

EXERCISE: WASHING THE ELEPHANT

Time: 5 minutes

Expected Outcome: Increased understanding of the effects of absenteeism on the student and other students and the school

1. ICEBREAKER: PRESENT VS. ABSENT (15 minutes)

Learning objective: to reflect on the effects of absenteeism

Ask one person (Volunteer #1) to leave the room and explain to the rest of the group that you are going to “wash the elephant.” Using an imaginary pail of water and cloth, and informing the audience about the meaning of each move wash the sides, the legs and the trunk; lift the ears and tail and so on. A member of the group (Volunteer #2) then volunteers to demonstrate with no words what he/she has seen you do. The volunteer outside the room is brought back and silently observes the mimed demonstration, then demonstrates what he/she observed and explains what he/she is doing at every move.

2. DEBRIEF (15 minutes)

Now ask the Volunteer #2 to explain the demonstration to Volunteer #1 who had left the room. Observe her/his reaction. Popcorn-style, ask the following questions:

What made a difference between the first and second volunteers?

Validate responses and emphasize how crucial it is for a person to be present when someone is sharing information or giving instructions.

Why is it important for students to attend school regularly?

Say: when a student is not present in the classroom, he/she misses instruction. The more classes a student misses, the farther behind the student falls

When do you think absences seriously affect a student’s ability to do well in school?

Is it when a student is absent 18 days or more during a school year? Or when they miss 10% of the total school days in a year? Or when they miss 2 days of school per month?

Explain that these are different ways of saying the same thing. A student who misses 2 days per month will end up missing 18 days during the school year, and that equals 10% of the school year. This is what is known as “Chronic absenteeism.”

Key Point: Being present when information is delivered is critical.

When your child misses one day or one lesson, that means when she returns, she may have missed something critical to her understanding of the next several days of instruction.

This exercise was developed for use as part of a parent workshop series by the Bay Area Parent Leadership Action Network, <http://www.parentactionnet.org/>. Reprinted with permission by Attendance Works, January 2013