

Scenario #2: Family-School Relationship

Mikhail's mother is worried about Mikhail's teacher's comments suggesting Mikhail is not assertive enough in classroom. The teacher says Mikhail does exactly what she asks him to do. The teacher sees this as a problem because Mikhail is now 14 years old and should think on his own and question his teacher when he disagrees with her. Mikhail's mother observes Mikhail in class. She believes Mikhail is quite assertive with his classmates and is willing to challenge his classmates' ideas. She tells Mikhail not to worry about what the teacher is saying, that he is doing what is right by not questioning his teacher.

Questions to discuss:

1. What values do you see expressed by the teacher? By Mikhail's mother? By Mikhail?
2. What might have led to the development of these values?
3. Why do you think Mikhail is not assertive with his teacher, but is assertive with his friends?
4. What parenting category (e.g., Care for Self, Guide, Nurture, Understand, Motivate, Advocate, etc.) identified in the National Parent Education Model (NEPEM) do you see displayed?
5. How is this category expressed by Mikhail's mother?
6. Based on your cultural background, how would you as a parent respond to this situation?
7. As a professional working with this family, what role could you play in this scenario?

Sample Responses:

1. What values do you see expressed by the teacher? By Mikhail's mother? By Mikhail?

Values of the teacher: sharing one's view point/speaking up to be heard; equality

Values of Mikhail's mother: respect people in authority (i.e., teacher) by not questioning what they say or do.

Mikhail: respect people in authority (i.e., teacher) by not questioning what they say or do.

2. What might have led to the development of these values?

The values of the teacher, mother and Mikhail might have been influenced by their family of origin (the family they grew up in); specific life experiences they have encountered (e.g., the teacher might have experienced not being heard in a classroom as a student and wants to make sure all students have their voices heard); formal education in a college or university setting; length of time living in the U.S.

3. Why do you think Mikhail is not assertive with his teacher, but is assertive with his friends?

According to Mikhail's cultural background it may be appropriate to question one's peers, but not people who are older than you or who are in positions of authority (i.e., teacher). In Mikhail's culture, teachers may be seen as people with authority and who deserve a great amount of respect. Questioning a teacher may be seen as disrespectful in Mikhail's culture.

4. What parenting category (e.g., Care for Self, Guide, Nurture, Understand, Motivate, Advocate, etc.) identified in the National Parent Education Model (NEPEM) do you see displayed?

Guide – helping children to be self-disciplined; respectful

5. How is this category expressed by Mikhail's mother?

She visits with Mikhail individually about his behavior in the classroom and not with Mikhail's teacher. She communicates to her son that he is behaving in an appropriate way and should continue to do so. She may tell Mikhail that his teacher knows a great deal and that is why she is a teacher. It is important for him to listen to her so he can learn a lot.

6. Based on your cultural background, how would you as a parent respond to this situation?

As an Anglo who grew up in the United States, I would visit with my son's teacher individually to try and listen to the teacher's viewpoint and ask the teacher specifically what she expects in the classroom. I would then visit with my son to hear his viewpoint and why he behaves the way he does in the classroom. I would help my son think about some ways that he could comfortably express his opinion in the classroom.

7. As a professional working with this family, what role could you play in this scenario?

I could spend time with Mikhail to learn more about the values of her family and their expectations regarding school, student behavior, and the parent/school relationship. After learning more about the above, I could help share some general expectations of students in U.S. classrooms and help Mikhail's mother think about how that fits with her family's values, beliefs and expectations. Depending on the responses to the previous questions, I could also see if Mikhail's mother would be interested in meeting with the teacher to learn more about why she expects Mikhail to be more assertive, and also provide a chance for Mikhail's mother to express her opinion/values if she wanted to with the teacher. I could connect Mikhail's mother up to a parent group consisting of parents who have children in the school so she can also learn about their values and expectations related to school.