SCENARIO: A RIGHT TO PROTECTION

Problem - Jasmine is walking through scanning and gets told to step aside. She is confused and annoyed that her morning is being slowed down but she complies. She is told that the Mace that she keeps in her backpack for protection is a threat to others and she must be suspended for bringing it to school. Jasmine claims that, being a vulnerable teen traveling alone, it brings her comfort to have a method of defense on hand. Jasmine feels like her rights to protection are being violated but is told that the decision is final.

Solution - Jasmine takes a breath. She does not have the right to bring a weapon to school but she thinks of one right she does have: the right to assemble a student council that can aid in helping students who have gone through similar experiences. Jasmine meets with her school guidance counselor and expresses that she would feel more comfortable discussing injustices to students with other peers. Jasmine asks for permission to form a student faculty alliance club with support of a school social worker. Even though she doesn’t have Mace anymore, Jasmine feels less vulnerable.

This brochure was produced by New York City high school seniors in the Freedom & Citizenship Program at Columbia University

http://freedomandcitizenship.columbia.edu

Authors: Aman, Shayan, Antonio, Iaisha, Kirsten, Rose, Amadou, Christieanne
SCENARIO: TURNING AROUND A BAD SITUATION

Problem - Zayn has been asked to leave the class because of his disrespectful behavior (using foul language towards the teacher because the teacher was rambling). Since Zayn was already having a bad day, he lashed out at the teacher despite the teacher doing his best to reason with Zayn. Zayn, as a result, finds himself in the Assistant Principal’s office. The Assistant Principal informs Zayn that as a result of his behavior, he will be suspended for a week pending a meeting with his parents. Zayn is now freaking out because he knows that this looks terrible for him, and that his parents will not stand for it. Zayn is now contemplating what he can do.

Solution - Zayn reflects on his actions and realizes his fault in the situation. Zayn knows that he should’ve thought about the consequences of his behavior before lashing out. He knows that a bad day doesn’t make an excuse for disrespecting his teacher and is aware that he could’ve stopped himself from having an outburst. Zayn owns up to his actions and takes the incident to his school social worker. Zayn proposes that he and the teacher have a one-on-one meeting to prevent the escalation of negative feelings towards each other. The school social worker arranges the meeting and they reconcile. Zayn’s teacher says that everyone has bad days and that he can confide in him anytime, he just wants the best for him and his future and to see him graduate. By being proactive about resolving the bad situation Zayn made sure one suspension does not turn into another one.

SCENARIO: STANDING UP TO TEACHERS

Problem - Sarah is sitting in class when her English teacher decides that it is best to write another essay for the hundredth time that marking period. She had been writing non-stop essays (almost four a week) and Sarah feels exhausted and fed up with everything. She decides to confront the teacher to voice her opinion, but he does not seem to be listening to her. Whenever Sarah tries telling him how she feels, he shoots her down as if Sarah is an annoying fly buzzing in his ear. Sarah is heated and is ready to stand up for herself even she has to be disrespectful about it.

In this scenario, Sarah feels her actions are warranted by her teacher’s bad attitude. She knows that if she decides to be disrespectful towards the teacher, she will be the one to get into trouble and could even get expelled if it gets out of hand. If expelled, Sarah could be headed towards the Student-to-Prison-Pipeline (the tendency for students--mainly minorities or those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds--to face trouble in school that leads them towards prison later).

Solution - Sarah decides to take a deep breath. She already knows that she is in the right for trying to have a civil conversation with him, and possibly he does too. Sarah sits down in her chair and keeps quiet, completes the assignment her English teacher told her to do and hands it in. She knows that this will only benefit her in the future. When the bell rings, Sarah goes straight to her guidance counselor and notifies them of what occurred. By doing this, she has shown that she has self-control and is not just a reckless teenager (like the teacher may believe). She gets her side of the story on record and asks for support in convincing the teacher to change his assignments. Afterward, Sarah goes to her next class and continues being the strong individual she is and pays him no mind.

SCENARIO: CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Problem - Zora is wearing a headwrap in school—a common hair accessory worn by many people of the African diaspora. A teacher she does not recognize tells her to remove the headwrap or face other consequences that will result in serious penalties. She feels oppressed even in their own learning environment. She complies but feels that her voice is being silenced.

Solution - Zora makes it known that she disagrees and is hurt by the actions of school officials. She decided to review the rights she’s given in school and realizes nowhere does it say cultural garments are prohibited. She takes the situation to the school authorities and advocates for cultural sensitivity training. By staying calm during the incident she kept herself safe and bought herself time to find the right school authorities to help her change the situation at school.

Learn more about your rights on our website! http://freedomandcitizenship.columbia.edu/student-rights-2019