

"What I Really Wanted to Say to the Teacher Who Called About My Child's Behavior" by Cherie Free

It was a typical Tuesday afternoon. My calendar, jammed with appointments and obligations lay open next to my laptop. My phone nearby in proximity hummed and whirred with notifications and texts. In my head, I was picturing what the evening would look like – what we would eat for dinner, what time to get to the school for the parent information night, how to get my oldest daughter to her golf match and make sure my youngest completed her homework, wondering if medical science really had made it possible for me to clone myself yet and why the heck they had't hurried that process up just a little bit for every other mom like me.

It was then my phone lit up with a phone call.

I rarely talk on the phone. I'm not one of those women who chats for hours on end with their gal pals, sharing the newest dirt and fashion tips. When I recognized the phone number was one of the elementary school's extensions, my heart skipped a little beat.

There are only three reasons why you get a call from the school in the middle of the day. Your child either has:

1. An Illness & Injury: someone threw up, contracted head lice, or broke an arm.
2. Made Unwise Choices: behavior issues – the dreaded call no parent wants to receive.
3. Been The Victim of Unwise Choices: this is equally awful when your child has been bullied or hurt due to the actions of someone else.

With a bit of panic, I picked up the phone and slid the answer call button to the right.

Me: "Hello?"

"Mrs. Lowe?"

Me: "Yes . . ."

"I'm Mrs. Mott, the new art teacher at Zoe's school. I have Mrs. Scott's class in art today. I have Zoe here and I'd like to talk to you about some behaviors during class today."

Me: *gulp* *panic* *What on God's green earth did she do to merit this call?*"Okaaaaay."

"Well, we're learning about patterns right now in art class. We've been making our names with patterns."

Me: *Oh no. We talked about words we don't use at school that don't bother Mommy and Daddy at home, but aren't appropriate. Did she write "suck" on her paper? Oh please tell me she didn't write "suck" or "butt" or "booty" or any other synonym for butt.* "Okaaaaay."

“Zoe was doing a really great job. She was paying attention and doing careful work. She was working really hard.”

Me: *aaaaannnnndddd then KAPOW* “Okaaaaay.”

“And Zoe’s class has something they want to say to you.”

Muffled 2nd graders in a chorus: “Hip, hip, HOORAY!”

“That was hip, hip, hooray if you couldn’t understand it. We just want to thank you for sending such a great kid to school.”

Me: *a muddled puddle of emotions* “Well aren’t you awesome?! Thank you.”

I don’t even remember hanging up the phone or saying goodbye. All I know is that one minute I was fuh-reaking out over the fact that my kid may have been out of line and the next I welled with pride, gratitude, and the thought “What an amazing teacher!”

So if I had composed myself enough to actually make any sense of my word salad, here’s what I would have said Mrs. Mott.

Thank you.

Thank you for taking the time to tell me that my kid had done something well.

That her heart matters more than her academics.

That you think she is a great kid.

That you knew it would matter to me to know if she was making wise choices.

Thank you for not allowing a long day of caring for and educating a parade of small children (who need the arts now more than ever) to wear you down, forgetting their humanity.

Thank you for the years of your life you gave up to pursue a field that’s under-thanked and under-paid, filled with long hours of preparation and hundreds of dollars of your own money spent on supplies and curriculum.

Thank you even more for reminding me that you really care. Not just about your job, but about my daughter and about me, too.

Thank you for championing her – for praising her in front of her parents and peers – reminding her that wise choices are worthwhile.

I have a hunch, someday when my daughter is many years older and inches taller, her sweet soul will have an impression in the shape of your face. She will remember standing in front of her class as you called me to share this short conversation. She will beam, recalling what it feels like to be told that she matters.

And even if she forgets, I’ll remind her of the difference-maker who went out of her way to mold her into the type of person I long for her to be. And once again, I’ll clumsily whisper “Thank you.” and remember this day.