

Stress Management and Discipline towards Self and Societal Growth: A Case of Edmund Rice Catholic Education Centre



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**Workshop presented to the administration and the teaching staff on 26th February, 2025
Presented by John Bosco Kiingati**

Introduction

The human being is endowed cognitively (Decety & Wheatley, 2017), emotionally, and behaviorally (Gupta, 2023; Bawa & Sharma, 2025). Similarly, the human being is a social being, and with this comes the economic, psychological, cultural, environmental and spiritual-ethical realms (Ethics Unwrapped, 2022). With the continued expansion of technology, the human being has also moved from being localized, to being global (Lawson, 2023). All these factors, interact intra and inter-personally, making the person a complex human being.

Within the person, different faculties inherently inter-relate in ways that at times elicit coherency and consistency (Coning de, 2009), while at other times they experience conflict and disparities (Vallacher, Norwak. & Bui-Wrzosinska, 2013). In the second phase where conflict and disparities are experienced, stress is realised. Stress therefore, is part of the human person, and its management, is consequently a human requirement, for continued individual and societal growth. For stress to be appropriately managed, discipline is required.

In learning institutions, the word “discipline” is largely used if not overused (Mariene, 2012; Bodovski, Nahum-Shani, & Walsh, 2013; Ngwokabuenui, 2015). Hardly do educators and learners sit back to clearly define its literal and metaphorical meanings. As a result, its uses, could easily fall into the realm of misunderstanding, and thus add to the stress, instead of facilitating stress management. It is on this backdrop that the paper deals with discipline within the confines of stress management.

Aim of the Study

It is hoped that at the end of the reflective workshop, and the subsequent study, the participants shall be clear on the understanding of both stress and discipline, and that they shall be aware of factors leading to, as well as the effects of stress. In addition, it is anticipated that the participants shall then have narrowed down to causes of stress in learning institutions, improper as well as proper ways of dealing with stressors, towards improved individual and societal growth. In the process, it is also hoped that the role of discipline in facilitating appropriate stress management, shall be elucidated. As an entry, the study starts by defining stress.

What is Stress?

Stress is defined as “a person's physical, mental, and emotional reaction to a certain stimulus (stressor)” (Sujaritha, Deepa, Nandhini, Vandhana & Mahalakshmi, 2022, p. 2). The terms “stressor” and “trigger” are used interchangeably. Stress is indeed the ability of our human systems to respond to specific demands (Pearlin 1981 quoted in Sujarintha et al., 2022, p. 2). On that note therefore, stress is a human bodily ability. Lack of that ability would otherwise lead to increased vulnerability.

STRESS RESPONSE

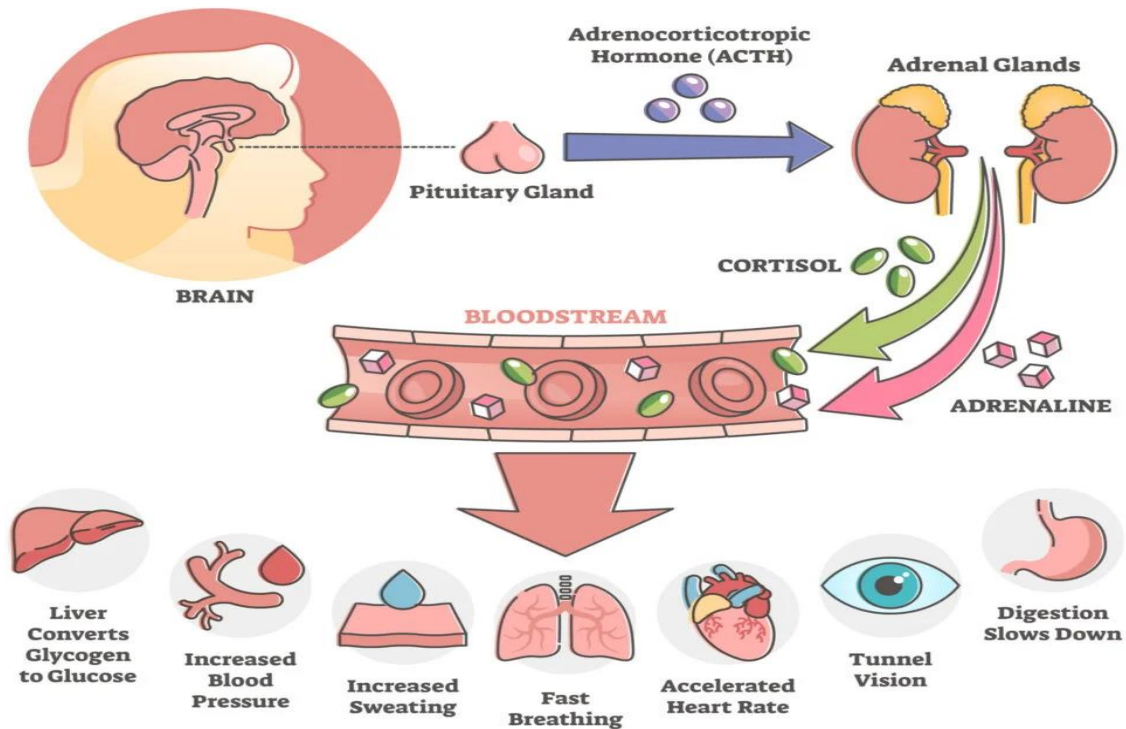


Figure 1 derived from Nona Child Development Center (2021), indicates that stress is a body reaction (release of adrenaline¹ or cortisol²) based on the threat elicited by the trigger. Ideally, the level of the body reaction should be equivalent to the degree of the threat. Nevertheless, depending on the intensity of the threat, its frequency, the time it occurs, and the state of the body, the reactions differ, hence the types of stress. The body reaction is meant to allow the body to fight or flee. The fight/flee response can either be short or long term. The response entails release of adrenaline/cortisol (Ranabir & Reetu, 2011). Then the body gets ready for action through “increasing heart rate, decreasing digestion, shunting blood flow to main muscle groups, and altering numerous other autonomic nerve activities, [including] providing a burst of energy and strength to the body” (Sujarintha et al., 2022, p. 3).

Types of Stress

In studies on stress, the following types arise: Eustress, distress, acute stress, and chronic stress, cumulative stress, and traumatic stress.

Eustress: is defined as the “good” or “positive” stress (Kupriyanov & Zhdanov, 2014). On the one part, it is looked at as emanating from pleasurable moments such as during a marriage ceremony, on receiving results of success or even job promotion. On the other part, it is viewed as the release of sufficient adrenaline/cortisol, to allow one appropriately deal with the threat. During an academic examination, a learner may require a release of adrenaline and cortisol, enough to make one recall what is needed in the answering of the question. An athlete, who desires to break a high-jump record, may require just enough to get him/her over the bar. A hunter who is abruptly attacked by a vicious animal, may require adequate strength to overcome the danger. Such is eustress.

Distress: Sujarintha et al., (2022) define distress as negative or “bad” stress. The authors associate it with hazards, unusual, unjust, or painful experiences such as loss, death, long-term illness,

- 1 a substance that is released in the body of a person who is feeling a strong emotion (such as excitement, fear, or anger) and that causes the heart to beat faster and gives the person more energy.
- 2 A hormone made by the adrenal cortex (the outer layer of the adrenal gland). It helps the body use glucose (a sugar), protein, and fats.

injury or even divorce/separation. When not addressed adequately the phenomenon may result in depression (Kiingati, 2023) and even suicide (Kiingati, 2024). As it is with Eustress, distress may also be defined as the release of too much adrenaline, to a level that the surplus adrenaline/cortisol, becomes pathological to the physiological system. A mother, aware of dangers befalling young girls, may be so scared of her daughter's lateness coming home. At the time the daughter finally arrives home safely, the mother's anxiety levels may be too much for her to handle, leading to pathology. More on effects of stress, shall be discussed later in the paper.

Acute Stress: Sujarintha et al., (2022, p. 50) define it as "a type of stress that lasts for a short period of time" and could either be eustress or distress. The indicators are sweating and increased breathing rate. After a short period, the body tends to normalize. Bryant and Harvey (2000) address it as a disorder. Such stress may be realised when one is asked to do something in front of a group, such as lead in a song. Due to the acute stress decision making may be negatively influenced (Toppings, Ferguson & Kirigolson, 2020), following a mental down-shift.

Chronic stress: Shchaslyvyi, Antonenko and Telegeev (2024), comprehensively discuss chronic stress from a health perspective. Though they do not give an express definition of chronic stress, they state how it "significantly alters gene expression, impacting inflammation, immune response, and tissue development" (p.6). On his part, Yusof (2023, p. 4) defines chronic stress as a state of the body when it is "exposed to stressors with such frequency or severity that the autonomic nervous system does not have adequate chance to activate the relaxation response on a regular basis". Chronic stress, as the name suggests occurs persistently and recurring and is associated with causing illness.

Cumulative stress: This refers to an accumulation or composition of accounts that expose one to chronic stressors that have persisted for at least six months (Epel, et al., 2018) and are experienced over a variety of areas (work or even relationships). These chronic stressors become cumulative when they are experienced across time (Slopen et al., 2018). An individual who loses money at a time when they are marking exams, and not so long ago had received a warning letter, may experience cumulative stress. The situation would be more dire if the same individual went home and found that the children had been sent home for school fees arrears.

Chronic stress is associated with pathology, to a level that there is an open access peer reviewed journal by the name "*Chronic Stress*". The journal publishes all aspects of stress including pre-clinical and clinical studies, as well as stress-related psychiatric disorders (e.g. mood, anxiety, and trauma disorders).

Traumatic stress: This is often studied as a disorder called post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It entails the

exposure to an experience or experiences that is[are] traumatic [shocking, frightening, or dangerous, and may be associated with death and] can cause emotional and physical harm for[to] the individual...[the experience(s) affect(s) its [integral human] functioning, "overloading" it with reminders of the trauma in various ways, causing anxiety, driving it to try to avoid them, and ending up "shutting down" to itself, or in other cases, constantly projecting its negative emotional state (Bryant et al., 2019, quoted in Mairi & Konstantopoulou, 2024, p. 31).).

Traumatic stress, unlike other stress types, is often vivid to the persons close to the affected. This is because it strongly alters or even hinders an individual's operations, rendering him/her incapacitated. The stress emanates from pre-during-and/or post events (Qi, et al., 2016). Thus, it is rare that it is a one-off event. Having discussed the types of stress, the next section looks into causes of stress.

Causes of Stress

Omwenga and Mwetii (2024, p. 276) come up with four categories of causes of stress affecting teachers. These are stressors associated with the organization, the job, the individual, and the body (response to stress). They state that these stressors affect the educator's performance.

(i) *Organizational stress* has variables that include control/delegation, organizational climate, and organizational design;

(ii) *Job-related stress* has factors that include task overload, time constraints, role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload;

(iii) *Stress elements associated to an individual* include income level, financial limits, competing demands, career advancement, and job stability.

(iv) *Body related stressors* factor in the physiological response to stressors which in turn act as increased stressors. These are “anxiety and profuse perspiration, difficulty feeling relaxed, chronic pain or muscle discomfort (back, neck, and shoulder, among other body parts), bloating or upset stomach, and shortness of breath” (Omwenga & Mwet, 2024, p.277). By extension, the psychological is also affected leading to “[a]pathy/loss of interest in work, low morale, reduced productivity, bad work relations, and absenteeism” The last two tend towards behavioural stressors.

Effects of Stress

On matters relating to the effects, item number (iv) (Omwenga & Mwet, 2024) discussing causes of stress, sheds light.

(i) *Physiologically*: The individual becomes anxious, has increased perspiration, difficulty in relaxing, and has chronic pain and muscle discomfort. In addition, the person may suffer bloated and stomach upset and shortness of breath. The person may also experience lots of fatigue.

(ii) *Psychologically*: The individual may experience apathy (loss of interest in work), low morale, and reduced productivity. Emotionally, one may experience increased boredom, irritability and anger, as well as hopelessness and despair.

(iii) *Behaviourally*: The individual struggles with work relationships, and may find the self-engaging in absenteeism. S/he may start struggling with appetite.

(iv) *Spiritually*: Religiosity is associated with stress in that the former is used to regulate emotions and nurture hope, thus managing the latter (Kim & Seidlitz, 2002). Spirituality is also associated with meaning in life and subsequent purpose. Nevertheless, the individual who suffers stressed states, may experience struggles on matters of faith; attempting to understand the role that God is playing in the struggles, and may experience abandonment and hopelessness; “*Eloi Eloi, lama sabachthani*” (Mark 15:34).

All rounded effects of stress on the individual, may in turn affect one’s relationships with others, thus influencing their social relationships. It can also be inferred that the economic wellness of the individual is affected. When one is unable to deliver at work and relate well with others, they may lose their job, or when in business, be unable to relate well with customers. These may in turn negatively influence one’s financial (economic) standings.

Stress affecting Educators in Learning Institutions

The educator is a complex human being acting on (and being acted upon by) other complex human beings within a complex environment (cf Bhagoji, 2024). In these intra and inter-actions, stress emanating from within and from without, become imminent. In the learning institutions, the educator cannot avoid stressful moments, as noted previously, emanating from

(i) *the organization* and its stakeholders (government, proprietors, management, administration, benefactors, and parents, among others). State politics influence policies that in turn affect the educator.

(ii) *the job*, including tasks to be accomplished, relating with other teaching and non-teaching staff and with learners.

(iii) *the individual* (personality, competencies and deficiencies, identity: - role-based, ethnicity, social position (family, community, church)). One also has other roles that they play, which include son/daughter, sibling and even parent. These stressors from the individual also bring to play one’s desires and ambitions, versus one’s reality.

(iv) *one’s body* (experiential identity: - gender and age). A question at this juncture may be to what degree is the person comfortable with their looks.

(v) *the environment*, in which one lives, the type of house and the demands of the neighborhood: - the infrastructure to/from and around.

(vi) *one's economic standings*, where the financial ability versus one's ambitions may also be an added stressor. Financial stressors interrogate one's earnings versus one's expenditure. The expenditure includes the day-to-day expenses, short and long-term investments. With increasing consumerism and materialism, finances become a stressor. On this note, leisure places, including supermarkets where attractive displays may lure instinctive buyers, may add to the financial-related stress levels.

Temporal/Reactive ways to Deal with Stress (Defense Mechanisms)

Triggers generally emerge from our common senses/perceptions: What do we see, hear, smell, taste, feel? At times through telepathy, we may have unexplained inner dispositions that affect our systems (Petrič, 2020). There are times when we have control over what we perceive: what TV station do I watch? What social media do I engage with? Where do I go to? Whom do I associate with? Nevertheless, there are moments when we hardly have control over what we perceive. When in public transport, we may not choose whom we sit next to, and how fast and reckless the vehicle is driven. Apart from voting, occasional contributions through social media and "chief's barazas" (gatherings held by local administration), we may have little choice on how the country is governed. Unconsciously, whenever we sign a contract with the employer, we say "yes" to quite a number of consequences that we may never have given deep thought. Such is the case with other issues that we have little control.

Whether we have control or not, we shall perceive and get affected by the triggers. Thus, our systems shall react whether we are conscious or not. At this juncture we have emotional-driven and cognitive-driven reactions.

Emotional-driven reactions tend to be quite sporadic. Emotions are reactions that follow triggers. They are mainly categorized into energy giving (anger and happiness), and energy draining (sadness and fear) (Sensoy, 2021). These are largely de-linked from cognition. Together with emotions come defence mechanisms. Bowing (2004), states that the defence mechanisms, have a "cognitive distortion with some containing elements of dissociation". In this context, they act as sieves or even as blocks to cognitive dealings with the threat. They offer temporal reprieve.

Freud and Anna Sigmund defined them as "'unconscious resources used by the ego" to decrease internal stress" (Parekh et al., 2010, p.1). Table 1 gives a summary of the defence mechanisms and brief explanations of each. The information is derived from Bailey and Pico (2025).

Defense Mechanism	Explanation	In the Context of the Educator
Primitive Defense Mechanisms		
Acting out	- Development of detrimental behaviors that distract attention & energy away from other stressors; may be present in conduct disorder, antisocial personality disorder, or oppositional defiant disorder.	Educator may attempt to ignore stressful triggers and focus on other topics. s/he may also opt to be rude or ignore/be (appear) disinterested.
Avoidance	-Dismissing thoughts or feelings that are uncomfortable or keeping away from people, places, or situations associated with uncomfortable thoughts or feelings; may be present in post-traumatic stress disorder, where one avoids the location of a traumatic motor vehicle accident or avoids driving completely.	An educator may avoid an environment where they experienced a traumatic experience including job loss
Conversion	- Development of physical symptoms that cannot be explained by patho-physiology or physical injury; recognized in conversion disorder, also known as functional neurologic symptom disorder.	Educator may struggle with conditions that may not be readily explained medically, emanating from a psychological state.

Denial	-Dismissing external reality & instead focusing on internal explanations or fallacies and thereby avoiding the uncomfortable reality of a situation. This defense mechanism may be present in someone who continues to shop for expensive designer clothes despite being in serious financial debt.	Educator may “refuse” to accept their role to a problem; What is my contribution to the existing challenge? May it be my attitude or even my vulnerabilities?
Identification	- Internalization or reproduction of behaviors observed in others, such as a child developing the behavior of his or her parents without conscious realization of this process. Identification is also known as introjection.	Educators may find themselves unconsciously acting out roles of people or even positions that they admire.
Projection	-Attributing one’s mal-adaptive inner impulses to someone else. Example is someone who commits an episode of infidelity in their marriage and accuses their partner of infidelity or may become more suspicious of their partner.	Educators who may be dishonest and short of integrity, may start blaming others of the mal-practice.
Regression	- Adapting one’s behavior to earlier levels of psychosocial development. For example, a stressful event may cause an individual to regress to bed-wetting after they have already outgrown this behavior.	Educators may find themselves regressing into substance abuse including behavioural addictive behaviours such as social media.
Repression	-Subconsciously blocking ideas or impulses that are undesirable. The mechanism may be present in someone who has no recollection of a traumatic event, even though they were conscious and aware during the event.	Educators who struggle with lies, may do so, so repeatedly that they hardly tell lies from truth.
Schizoid fantasy	- Creating an internal retreat into one’s imagination to avoid uncomfortable situations. The mechanism may present commonly in children or later in development, may be present in schizoid personality disorder.	Educators may struggle with displaced imaginations that may at times be linked to metaphysical (religio-spiritual) fanatic overtones.
Splitting	- Failing to reconcile both positive and negative attributes into a whole understanding of a person or situation, resulting in all-or-none thinking. Splitting is commonly associated with borderline personality disorder.	Educators may choose to either see the half-empty or the half-full part of the learner or of their colleague, ignoring the integral nature of the individual.
Higher-level Defense Mechanisms		
Anticipation	-Devotion of one’s effort to solving problems before they arise. The mechanism may be present in someone who prepares for an important job interview by practicing their answers to the toughest questions.	Educators may live in the future/fantasy of the new job or the new promotion and fail to seize the day
Compensation	- Focusing on achievement in one area of life in order to distract attention away from the inadequacy or fear of inadequacy in another area of life. The mechanism may be present in a student who receives poor grades on their report card and then devotes more time and effort to extracurricular clubs and activities.	Educators may choose to only focus on their successes and remain oblivious of their limitations.
Displacement:	- Transferring one’s emotional burden or emotional reaction from one entity to another. The mechanism may	Educators may transfer their work challenges to their families at home or vice versa.

	be present in someone who has a stressful day at work and then lashes out against their family at home.	
Humor	Decreasing or combating the negative emotions associated with a situation by using comedy. For example, telling a funny story about someone during a eulogy.	Educators may look for slightest moments to make jokes out of serious issues or laugh out when being challenged
Intellectualization	The development of patterns of excessive thinking or over-analyzing, which may increase the distance from one's emotions. Example is when someone diagnosed with a terminal illness does not show emotion after the diagnosis is given but instead starts to research every source they can find about the illness.	Educators may argue intellectually trying to justify their mistake rather than accepting and working towards improvement.
Isolation of Affect	- Avoiding the experience of an emotion associated with a person, idea, or situation. The mechanism may be present in someone who describes the day their house burnt down in a factual way without displaying any emotion.	Educators may choose to avoid emotions even and rather focus on only the cognitive/facts
Rationalization	-Justification of one's behavior through attempts at a rational explanation. This mechanism may be present in someone who steals money but feels justified in doing so because they needed the money more than the person from whom they stole.	Educators may easily justify their learners' performance and failure based on their (learners') limitations, ignoring their (educators') role in the result.
Reaction formation	- Replacing one's initial impulse toward a situation or idea with the opposite impulse. This mechanism may be present in someone who teases or insults a romantic interest whom they like. Conversely, reaction formation may be present in someone who is overly kind to someone whom they dislike.	Educators who spend time and joke with the learners they dislike and vice versa
Sexualization:	- Associating sexual aspects to one's experience of certain people, places, objects, or ideas. Sexualization can refer to the development of one's sexual identity in general. Alternatively, sexualization can refer to the development of specific fetishes or sexual references to conventionally non-sexual entities.	Educators who may over-use sexual connotative terms and at times insults with sexual overtones
Sublimation	-Transforming one's anxiety or emotions into pursuits considered by societal or cultural norms to be more useful. This mechanism may be present in someone who channels their aggression and energy into playing sports.	Educators who transform their uncomfortable emotions into work. May be workaholics, or may even over-indulge in addictions
Suppression	- Consciously choosing to block ideas or impulses that are undesirable, as opposed to repression, a subconscious process. This mechanism may be present in someone who has intrusive thoughts about a traumatic event but pushes these thoughts out of their mind.	Educators may opt to avoid discussions of uncomfortable topics, including death, sickness etc

While Defense Mechanisms have a role to play in momentarily protecting our systems from harm, they are not appropriate ways to deal with issues. Over-time, others realise the defense mechanism and consequently render the user immature. Maturity entails having appropriate methods

of dealing with stressful issues, for integral individual and social development. Discipline falls into the category of appropriately dealing with stressors.

Appropriate Methods of Dealing with Stress (Discipline)

Prior to initiating mechanisms to deal with stressors, individual educators are invited to be aware of the “Serenity Prayer”:

**God,
grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and
the wisdom to know the difference.**

This prayer seeks to categorize stressors into two: those that we cannot effect change; those that we can effect change. The focus is on personal strengths and abilities. It is an acceptance of my limitations as a human being and avoidance of the attempts to be the Supreme Deity; sin against the first commandment.

Following the serenity prayer, the process invites the individual to redress one’s self-awareness. Awareness of the self in relation to one’s strengths and limitations is a notable prerequisite of maturity. The self is the instigator as well as the first beneficiary of any carried-out efforts. It is thus, required that the individual is aware of the self as the principal actor, and upon whom success and failure lie. With the gifts of life, health and time having been granted, utilization of these resources among other inherent and acquired capacities, is recipe for development.

The second aspect of awareness entails one’s environment. This includes the social as well as the physical environment. A steady guide is the 5W and 1H: What is happening? Who is involved? When did it happen? Where was it? How did it happen? Finally, Why (How come) it happened? It is prudent to be cautious of the Why questions as they are apparently intrusive and may be challenging to respond to.

On the question of the who, the persons that surround the individual, and are willing to journey with this individual, are important. The location, from which one operates, is equally important. Together, the aspects of social and physical environment, present to the individual, the opportunity to co-create. It is through an appropriate engagement with the environment that one’s potentials and competencies are realised.

In awareness of the self and of one’s environment, there is an unsaid invitation to be cognizant of God’s role in the activities of the individual. One may do all that is humanly possible but still not realise the anticipated outcome since it is not in accordance to God’s will. Constant search for God’s Willis discernment and it is an exercise of prudence. It grants rest and authentic serenity.

Whenever stressors emerge, the speed with which the individual system accepts the outcome, is the promptness with which the human system starts to deal with the issue. While it is challenging to readily accept traumatic phenomena such as news of terminal illnesses, and other losses, including death, the more one stays in the experience of the moment, the more they are likely to effect healing. Rather than argue, pray and hope that things were different, the more we accept, and the more we help others to accept, the better and the quicker, the healing starts.

Whenever triggers can be avoided, without compromising one’s growth, they should be. However, as situations dictate it is not always possible to avoid. In such circumstances, one has to deal with the situations. For hurt or stress to be realised, the following components largely tend to be present:

- (i) relationship with the self, with significant others and with the environment
- (ii) expectations derived from the relationship(s)
- (iii) breach of the expectation(s)
- (iv) interpretation of reasons surrounding the breach
- (v) decision to act in a particular way depending on the interpretation.

In addressing each of the stages of the hurt/stress process, let it be realised that the individual has it in their docket to control the relationships in which they engage. When the individuals surrounding the individual are not dependent on one's choices, the individual still has the role of setting clear boundaries on the interactions; fluid boundaries easily lead to increased hurt. In addition, at the level of the expectations, the more realistic they are, the less the chances of getting hurt. Also, the slower the process of raising expectations, the lesser the chances of hurt, and the more the individual is able to critically interrogate the levels of these expectations.

Whenever there is a breach to the expectations, there is a chance to re-look and interrogate whether they were fallacious, too high or even very hastily arrived at. It is an opportunity to re-look, learn and improve for a better future. A speedy interpretation, often marred by emotions, blurs cognition. This leads to increased hurt and broken relationships. The same goes to decisions made in the process. Decisions are a cognitive faculty (not an emotional one). It is therefore prudent that the right ambiance is used in making decisions.

Conclusion

The term "discipline" is associated with research, knowledge and education. It also entails pursuit of set principles and order. Addressing discipline from a reductionist perspective of reward and punishment; reinforcement and weakening of behaviour (Bandura, 2004) is a dis-service to the imminent term. One that is disciplined becomes a disciple; a follower of a certain pathway. This anticipates relationships with the self, with significant others, and with the environment. Awareness of the self and of the surrounding, and the subsequent systematic process of dealing with stressors, is discipline, whose consequences are increased happiness and wellness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Inversely, allowing an emotional "avalanche" to blur the cognitive path of dealing with stressors is indiscipline, and leads to increased hurt.

Work to do

Task process:

1. Participants come up with cases, that they have encountered (may be hypothetical), and which led to stressful moments.
2. Participants share the cases or even act it out in short (two minute) skits.
3. Participants discuss the case(s) identifying the stressors, tempting defense mechanisms, and appropriate ways to deal with the issues.

Hypothetical Stressful Cases that emerged from the Participants, founded on Past Experiences

Case A: Teacher-Student

A Form two student was reported as being responsible for the pregnancy of a married Biology teacher who was stationed in the same school. The case was confirmed by both parties to be true. This fifteen-year-old learner was proud to be responsible; he was man enough and had "conquered" a teacher. He was in love. On her part, the Biology teacher, newly married, was ashamed of the issue, and was scared that both her marriage and employment would end. The case was more complicated since the husband of the Biology teacher had gotten wind of the story. He had been away for a lengthy period and so could not be responsible for the pregnancy.

Speedy Defensive Reaction (avoidance)

The preset five-member tribunal listened attentively to the case. Administratively, it would suffice to terminate the contract with the biology teacher and suspend or even expel the student. This would leave the teacher managing her issues away from the learning environment. The Form two student would be expelled and so leave the school. Over time, the tension in the school in relation to the school environment would die away. The aggrieved husband would be left to deal with the issues of his life away from the school environment.

Care-led Intervention

The facilitator reminded the participants that they were in a Catholic institution where everyone's welfare was important, including that of the biology teacher and the learner: In the parable of the Lost Sheep, Jesus left the 99 and went looking for the lost sheep (Matt 18: 10-14). Given this situation, what may be best for all?

Participants noted that the biology teacher had a greater issue than just having sexual relationships with a minor and becoming pregnant; what had led her to getting involved with a minor, knowing all too well the risk of losing her job and her marriage? In pursuit of a care-led intervention, it was agreed that rather than a speedy solution to send the teacher and the student away, it would be prudent for professionals to accompany both the biology teacher and the student, separately. If needed, some time off the school premise would be availed. This process would communicate care and concern to all involved parties, on the issues at hand. This would allow the teacher to re-look at her life and understand what was going on within her and subsequently influencing her relationship. This process, does not entirely remove disciplinary measures to ensure that she too learns from her actions.

As for the learner, the growing mind had already been exposed to active sex. Key questions needed to be addressed on matters of his morality. How was his relationship with his parents and with other female members of his family? He needed to also be guided to prioritize his academics, nurturing of competencies and values. Focus on sex would place him at a disadvantage in his future days. For both the teacher and the student, the continuation of the process would shed more light to the situation.

The aggrieved husband also needed assistance. He was hurt and his relationship as well as his image were at crossroads. What is it that he had done to suffer such humiliation? How would he trust in the future? Was it in his thoughts to consider forgiveness? How would he carry on in the future with a child that was not his? These and many other questions needed to be addressed by the right professionals. By extension, there were other people that were involved in the entire case, central among them, the unborn child who was at risk of being aborted or later rejected in life. How best would the process, factors in his/her wellness?

While the initial three required care and caring accompaniment to allow them deal with the shameful issues, all other affected parties needed to be considered. The environment (the staff and other learners in the school environment and in the neighborhood) also needed healing, as well as deterrence measures, to avoid future such-like eventualities. Talks on morality and discipline may be required for the larger school community. In the talks, individuals would be given opportunities to share on challenging issues in their lives and in their relationships. Hopefully, the case at hand would in some way emerge, get discussed, and lessons extracted, towards improving the future. A subtle balance was needed between taking hasty-stern disciplinary actions, which are often dismissive, and concern for the “lost” sheep, and the welfare of the entire community.

Case B: Teacher-Teacher

It was reported that a married female teacher (Angie) was being accused of having sexual relationships with another male teacher (Demb) in the same school. Angie was married to Tim and both were teaching in the same school. Prior to the report, Demb and Tim had been involved in a physical fight following the issue.

Speedy Defensive Reaction (projecting)

Administratively, several issues needed redress. The first is that two teachers were involved in a physical fight. This is against the school rules, and against teacher ethics where they should be role models to the learners. Disciplinary measures as stipulated in the school policies would take place. This may include transfers or even subjected to litigation, depending on the severity of the harm and the desires of the aggrieved. If the teachers were employed by the Board of Management, it would suffice to get the contracts of the three terminated. Public announcements on the measures that had been taken would then be done the rest of the school community. This would pass a message to them all, on consequences following such acts. The process would communicate the unwavering position of the school administration on such like matters.

Care-led intervention

In an environment of integral human care, various issues needed clarification. Each of the individuals would first have fair hearing. This may be done individually or together. The aim of the hearing is not to get a winner versus a loser, but rather a win-win situation. The necessary disciplinary procedures would be discussed with them, and followed to ensure justice to all.

However, in addition, the individuals would be required to have other preventive and corrective measures. This may include therapy sessions to allow for improved self-awareness and emotional

intelligence, as well as continued growth. The aim would be to journey with each individual in order to assist them deal with the challenges relating to their interactions. The professional accompanying would supposedly assist the couple address the underlying issues in their marriage and see how these were contributing to the implied love triangle. This may also incorporate (though separately) the man who is involved in the love triangle, a situation that may in turn be influencing the relationship between him and his wife. Of course, these relationships by extension influence the relationships between parents and their children, and also between the concerned teachers and the learners.

Listening, showing empathy and unconditional positive regard (respect), should not be confused with avoidance, or even escapism from the issue. Rather, the steps are to allow a more comprehensive understanding of the situation. It also means giving appropriate attention to the issue, in order to identify the underlying individual and marital issues. The process would also give a chance to each of the three (and any other closely affected individual) to re-look at their issues and so start working towards improving themselves.

Violence in school is not allowed at all. Indeed, it is criminal since it is linked to assault, injury and even murder (loss of life). On the one hand, these are bad examples for learners. Learners learn that the “best” way to solve disputes is through violence that may be verbal or even physical. On the other hand, there is an issue of challenged emotional intelligence (lack of emotional self-control), among these teachers. How come they lacked self-control? How was it that they were ready to jeopardize losing their jobs and even going to prison, by engaging in violent activities? As teachers, what examples were they setting to their learners?

There is also the case of sexual imprudence. Ethics and morality are a dicey issue and so need to be handled cautiously and caringly. Hasty decisions often end up in increased hurt and broken relationships. A question that constantly comes to mind is the degree to which the administration is well equipped to deal with the eventualities?

Case C: Teacher-Parent

Jonte (pseudonym) was an intelligent and well-behaved Form two student. One evening after school, James a male teacher in the school, found Jonte in a place not so far from the school. He was smoking bhang. Immediately, James confronted him, reminding him that the school was a drug free zone, but the response from Jonte was not respectful. He actually complained that he was not in the school compound, and that the teacher had no jurisdiction to check on him outside school. He ignored the teacher and continued with the drug.

Secretly, the teacher took a video of Jonte smoking as evidence of the action. Later, James reported the matter to the school administration. After some discussion, Jonte and the father were summoned to the school for a hearing. During the hearing, Jonte was quite unapologetic. The father, a re-known

politician, also complained that his time was being wasted on trivial matters. He reminded the teacher and the administration that Jonte was a bright student and so his drug intake was a non-issue. He confessed to having introduced the drug-taking practice to Jonte. He even threatened to sue the teacher for wrongly taking a video of his son without parental consent, and outside the school premise. He demanded an apology from James. The administration appeared to distance itself from the case thus leaving James to handle the matter.

Speedy Defensive Reaction (repression)

The tribunal at first felt that the teacher needed to apologize to allow things to calm down. Since Jonte's father was a powerful politician, confrontations with him would endanger the teacher. In addition, in this public school, politicians were important in influencing development and in getting additional finances for the school's sustainability and progress. So, it would be prudent not to annoy him. After all, all he was asking for was just an apology, and all would go to rest.

Care-led intervention

The tribunal and the participants felt that the initial process would be unjust. First, Jonte would not be helped. The outcome would encourage his drug-taking habit and rudeness to teachers. It would also communicate to other learners that powerful parents would shield their children against any administrative disciplinary issues. In the long run, this would negatively affect Jonte, and the other learners.

The decision would humiliate the teacher. The teacher may even opt to transfer from the school due to shame. If the teacher chose to remain in the same school, he may prefer to keep off any disciplinary issues with the learners. The humiliation would also leave the teacher powerless in front of the learners and this would in turn influence the delivery of content and discipline. The learners would ultimately suffer.

The avoidance of the administration, sets a bad precedent. The teacher would feel unprotected and exposed. This would ruin the amicable working relation between the administration and the staff. The situation would also communicate to powerful parents that they can meddle in the affairs of the school. This would then expose the school to further misuse. The tribunal and the participants in unison agreed that the teacher had done his duty, to confront Jonte. Even if it meant losing his job, it was for the right course, and so worth it. He was advised that he could seek redress in higher set-ups to get further justice, and appropriate measures taken by the higher bodies. These higher bodies would even be the Courts of Law.

As for the administration, the tribunal advised that it should seek guidance from a higher organ. The Board of Management, Ministry of Education offices, and even tribunals could be consulted to come up with clarity on the matter. These higher organs would communicate to the powerful politician that he is not at liberty to negatively influence school decisions. The process would also put the parent to task on matters of appropriate parenting; no parent is free to ruin their children. The society, represented by government, has jurisdiction to watch over the welfare of each of its citizens, including protecting its children against wrongful parenting.

This process would also protect the teacher, and in fact commend him for the action. Concerning his relationship with learners, the teacher's face would be protected. This would in turn encourage other teachers and staff to care for the learners even outside the school environment.

Finally, to Jonte and fellow students, the process would pass clear messages that the school is truly a drug-free zone. Clearly drugs are not allowed in and even outside the school. Such practices are punishable not only in school but even in the outer world. The practice is wrong. It would also be clear that the teacher is a custodian mandated with the task of taking care of the learner in and outside school. This would make the learners be more respectful and aware of teacher/parental power in and outside school. Jonte and his colleagues would also have the clarity of mind to criticize the wrongs that they witness in their families. It is not all right for a parent to take the child the wrong way. As the child grows, they have rights which include, querying when parents do wrong.

Case D: Teacher-Administration

Mr. Karim a science secondary school teacher, had been suspended. The administration of this private institution felt that he had failed to deliver since the mean grade had dropped from 6 to 4 points in the national examination. In the previous years, he had managed to raise the mean grade from 3 to 5 and to 7 respectively. During this "success" phase, there had been no additional remuneration or other rewards. The teacher lamented that also in the school, contributors to the lowered mean grade were involvement in too many co-curricular activities. These were distracting the learners from academic focus.

Speedy Defensive Reaction (compensation)

The immediate reactions were that the teacher was at fault for failing to deliver the anticipated results. On that note, results were the only measure of performance and of success, thus the defense mechanism of compensation. As had been decided, the school being private, the proprietors were at liberty to retain or send away any teacher. What was lacking in the report was the period of suspension, and a re-look into what the contract stipulated.

Care-led intervention

A deeper look into the case brought out areas that the school needed to address. First among these is that while academic performance is important, the integral wellness of the learner is of greater importance. The integral wellness, is inclusive of co-curricular activities. Thus, these activities should be looked at as positive and not distractions to academic wellness. On that note, the teachers should not be appraised based on academic performance alone, more so the mean grade alone.

The case appears to have some unjustly ignored areas. Among these is the failure to reward the teacher when results are positive versus the speedy penalizing of the teacher when the results go down. In addition, a mean grade is an average of all subjects. How come, one teacher was being penalized for the entire performance? Might there be underlying issues, and that the results were a flimsy excuse?

Teachers whose job security is a high risk, tend to focus on survival rather than on delivery. They may even fall prey to cheating during examinations, since it appears to be the gauge to their performance and the reason for which they retain their jobs. In such circumstances, while results are important, as said earlier, the integral development of the learner is of greater importance. Indeed, it is the purpose for education.

The teacher's wellness is a significant component of care in a learning institution. The teacher is also human and is meant to profit from a just environment. The teacher should also be given a chance to learn and grow their professionalism. In addition, there is an apparent unjust position of focusing on negative results while ignoring the positive ones. Notably, teachers should be part of a process, rather than victims of results. The school is meant to have a clear strategy on how to improve results. This strategy, should involve all stakeholders. In it, requirements, activities and benchmarks should be clear long before the final examination. These should factor in all areas of learner development. On that note, each stakeholder would identify areas in which they are lagging behind in delivery. As the process moves towards maturation, each involved individual (including the teacher), would be clear on the anticipated appraisal. In that case, the processes of dismissal and even renewal/lack of renewal of contracts, would be in the open.

Having mentioned of contracts, this is an issue that raises concerns. The appointment letters and the accompanying job descriptions should be reviewed. In addition, appraisal instruments, their timelines and mode of dissemination, should all be clear. This would remove any bias and witch-hunt. Also, working in tandem with the school administration, the board of management as well as the educational offices should be clear on disciplinary steps taken against any teacher. Teachers should be at liberty to contact these offices, for additional redress of their cases. This process would then hold the school administration accountable for their actions.

Case E: Teacher-Welfare

Teacher Angela, a pre-school teacher was struggling with different issues. Key among these issues were financial challenges that were negatively influencing her family relationships. By extension, this was also negatively influencing her performance at work. She visited the welfare office and shared her problem. In detail, she discussed deep matters concerning her relationship with members of her family, including her spouse. She was promised total confidentiality, and that her case would be appropriately dealt with.

After two days, to her shock, she over-heard two teachers discussing her issue. She was certain that the welfare officer had not kept her word on observing confidentiality. She was devastated.

Speedy Defensive Reaction (compensation)

The first reaction was to summon the welfare officer and find out from her the reasons that had made her break confidentiality. The teachers who were heard discussing the issues would also be summoned and questioned on how they had come across the information. If found culpable, the welfare officer would be subjected to disciplinary action. She would be asked to write an apology to Teacher Angela who then would start a process of self-healing.

Care-led intervention

A closer look into the case brought out the issue of confidentiality in the school. All persons involved needed to be taught about confidentiality, and on implications of breaking it. To the victim, breaking of confidentiality is severe injury to the person's image. The injury may taint their image throughout their life and negatively affect their delivery of service. In some cases it may even lead to one's inability to remain in the same working environment. When it concerns marital relationships, it could lead to separation or divorce. Depending on the gravity, breaking of confidentiality is equivalent to murder/assassination of one's character.

In order to take care of the image of Teacher Angela, she would be invited for a sharing on the issue. The degree to which she was hurt would be explored in which case, possible remedies would be put in place. With her involvement, the process of recovery would be commenced. Whoever, she would recommend, would also be brought in as a way of rebuilding the broken relationships.

On the part of the welfare officer, she too would be summoned. What is it that could have made her break confidentiality; is it that she was unaware of its consequences? What is her level of training? How often does she attend re-fresher courses on her delivery of service? Might she be experiencing burnout? All these are factors that need consideration. Aware of her case, the school administration should take the necessary disciplinary (retributive & deterrent), as well as, re-constructive measures.

This means that the measures should follow the forgiveness path, where lessons learned would then improve the welfare officer, the teacher and the entire school community.

As a preventive measure so that such issues are proactively dealt with, additional training and workshops on matters confidentiality would be instituted. These measures would incorporate the staff as well as the learners. In addition, clarity on consequences of breaking confidentiality would be discussed and improved. These measures would assist in improving future issues in relation to confidentiality.

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