

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: My child seems to have a split personality. When he's at school, he's an angel according to his teachers. When he comes home, he's a terror. What's up?

ANSWER: Without being able to ask you specifics about your child, I would offer the following possibilities:

1. Your child consciously works hard at self-control all day. This is emotionally and physically exhausting. When he comes home, all the suppressed irritation, anger, frustrations, etc. come out.
2. Your child thrives in the structure and consistent discipline at school (This is a function of temperament and personality.). At home, there is little structure and inconsistent discipline.
3. Your child is not getting enough sleep and rest at home. By the time school is over, he is emotionally and physically exhausted. The "dam" of self-control breaks when he comes home.
4. Your child is a "people-pleaser" at school (The function of this behavior is a child's need to protect self and has to do with issues of security). Home is an emotionally "safe" environment for him to let loose.
5. Your child has suppressed anger, resentment and hurt in his relationship with you. Feelings always find a way to come out. His actions are revengeful and directed at you personally. Depending on his age, he may or may not be aware of the motivation behind the behavior.
6. Something (bullying, embarrassment, failure, etc.) happens regularly at school that deeply hurts, scares, frustrates or threatens your child. He subsequently acts out at home.
7. Your child really loves everything about school (The acceptance, security, and purpose). In contrast, the home environment is filled with uncertainty, anger, frustrations, abuse, humiliation, etc. He subsequently acts out at home.

As you can see, there are multiple possibilities. His behavior could be explained as simply as not getting enough rest. It could be as complex as suppressed anger and resentment. Or, it could be a combination of some or all of the above possibilities.

1. Begin by making certain he gets enough rest, eats a good protein (no sugar) snack after school, and has a physical outlet for his energy (Very important for boys.).
2. Sit down with his father and discuss how to be consistent and structured in how your son is handled. It is imperative that you both agree.
3. Find ways to celebrate when your son does well at home. Praise him publicly.
4. Read "Parenting with Love and Logic" and implement.

5. Ask for input from his teacher on what works best with your son.
6. Have some on-going, heart-to-heart talks with your son to determine if there are any hurtful, scary, frustrating or humiliating events that regularly happen at school. You might wish to have him talk with the school counselor.
7. Find ways to increase the quality time he has with his father.
8. Make prayer for him and with him an every day event.

As most children grow older, they exhibit varying degrees of what you referred to as a “split personality”. They act different ways in different environments (Usually to the chagrin of their parents.). Most children aren’t even aware of the inconsistencies. Their personalities are developing. They are experimenting with different behaviors, attitudes and ways of interacting. On the other hand, children will be as much “a terror” as **you** allow them. Help your son handle his behavior now before adolescence kicks in. As in every situation, God is holding out an opportunity for you as parents to grow. **Children are one of the two** (You can guess what the other one is!) **most powerful means through which God uses the struggles of life to draw us to Himself.**

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