

A Lesson from an Old Song

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“Excuses, excuses, we make them all the time,” go the lyrics of an old county gospel song. The song gets silly as it journeys down the lyrical road, but this line is worth paying attention to. It is worth paying attention to because there is a profound truth communicated in it. People do have a tendency to be excuse makers, and as the song states, “we make them all the time.”

As parents and educators, and all parents are educators, we need to give focused attention to addressing this character flaw in our children. Excuse-making starts as soon as the vocal apparatus in the child is ready to perform its task, and it continues until repeated confrontations bring about a mature self-discipline that slows it down and, at times, even brings it to a stop. As stated, this excuse-making is a character flaw; it is not good! It is so for at least two reasons: first, it is rooted in lying, and second, it is a cowardly way of not facing up to one’s actions in a responsible manner. As such it is something that parents and teachers cannot gloss over but must confront. We do not want to raise irresponsible excuse makers.

We begin fixing this problem by firmly establishing in the home, and classroom, that excuse-making will not be tolerated, rather, it will be confronted. If we tolerate the lesson that making an excuse gets me out of difficulties, it is confirmed in the child’s mind; then it becomes a pattern of life. The second way to fix it is to instill within the child a sense of personal responsibility. This personal responsibility includes owning up to one’s mistakes, may I say sins? How refreshing to hear a child, when confronted over a situation, respond with a, “Yes, sir, I did it, and I was wrong in doing so.” This is not ‘pie-in-the-sky’ thinking. It really can be done. Excuse-making children do not have to grow up into excuse-making adults. The hard work of confronting and correcting is needed, but such hard work can keep our children from making excuses all the time.