

## C A S E 2

### Learning the Ropes

Today is Mindy's first day in Mr. Cobet's kindergarten class. Never before has she been in a room with so many other children her own age. She gets to sit at a blue table with two other girls and two boys. She has her very own chair, which is also blue; it even has her name taped on the back of it. Right now, she is coloring a name tag that will be taped to her place at the table, and she is chattering along with the other children who are sitting at the table with her.

"Hmmm...I think I'll color 'M' in pink," Mindy says. "I like pink. It's my favorite color."

Tanya, who is sitting next to her, says, "I think this letter is looking good.

Oops, I colored outside the lines on the other one. Oh, well. What should I color the rest of my letters?"

"This is so easy," Jonathan pipes in. "I did this stuff last year when I went to preschool."

"I wonder if we're going to learn to read today," Grant muses.

The fifth member of the group, Tabitha, scans the room. "When did my Mommy leave?" she cries. A bit unnerved, she runs across the room to seek comfort from Mr. Corbet.

Pressing a little too hard, Mindy breaks a green crayon as she begins to color the letter **D** on her name tag. She looks around to see if anyone else has seen what she did; unfortunately, Jonathan has observed the mishap. She walks over to Mr. Corbet so that she can tell him she broke his crayon, but he's preoccupied with Tabitha and so sends her back to her seat. Mindy hides the broken crayon in a box and resumes coloring her name tag.

Jonathan raises his hand straight up in the air. Mindy looks up to see what he is trying to touch, but there's nothing there.

As Mr. Corbet approaches the blue table, Jonathan puts his hand back down.

"Well, Jonathan," Mr. Corbet says loudly enough to attract the attention of the entire class, "where did you learn to raise your hand?"

"At preschool," Jonathan replies. He points to Mindy. "That girl broke your crayon."

Mr. Corbet squats down between Mindy and Jonathan. He gently covers Jonathan's hand with his own and curls the boy's pointed finger inward. "It's not nice to point at others or to tattle on them." Jonathan frowns and pulls his hand out of his teacher's grasp.

"What's your new friend's name?" Mr. Corbet asks, looking at Mindy.

Jonathan shrugs his shoulders. "I don't know."

Mr. Corbet smiles at Mindy and asks, "Would you like to tell him your name?"

Mindy looks at Mr. Corbet, then whispers, "Mindy. I didn't mean to break your crayon."

"It's okay, Mindy," Mr. Corbet reassures her. "Sometimes that happens with crayons when we press on them too hard. I know you didn't mean to break anything. It's not a big deal. In fact, the more practice you have using crayons, the less likely you will be to break them. So, then...let's find out who else is sitting at the blue table with Mindy and Jonathan...."

After the children have finished coloring their name tags, Mr. Corbet announces, "Okay, class, it's time to go to recess." Mindy isn't sure what this "recess" thing is, but she can tell by her classmates' excitement that it must be something good.

Mr. Corbet continues. "I'm going to have you line up at the outside door one table at a time. Hmmm...I see that the children at the red table are waiting very nicely. So, red table, you may be the first ones to line up. Please walk, walk slowly *and quietly*, to the outside door."

Two members of the red table run to be first in line. Ignoring them, Mr. Corbet says, “My, I like how Sam *walks* to the door. Did *you see* how he *walked*, class? It shows that he’s definitely ready to be a kindergartner!”

Mr. Corbet next summons the yellow table. “Wow! Did you notice how everyone in the yellow group *walked*? I can tell that I have a smart class this year.

Mindy squirms in her seat until she hears her teacher call the blue table. When

he does so, she makes a concerted effort to walk, not run, to join the line.

Once outside, Mindy stands near Mr. Corbet and watches the other children play on the playground equipment. She has finally concluded that *recess* must be a special place that has swings, monkey bars, tricycles, and other things to play on. A recess is like a park, she thinks, only smaller. Unlike her kindergarten classroom, recess is a place where running is allowed. Mindy runs to play with Tanya, her new friend from the blue table.

While the class is outside, Mr. Corbet sometimes blows a loud whistle at particular students. Mindy realizes that the sound of the whistle must not be a good thing, because the children he’s whistled at have to stop what they’re doing and talk with him, and they usually don’t look too happy afterwards. Mindy wants to avoid the whistle at all costs, although she’s not exactly sure how to go about doing that. Mindy and Tanya spend most of their play time on the swings. At one point, a girl in a yellow dress pushes Tanya to the ground and then climbs on Tanya’s swing as if nothing had happened. Tanya begins to cry, and Mindy looks around for Mr. Corbet. Seeing him close by, she raises her hand and waves it to get his attention.

As Mr. Corbet approaches the girls, Mindy starts to point at the girl in the yellow dress but then immediately closes her fist tight. She nods her head toward the guilty child. “See that girl in the yellow dress?” she asks her teacher. “Well, she pushed Tanya off the swings....”

Learning the Ropes

***Possible questions for “Learning the Ropes”:***

- 1. Children don’t always know what is expected of them when they first come to school. What evidence do we see that Mindy lacks knowledge about “how things are done” at school?***
- 2. At the beginning of the case study, we see Mindy and Tanya talking while they color, yet they don’t seem to be listening to each other. How would Piaget explain this event? How would Vygotsky explain it?***
- 3. Children sometimes develop misunderstandings of what certain words mean. What meaning does Mindy construct for the concept “recess”? What information does she use in constructing this meaning?***
- 4. What strategies does Mr. Corbet use to teach his students appropriate classroom behavior?***
- 5. Vicarious reinforcement occurs when individuals increase the frequency of a response after they observe another person being reinforced for the same response. What evidence do we see that Mindy has experienced vicarious reinforcement?***
- 6. Vicarious punishment occurs when individuals reduce the frequency of a response after they observe another person being punished for the same response. What evidence do we see that Mindy has experienced vicarious punishment?***
- 7. What strategy does Mr. Corbet use to make his students feel at home in their new classroom?***