answer is” game that many teachers inadvertently play. Individuals hesitate to suggest or explore alternatives if the goal is simply to guess what someone else already “knows” is the solution.

8. *Focus discussion on the value the information may have to the recipient, not the value or “release” that it provides the person providing the information.* The information provided should serve the needs of the recipient rather than the needs of the giver. Help and feedback need to be given and perceived as an offer, not as an imposition or mandate.

9. *Focus discussion on the amount of information that the person receiving it can use, rather than on the amount you have which you would like to give.* To overload a person with information is to reduce the possibility that he or she may use it effectively. Giving more than can be used is often done to meet some need within the giver rather than to assist the receiver to solve the problems. This is a common fault for parents, teachers, and others in “authority,” who have lectures that they desperately want to give—particularly in matters of values and belief systems. My children have a delightful way of letting me know when I have gone into overload: “Dad, you really overestimated my curiosity on that one.”

10. *Provide discussion and feedback at a time and place and under an emotional level that will enable the individual to thoughtfully receive and process the information.* Intellectual capability and emotional readiness are critical in problem solving discussions. Certain problem areas require a particular level of intellectual and moral reasoning capacity to be effectively analyzed and discussed. Problems discussed should be within the capability range of participants. When emotions are high and accusations and defenses are defeating the purpose of the discussion, it may be wise to reschedule until participants have had a chance to get their feelings under control.

Selecting Agenda Items for Family Councils. Certain elements and components can be useful in a family council,

depending on its goals and objectives. Not all items need be included each time. Family councils should be scheduled at times that are most convenient for family members. The mood and setting should be positive, focusing on seeking solutions rather than finding fault. The following procedures are recommended components:

a. *An introduction of the agenda and goals of the family council.* This might include a quick review of the “rules of engagement” that have been established.

b. *Calendaring and scheduling.* Family councils provide opportunities to review what is going on in the lives of the family members and to make lists of appointments, concerns, deadlines, commitments, etc., that the family and individual members have.

c. *A review and follow up of the last family council.* It is important to follow through with assignments that were given, goals that were achieved, and areas that still need more effort. Problems encountered should be identified.

d. *Discussion and problem solving of the selected concern.* A number of problem solving models can be applied.

e. *Closure.* Good discussions have good closure. This should include a summary of the conclusions reached and assignments made.

f. *Focus on the positive.* Some families conclude by having every family member give a genuine compliment to every other family member, along with offering unilateral gifts for the week.

g. *Move on to a previously scheduled recreational activity.*

MODULE #3: GREEN LIGHT, YELLOW LIGHT, RED LIGHT: PART I, APPLYING THE PRINCIPLE TO DEALING WITH BULLIES AND HARASSMENT

This unit was initially developed at the request of a school district to help a number of students who were being intimidated, harassed, bullied and, in general, treated unkindly. Unfortunately, these students were reacting in ways that compounded the problem, led to unfavorable impressions, and required disciplinary actions. Serious problems in schools across the nation have shown what can happen if rejecting and bullying behavior cannot be resolved.

The basic principle of the Firm, Fair, and Friendly Model is to educate all parties on when to use which level of intervention and who should be involved at each stage. The underlying principle is to attempt to get the problem

resolved at the lowest intervention level possible without putting the child at risk or setting up individuals for failure. As this principle is discussed, each stage will be described with suggestions for intervention for the various parties, with the goal of training students, parents, school and community participants to understand what their roles are and how to work with the others.

The model is based on the following basic precepts:

a. Every child has the right to a safe, non-threatening environment.

b. Maintaining this environment requires a coordinated, collaborative team effort.

c. Every team member has a responsibility.

For this program to be effective, all parties need to receive adequate training and coordination. First, various team members need to be identified and their roles defined. Some communities have established systems such as interagency councils. If a system is not established or is incomplete, a community action team can be developed to deal with this and other related problems. An effective team should include the following:

a. A school component, including administrators, teachers, and counselors

b. Student representation

c. Parents/ family representation

d. Mental health professionals

e. Police

f. Juvenile court

g. Family services

h. Others as needed

Green Light Mode. The *green light* represents the steps that the individual student can take before enlisting the help of others. Theoretically, when the student has skills and abilities for dealing with harassment or intimidation issues, fewer problems will escalate to serious proportions. Developing and exercising skills gives the student self-confidence and expanded ability to apply these skills in other conflict resolution and problem solving settings.

The student should be trained to recognize which situations are reasonably safe to confront with his or her skills and which pose a serious enough danger to “withdraw and report.” Skill training at this stage might include the following:

1. *Recognizing and understanding the role of the “victim’s” response in the probability of being targeted.* Bullies tend to enjoy tormenting students who respond with extreme

emotions. Excessive crying, whining, and "helpless" behavior comprise one type of emotional response. Another response set involves going "ballistic" and overreacting with aggressive retaliation. Students who respond aggressively may find themselves in more trouble with authorities than the bully who initiated the confrontation.

In addition to controlling their responses, students can be taught to recognize and eliminate their "erasures." An erasure is a behavior that irritates, annoys, or provokes others to the extent that it seems to "erase" all of an individual's good behavior. For example, an individual may be courteous, friendly, and helpful, but have a habit of using vulgar profanity that makes others forget or "erase" his or her otherwise excellent qualities.

2. *Using "I" statements and other forms of assertiveness training.* To avoid overreacting either too helplessly or too aggressively, students are taught how to respond assertively. First, it is essential that students learn to discern situations when they can practice assertiveness without placing themselves at risk for injury or abuse.

Assertiveness has been described as the ability to stand up for oneself without being aggressive or abusive. One effective assertiveness skill is learning how to use the "I" message: e.g., "When this happens, I feel _____, and I would appreciate _____." For example, a student who is the victim of name calling might say, "When you call me *retard*, it makes me feel bad. I would appreciate it if you would cut that out."

Students are trained on how to express their feelings and make suggestions for resolving conflicts. A student who sees someone misbehaving in the cafeteria might say, "I don't like it when you butt in line and push little kids around. If you keep it up, I'll report you to the lunch monitor."

3. *Recognizing and learning to avoid situations where bullying and harassment are most likely to occur.* Bullies tend to avoid settings where responsible adults might intervene (Astor, Meyer, & Behre, 1999; Farrington, 1993; Olweus, 1994). They usually pick on loners--individuals who are isolated and have no one to help them stand up for their rights. Students who have been or are likely to be victims are encouraged to avoid dangerous settings and to try to ally themselves with at least one associate or friend. They are also taught to seek out authority figures or other responsible individuals if they feel threatened, as recommended by Casey-Cannon, Hayward, & Gowen (2001), Newman, Murray, & Lussier (2001), and Olweus & Limber (1999).

4. *Making and maintaining friendships.* As mentioned, one

of the main deterrents for victimization by bullies is being accompanied by friends (Cowie & Olafsson, 2000; Olweus, 1993; Pellegrini & Long, 2002). Many students do not have the skills to acquire and maintain friendships. In addition to learning to eliminate their "erasures," some students are taught friend-making skills.

For example, one very basic skill is learning how to focus on and attend to others. Children who lack friends are often those who are egocentric and focus exclusively on themselves. Students are taught how to identify and express interest in the needs and interests of others. Following are a few examples:

"I notice that you are pretty good with a skate board. What are some of your favorite tricks?"

"I understand that you know how to play chess. I would really like to learn how. Do you think you could help me?"

"I noticed you checked out one of the Harry Potter books. They are my favorites. How do you like them?"

5. *Developing a new set of friends and finding a support system with peers.* Many victims try too hard to impress or gain favor with the wrong crowd. Some groups and some kids are just not going to accept them as friends. One successful approach is to encourage the young victims to identify other youth who might better appreciate them. Research has shown that students in groups are less often singled out for harassment and bullying (Boulton, Trueman, Chau, Whitehand, & Amatya, 1999; Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999; Junger-Tas & Van Kesteren, 1999; Pellegrini, Bartini, & Brooks, 1999; Rigby, 2000).

6. *Training in relaxation and stress reduction techniques.* Teaching students how to maintain a calm and confident state even when they are provoked can be very helpful. Muscle relaxation, breathing techniques, positive self-talk, cognitive restructuring, counting to ten, visual imagery, and other techniques have been successful (Fallin, Wallinga, & Coleman, 2001; Horne, Bartolomucci, & Newman-Carlson, 2003; Suckling & Temple, 2002).

7. *Know when to calmly disengage and walk away.* Disengaging can be extremely hard for some of the students who overreact either by falling apart emotionally or by retaliating aggressively. These students must learn to keep their emotional thermostat from clicking on in times of stress.

If the bully or harasser does not respect the victim's decision to disengage and walk away, or if the victimizing continues despite the student's best efforts to employ the other "green light" strategies and skills, it is important for

the student to know whom to turn to for support and protection.

Yellow Light Mode. In an ideal world, the *green light interventions* would be all a student would need. However, not all problems are going to be resolved with green light ease. There will be situations when the best of techniques do not deter peer harassment, bullying and intimidation. Additionally, in this less than ideal world students will get upset in other settings, with school staff, parents, etc. In these imperfect situations the *yellow light condition* is warranted.

The individual student is not responsible for dealing alone with more than the green light behaviors. Yellow light planning involves identifying and training responsible adults to whom a student may turn for additional help when his or her best green light behaviors do not resolve the situation. Learning to handle the green light area reduces the likelihood of being viewed by peers and adults as a *wimp, narc, cry baby* or other popular designation. However, knowing when to enlist the assistance of others greatly reduces the probability of explosive, assaultive, or emotionally upsetting occurrences when the student can no longer handle the problem alone.

The *yellow light* mode requires team and system planning. Parents, counselors, teachers and administrators need to determine whom the student can turn to for which forms of services and interventions. Some successful yellow light applications allow for an upset student to leave the confrontation setting and go to speak with a counselor or a trusted and trained teacher or administrator. This approach is not restricted to incidences of harassment, but can be utilized any time a student feels that he or she is losing control.

The school system, parents, and counselors should develop some intervention strategies to assist upset students. Strategies which have been successful include active listening, exploring alternatives, and making direct intervention in the student's behalf. Some schools incorporate strategies such as a peer court to help deal with harassment and bullying issues (Mahdavi & Smith, 2002; Nessel, 2002; Poch, 2000). How well the system responds to the specific and legitimate needs of the upset student determines how successful the program will be. The student has to have confidence that those he reports to will make things better and not worse. This may require some training in conflict resolution and other intervention strategies. Policies and procedures involving disciplinary actions for students who violate the rights of others may

need to be revisited and revised.

Red light mode. Just as there are limits to what an individual can do in his or her own behalf, there are limits to what parents and schools can do, even in serious cases. It is as important to know what a system cannot do as it is to know what it can. A parent's job is to parent, and the school's job is to create a safe learning environment and provide effective teaching. We get into trouble when we try to wear the hats of others.

There are times when resources outside the family and the school are needed. The school system and parents need to decide under what conditions outside resources should be brought in and how this should be done. Policies and procedures should be determined before a crisis occurs, so that all participants understand their responsibilities and expectations.

The following outside resources may need to be included in the red light mode:

- a. Police
- b. Juvenile court and probation officers
- c. Health and human welfare
- d. Emergency services (911)
- e. Mental health crisis resources
- f. Resources identified by the family for support and respite, including clergy, family, neighbors, etc.

GREEN LIGHT, YELLOW LIGHT, RED LIGHT: PART II, APPLYING THE MODEL TO FAMILY RULES AND POLICIES

An additional application for the Green Light, Yellow Light, Red Light Model helps families determine what level or system of rules to develop and implement, depending on circumstances.

Green Light Mode. The *green light* condition allows a fair amount of freedom with few restrictions, as long as the behavior does not cross into the *violation area*. Like a thermostat, the heat is not turned up unless a predetermined unacceptable level is reached.

Every family should try to designate a substantial range of behavior that can be controlled using the green light mode. Children enjoy the freedom and benefits, while parents appreciate the compliance with reasonable standards that do not require constant monitoring and intervention.

Critical to successful green light conditions is a clear agreement as to where the light changes to yellow or red so that outside sources begin to exercise control.

Following are some areas in which families have been successful with the green light mode:

a. *Homework.* A student who is performing at an agreed-on academic level, with no negative reports from the school, is allowed to select and schedule the amount of study time needed to maintain that level of performance.

b. *Personalizing and upkeep of the child's room.* As long as a minimum level of cleanliness and order is maintained, and as long as certain agreed-on values such as prohibition of violence, profanity, or excessive sexuality are maintained, the child is free to design and maintain his or her own living space.

c. *Choice and use of music, videos, etc.* As long as agreed-on standards are not violated--such as avoiding unacceptable themes of excessive violence, inappropriate sexual content, and disrespect for authority--the child may have some freedom in selecting music, video, TV shows, and computer games.

d. *Bedtime.* If the child can get up and have everything ready for school on time, be reasonably cheerful, and function effectively, he/she might be allowed some choice in bedtimes.

Yellow Light Mode. Most of the time families are going to be operating in the *yellow light* mode. Within this mode the family develops and implements rules that follow the Firm, Fair, and Friendly Model. In the outside world, most behavior results in consequences, often referred to as rewards and punishments. I prefer to use the words *costs* and *benefits*, which focus on the individual earning the consequence and imply a certain amount of fairness.

Families should be prepared to spend some time developing appropriate rules and agreeing on consequences. Rules developed in a calm environment before specific misbehavior occurs are superior to rules that arise in the heat of the moment.

The following procedures are recommended for using the yellow light mode:

a. *Identify target behaviors with specific definitions and limits.* Do this at a calm time when a potential violation has not just occurred.

b. *Establish "fair" consequences.* Natural or logical consequences should be used whenever possible. Consensus and commitment are essential to any system of rules. Immediacy and consistency in delivering consequences are more important than consequence size.

c. *Provide positive rewards or benefits for the desired behavior as well as costs or punishments for the undesired behavior.*

d. *Use minimum discussion during enforcement.*

e. *Using a "corrections model," allow opportunities for "reduced sentences" or "time off for good behavior."*

Red Light Mode. A parent's job is to be a parent. Like teachers and schools, parents can get into trouble by trying to wear the hats of others. At times additional resources are needed. Before a time of crisis, the family should discuss conditions under which outside resources may become necessary, along with *who* should be included and *how*. The following formal or public resources might be needed from time to time:

a. Police or probation officer

b. Mental health crises worker

c. Emergency services (911)

d. School staff when problems are school related

e. Division of Family Services

Many families also decide together on those who might serve on a more informal resource team to assist the family in times of crises or stress. The following individuals might be considered:

a. Extended family

b. Trusted neighbors

c. Scout leaders

d. Coaches

e. Community or church youth leaders

f. Home teachers

CONCLUSION

Even the most generous unilateral gifts and the most professionally conducted family councils would probably have had little effect on the dispositions or behaviors of Laman and Lemuel. Children do have their free agency, and the older they get, the more freely and creatively they are going to exercise it. However, for children who fall somewhere within the "normal" range of the Nephi-Laman continuum, the Firm, Fair, and Friendly Model can be helpful in alleviating family stresses and conflicts, providing skills and competencies for handling peer difficulties, and establishing standards and processes for appropriate functioning within the home. A family Liahona with "F Dials" may be what is needed to keep many on a reasonable path to the "promised land" of peaceful home and school environments.

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