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## HITTING BACK MEDIATION

### Confidential Information for Teacher, Chris Cooper

You are Chris Cooper, a teacher at the local grade school. This year, you welcomed a new child, Emily Parker, to your classroom. Emily had moved to your district from another area, and you suspected she was having trouble adjusting. You worked a lot with her individually. You felt a bit sorry for her as the physical education teacher told you that other children often made fun of her weight, calling her “Pudgy Parker”. At one point, you asked her parent, Pat Parker, to meet with you to talk about Emily’s school performance. You were afraid she was falling behind and daydreaming in class a lot. You liked Pat’s positive response and noticed an improvement in Emily’s work. You and Pat kept in touch weekly about Emily’s progress in class.

A couple of weeks ago, you looked out your classroom window after school and saw Emily push another child. You left the classroom to go out and check on the situation. In the hallway, Emily and two other children came running toward you. The two others got to you first and began saying that Emily had pushed and hit them outside. At this point, Emily caught up to you and, upon hearing the other children’s accusations, she burst into tears. She wailed, “They are liars,” and began flailing her arms around. You immediately grabbed Emily to keep her from hitting the other two. You told them to go to the administrator’s office. You held Emily and began patting her on the back hoping to soothe and calm her.

The episode ended when the school administrator, Mr. Snyder, came and led Emily away, saying he would “take it from here.” You were relieved because you had begun to feel very lightheaded. In fact, when your spouse picked you up a half hour later, they realized you were having a low insulin reaction. (Last summer, you were diagnosed with diabetes and began taking insulin. You have not shared details about your medical condition with anyone at school.) Your spouse immediately took you to the hospital where you were given the proper medication. You then went home and slept until the next morning.

At school the next day, Mr. Snyder met with you to talk about the incident. He explained that Emily’s parent, Pat Parker, had phoned and complained that you had hit Emily. Pat said that there were red marks on Emily’s arms and back and threatened to file a complaint. You explained that you were simply trying to calm and comfort Emily. You did not hit her, although you did have to hold her arms down to keep her from hitting the other two children (or you) as she was out of control. Mr. Snyder then told you that when he found you with Emily, he had observed you patting her on the back very roughly. He said that it looked like you were hitting her on the back.

You were stunned to hear that. You then confided in him about your diabetes and your belief that you were having a low insulin reaction. You explained that when your spouse picked you up that day, they recognized the symptoms and took you to the hospital for emergency treatment. You told Mr. Snyder that, in your dazed state, your patting Emily on the back may have been more forceful than intended. You vaguely remember feeling the need to grab onto



Emily to keep your balance. Mr. Snyder advised you to say nothing at all to anyone else. In particular, he advised you not to speak to Pat Parker until further notice. At some point after that, Pat phoned you directly. After assuring Pat you did nothing wrong to Emily, you explained that you weren't supposed to talk with them about it.

You have been in the classroom for over fifteen years and have never had a complaint or disciplinary action taken against you until now. You are upset that Pat has filed the complaint. You thought you and Parker had established a good relationship. You don't understand why you two could not have worked through this on your own.

### ***Your Core Concerns and Behaviors in Mediation***

**Appreciation:** So far, you have not been given the opportunity to explain anything to Pat Parker. You have made your explanation to the school administrator, but he doesn't seem to know what to make of your story and encouraged you to "make it right" with Pat in mediation. Although your doctor has told you it is common for persons in the early stages of a low insulin reaction not to know exactly what they are doing or to feel dizzy, you are not sure if anyone else will appreciate that. In addition, no one seems to care that you saw Emily hit another child and that she was literally having a fit in the hallway that day! Pat should be thanking you for keeping her child safe from harm and keeping her from harming the other children!

#### **Behaviors to exhibit in mediation:**

- Deny you did anything wrong.
- Ask Pat why Emily was hitting the other children.
- Suggest that if Pat would do something about Emily's weight problem, perhaps other children wouldn't pick on her.
- Keep repeating that Emily's behavior was not acceptable.
- Suggest Emily should have been treated by a psychologist from the beginning.
- State you have never had a complaint before, and it is ludicrous to believe you would strike a child.

**Affiliation:** You feel that you have already been judged "guilty" by Pat Parker. You are upset that they would take such a stance after all your work helping Emily adjust to the school. You thought they appreciated the extra time you spent with them and Emily. You are very upset Pat did not talk to you before filing a complaint. Although Mr. Snyder explained that you can say what you wish in mediation, you are not sure about sharing your personal medical issues; you don't know if you trust these people.

#### **Behaviors to exhibit in mediation:**

- Be reluctant to talk much about the situation, say you are not sure this should be discussed or settled.



- State you can't imagine this is the first time Emily's behavior has been out of control; children of single parents often have behavior problems.
- Accuse Pat Parker of being a backstabber for filing a complaint against you after all you have done for Emily.
- Imply that you think Emily tends to lash out at her parent.
- Be very reluctant to share your medical history as an explanation for the incident; maintain only that you didn't intend to harm Emily.