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# DETENTION DYSFUNCTION MEDIATION

## Regi Cluny, Math Teacher and Detention Monitor

You are a ninth-grade math teacher in a large public urban high school. You believe in strong discipline, and in the importance of children and teenagers demonstrating respect for their parents and teachers. Fortunately, your school administration shares this value. At this school, students are held responsible for their decisions and their misdeeds. They learn when they have to face the consequences of their actions.

You know that Dr. Miller, parent of Jan Miller, has contacted the OCT with a complaint against you. Jan Miller is not in any of your classes, but you had an unfortunate run-in with her when you were doing your weekly service as detention monitor.

Jan had received a detention that day from her science teacher. (A classroom teacher records detention and sends the name into the central office, which gives the list to the day's detention monitor.) You had no idea what Jan had done to earn the detention.

When Jan arrived at your detention room, she immediately began saying that she “couldn’t have a detention because my parent is a doctor who is very busy...” She was talking quickly, in what you thought to be a rushed, loud, and high-handed manner. So, her parent is a doctor! That’s all you needed to hear. You told her the detention would stand and she’d better sit down. Instead, she picked up her backpack and headed to the door, saying that “this would have to be changed,” as if she thought her all powerful Dr. Parent could fix the detention. What a nerve! You stood in the doorway with your arms crossed. When it was apparent that she planned to charge through and virtually knock you down, you stepped aside. In a last attempt to stop her, you tried to put your hand up, but you were too late. Your hand caught on Jan’s long ponytail, and she grabbed and yanked it away, whipping her backpack around and into your chest. An open felt tip marker flew out and put indelible ink on your favorite shirt. (It was expensive – you wore it only because you were attending a function after work that day.) You did raise your voice in the heat of the moment, yelling something to the effect that leaving was a stupid decision and said she would have to pay for it (meaning the shirt).

Because of her impudent behavior, you marked Jan down for three weeks of detention. Jan did show up each day in the detention room after school for three weeks. Jan and her parent are just lucky that you never pressed the cost of the shirt. Dry cleaning was unable to remove the mark.

Even though three weeks of detention may seem steep, you view it as critically important that people respect detention rules. It was problematic that Jan’s display occurred in front of half a room of other students in detention that day. If Jan could revolt and leave, why wouldn’t they? You wanted to send a message that detention must be respected, or the consequences will be severe.



You don't know whether this behavior was an aberration for Jan or whether she was a discipline problem in elementary school. (This school starts with seventh grade.) You had seen Jan occasionally in the hallways in the first week or so of school. You remember that she seemed to be struggling with the heavy backpack, and that you once commented about that. Jan is slightly built. (Ironically, that's the backpack which slammed into you). Other than that, you didn't observe anything unusual.

You were amazed and angered to learn that Jan's parent had contacted the OCT office about the detention incident.

[When playing your role in the mediation: consider taking a rigid, authoritarian attitude, expressing disdain for the "undisciplined," characterizing the student as having an "attitude," and resist questioning of your judgment at the time.]