

## ***Breaking the Rules***

***By Paul J. Ashton, Psy.D., D.Min.***

*Consultant to the VIRTUS® Programs*

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*The person who is trustworthy in very small matters is also trustworthy in great ones; and the person who is dishonest in very small matters is also dishonest in great ones. —Luke 16:10*

As the saying goes, “It is who you know.” Whether it is the host or hostess at your favorite restaurant, the teller at the bank, or the person behind the popcorn counter at the cinema, let’s face it—we all like to have friends in high, or at least convenient, places. Isn’t it wonderful to step ahead of the line on a crowded Saturday night at the restaurant and get a “good table,” or not have to wait the three days for an out of town check to clear, or get a little extra butter on top of your popcorn? It *is* who you know.

One of the warning signs described in the Protecting God’s Children® program is: “Thinks the rules don’t apply to them.” This is a crucial component of Step One of the Five Steps in *A Plan to Protect God’s Children™* because it is so important to understand how a perpetrator might operate in our presence. It can be a difficult warning sign to understand because of the often positive feelings that we attach to any gesture of kindness made on our behalf—even if, and sometimes most especially, if the rules are bent or broken, or someone enables us to get ahead in some fashion.

Children constantly witness their parents’ behavior and learn from their actions. Receiving too much change from the grocery clerk, having the computer in a department store misread the code and charge you less for an item, getting an extra or “free” anything is a boon we all enjoy receiving. We know, however, that there is always a right way to do things, and the correct, good, or moral answer to anything that we receive that does not belong to us is clear—return it. It is so tempting, however, to accept what seems to be “manna from heaven” when these small “gifts” come our way. Since we don’t personally know the people behind the large grocery and department store chains, we might rationalize our behavior—they overcharge us anyway—we deserve that little extra.

Doing the right thing may often be more trouble than it is sometimes worth. Nothing, however, can replace the good feeling we enjoy when we return to others what we have gained from error or been given by someone who has no authority to do so.

Teaching children the right way, no matter how small the example, is the best way to instill in them that no one should break rules for us. A habit of using our friends and influence to get ahead could lead to an attitude of entitlement, but one that is devoid of value.

Perpetrators break rules which appear to benefit a child in small and sometimes large ways. They cut corners, give permission, and allow children to benefit from their favors in order to manipulate and groom them. On the surface, even to parents, these rule-breakers seem to be helping the child in ways that appear to be blessings.

Perpetrators even break the rules for the parents of the children they groom. They give them special gifts, offer them opportunities that no one else has, all the while presenting themselves as people who only want to help the family and do good for them and their children.

Kind deeds, favors, acts of charity, good intentions—these are all wonderful blessings shown to us by our brothers and sisters all in God’s name. We all know these and recognize them

when we see them. However, rule-breaking in any way, shape, or form is exactly that—breaking the rules. We need to be clear when we teach children about right and wrong that the exceptions make to the rules are costly, and sometimes that cost is overwhelmingly painful.

As much as all of us would like to, we can not have it both ways. We know the right thing to do and the right way to teach children is always to do the right thing. When an adult breaks a rule, we do not raise it up as a blessing, but uncover and teach it for the sadness it really is. So easy to say, but sometimes so very hard to do.

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