

## Ethics and School Counseling

In the morning of Thursday, April 17<sup>th</sup> I was finishing a lesson with the small kindergarten group I worked with. The group consisted of four students that morning. As we headed out to recess following our friendship group time, one of the students expressed that they were scared. The other three students heard this and quickly turned their attention to their group mate, wondering what could be making them scared. I inquired as to what was frightening the student. They shared that the following day was going to be scary because it is when Jesus dies (Friday, April 18<sup>th</sup>, Good Friday). The other students who heard the explanation had mixed reactions. Some were curious about what that meant where as other students' attention had shifted and was focused elsewhere.

My dilemma began here as I was pulled in various directions as to how to handle the situation from here. On one hand, I wanted to address the student's fear and find out more to see if they felt a significant amount of anxiety about it. I also did not want to speak too specifically about the explicitly religious topic for fear of impinging on the legal and ethical guidelines regarding keeping a school a religiously neutral environment and refraining from discussing religion in the school setting.

I decided to take a middle ground approach to the situation by addressing the student's fear by asking them more questions while offering no opinion of my own. I asked the student to describe more about what was frightening to them and what else they knew about it. Through their response I ascertained that although the student had concerns and questions about this particular part of their family's religious beliefs, they grasped that it was not something happening in present day and was not frightened for themselves. The other students were not overly concerned with the situation at this point. If the student or the other group members had questions I encouraged them to speak to their parents about it and subsequently emailed the parents to provide background information about the happening and prepare them if their child had any questions. Parents were fine with the situation and I did not report their children having questions.

I feel satisfied with the way I handled the situation. I think as a counselor it is our job to tune into the questions and concerns of students and help to normalize feelings surrounding fear, anxiety and stress. In all cases it is important to involve parents so that the message regarding student issues is as consistent as possible, especially regarding personal issues such as religion. Depending on the depth of the student's concern surrounding religion and that of the students involved in such conversations, I might change how I contact parents to talk about issues of this kind that happen at school.