

# Let's Be Courteous, Let's Be Caring

Several years ago, Winkelman Elementary School, which serves a diverse community north of Chicago (some children are from welfare families, others come to school in limos), found itself unhappy with student attitudes and behavior. Fights and put-downs among children were common. Students would frequently "smart-off" ("I don't have to listen to you!") to teachers and other adults.

To address this problem effectively, Winkelman's principal and faculty decided they needed a schoolwide approach. They launched a project called Let's Be Courteous, Let's Be Caring that emphasized the values of courtesy and caring at every opportunity.

A giant display inside the school entrance defined "courtesy" in terms of observable behaviors: **(1) Saying please, thank you, you're welcome, and excuse me; (2) Being a good listener; (3) Waiting your turn; (4) Acting politely everywhere; and (5) Discussing problems.**

"Caring" was defined as: **(1) Sharing; (2) Respecting others' feelings; (3) Following rules; (4) Working cooperatively; and (5) Being a good friend.**

When teachers set up classroom rules with their students at the start of the year, they asked, "What rules do we need that will help us show courtesy and caring toward each other?"

When a child broke a rule, the teacher took him or her aside and asked, "Did that behavior show caring?" or "Did it show courtesy?" In this way, students learned to use these values as a yardstick for assessing their behavior.

Students wrote a school song on the theme of courtesy and caring, and planned and conducted weekly school assemblies on courtesy or caring presenting a skit or bringing in a speaker. When teachers had teacher-parent conferences, they said to parents, "We're working in school on courtesy and caring, and we need your help at home."

All students became involved in community service working, for example, with the physically handicapped or with the elderly in nursing homes so that they learned to care by giving care.

The moral environment at Winkelman steadily improved. Parents say fights are now very rare; children say that if you forgot your lunch, you can always count on somebody to give you some of theirs; and a veteran teacher who has taught in several

other schools says that Winkelman students show an unusually high level of respect for adults and each other. Three years after beginning its character education project, Winkelman was recognized in a Chicago-area competition for excellence in both academic achievement and character development.

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