

August 24, 2018

Consequences

I have to admit, that I had a different working title for this week's post. I was going to call it "Why Bother?" It has been a very discouraging couple of weeks, in this lead up to the start of the school year. I keep hearing reports from DSS providers who have done everything right, have worked hard to get their policies in place, gotten approval and buy-in from those above them – and then had the rug pulled out from under them when they tried to enforce those policies. Why bother having policies if you aren't going (or aren't allowed to) follow them?

* I have spoken with two service providers in the last week who have a statement in policy that says that without at least "x" amount of notice (30 days in one case, 45 days in the other), the institution cannot assure that the request for an ESA can be met. In both cases, students showed up on campus with an ESA and paperwork in hand (first time the DSS provider had heard about a need) and the Dean had allowed them to move into the dorm on the spot ("You can sort it out later").

* I heard from one service provider who has a statement in policy that indicates that animals must be spayed/neutered. A student wanting to bring in an older dog insisted that it would be medically ill-advised to have the dog neutered. While the service provider was willing to allow it if the student produced a letter to that effect from the veterinarian, the Dean said, "Don't give her a hard time about it. It isn't that big a deal. Let her bring the dog."

* I spoke with a service provider who has the appropriate statement in place regarding limiting the presence of multiple animals. The kid who wants to bring his two bunnies (because they do better when they have a companion) complained to someone above the DSS provider who said, "If you are going to allow one bunny, why not two? Just let him have the two rabbits."

* Just yesterday, someone reported on the ICU list that the faculty on her campus have been pretty loose about allowing ESAs in their classrooms, because they don't want to see the dogs cooped up in the dorm room all day while the student is in class, so they allow them to bring 'em along.

* The worst example was that of the service provider who patiently built the case for why a student should not be allowed to bring a puppy to campus (to live in the dorm and accompany her everywhere) that was being raised for an agency in another state. Not only did the service provider make a good case in all the right ways, and communicate everything clearly to the student in a series of correspondence throughout the summer, the college attorney wrote a great letter explaining exactly why the institution had decided to say "no," and the legal justification for doing so. When the student showed up on campus for move-in day two weeks later, she had the puppy with her. The administrator in charge, faced with the cute poppy and the insistent student/parent, said, "We're reconsidering the decision. Let her keep the dog."

Why bother to have policies if you aren't going to be allowed to follow them?

Then there were the frantic calls from service providers who wanted to know what to say in the face of a no-notice ESA, or someone who showed up with two bunnies instead of the one approved, or the student who brought in an eight-week old puppy who greeted the new roommate by wriggling with excitement – and peeing on her shoes. All of these were people who had taken the DAIS “Dogs” class before, and in each case I asked, “Do you have the statement about _____ in your policy?” And in each case there was an embarrassed pause, and a mumbled, “No... I didn't think that was important.”

Why bother to set out the rules if folks don't understand that they exist for a reason?

Why can't we get others on our campus to be as concerned about the presence of animals on campus as we are forced to be, because of our assigned role in working with students with disabilities? And how are we to discharge those responsibilities appropriately when we keep getting undercut by others who don't understand the issues? More... *they don't understand the **consequences** of not following the policies.*

I have come to the conclusion that we are only going to get everything into policy, and get everyone to respect the policy, when we do a better job of presenting the consequences of NOT following policy. Folks need to understand the **WHY**, and they need to understand that it doesn't matter if you have a written policy if your customary practice is something different. That customary practice will become the norm, and THAT has consequences that need to be recognized.

The Dean who approved the move-in of an ESA with less than the stated minimum notice requirement should be reminded that if there are problems with the student and her roommate(s), you will refer the students and their parents to him. If you had time to vet the arrangements in advance, you could have avoided any problems, but since the Dean allowed the student to bring the animal without advance notice, the CONSEQUENCES of that decision are on him.

The administrator who waived the policy for the animal to be spayed/neutered should be reminded that animals who are not properly attended to can do significant damage to their surroundings during estrus. And what about the administrator who approved the two bunnies because, what difference does it make? As her if she would be as sanguine about four rats, or six kittens in the same dorm room. They need to understand that there is a reason for the policy to be in place, and CONSEQUENCES for not insisting that it be followed.

In discussing the faculty members who allow students to bring their ESA dogs to class so that they won't have to be left alone all day in their rooms, I suggested that the service provider ask the faculty if they would also be alright with another student bringing their kitty, or their ESA bunny, or their hamster to class with them. If the

answer was, “no,” then perhaps they would like to rethink their approval for the dog in class. Once they say “yes” to that, they may have to allow the others, too. There are CONSEQUENCES to their decision.

What about the decision to allow the puppy raiser to bring the puppy into the dorm and onto campus, over the objections of the service provider and advice of counsel? Do the administrators who allowed the puppy to be there have any idea of the CONSEQUENCES of that decision? The student brought the dog in under the guise of it being a service dog in training (under their state law). By accepting it, they have given credence to the arguments of every other student who (a) wants to bring in a very young animal as an ESA; (b) wants to raise puppies for some other agency – perhaps a less credible one; (c) wants to train their own service dog and figures to start that in their spare time while they are on campus; or (d) was turned down for an ESA and suddenly decides they will train their animal to be a psychiatric service animal, starting today. CONSEQUENCES.

Students need to understand CONSEQUENCES, too. We have spoken before about the idea of making sure that they understand all the rules BEFORE their go through the process of applying for an ESA. Rules such as “the animal cannot be left overnight in the residence hall if the student is not on campus,” and “the animal must be caged/crated when the student is not in the room,” and “documentation letters purchased through the internet rarely provide adequate information to approve a request for an ESA.” But I think students need to understand the CONSEQUENCES of not following those policies. Breaking the rules laid out in the contract, or lying to school personnel about the need or functions of the animal are serious violations that WILL result in the student being referred to the Student Conduct Board for disciplinary action.

I went looking for some quotes about consequences, and found several that seemed apropos (see end). But this is the one that jumped out at me:

While we are free to choose our actions, we are not free to choose the consequences of our actions.

Perhaps I should have that made up as a bumper sticker, and sell them at the next AHEAD conference.

Janie

It is easy to dodge our responsibilities, but we cannot dodge the consequences of dodging our responsibilities.

Nobody ever did, or ever will, escape the consequences of his choices.

The sower may mistake and sow his peas crookedly: the peas make no mistake, but come up and show his line.