

Dear Teachers, Please Presume Competence When You Work with My Child

by Crystal Kostick

From the Editor: This article first appeared on October 28, 2018, on the web community The Mighty. The Mighty is a digital health community created to empower and connect people facing health challenges and disabilities. Though the little girl in this article is not blind, she still faces low expectations from her teachers, and just like Federation parents, her mother doesn't plan to let those low expectations pass unchallenged. She addresses it with humor, but is serious about making sure her daughter gets the education she deserves. Here is what Crystal has to say to her daughter's teachers:

"Oh, she is just so sweet!"

"What a precious little angel you have!"

"Is she always this easy-going?"

Umm... nope. Nuh-uh. No way.

It's laughable, really. If you spend some time in our home and get to know my lovely little girl, these statements are so far from our experience. And yet, these are the type of comments I hear most often from teachers, aides, principals, etc.

Well guess what? They are all being played.

Now before I continue, because the internet likes to mom-shame and some people take things way too seriously, I feel like I need to interject here the fact that I love my kid.

She's probably the coolest one alive, and I am basically obsessed with her sheer awesomeness.

However, that being said, she is no angel (but is any child, really?) This girl is so many things: smart, sassy, goofy, mischievous... but sweet, angelic, and precious are not the first things that come to mind. And I honestly love that about her.

My daughter sustained a severe brain injury during her birth and as a result has been diagnosed with hypoxic ischemic encephalopathy (HIE), cerebral palsy, and epilepsy. She has significant delays and obviously needs some extra support at school. But she is extremely bright, and her levels of manipulation and impishness are right on track for her age.

She is only five years old, but she has already caught on to the idea that she is cute.

Like, really cute. She is cute, and she has a disability, and people feel sorry for her (insert eye-roll).

Please, make her work!

She is not at school to be cute for you. She is not there to learn new and creative ways to get out of working. And she is definitely not there to watch other people doing everything for her.

It's not OK. Yes, she is cute. Yes, she has a disability and will need extra help in some areas. But as her mother I need to know that you are seeing her potential and helping her to reach it. She is very capable of many things, and I need to know that you know that.

Sending your child off to kindergarten is hard... for any mom. But for a mom with a child who has disabilities, it is downright terrifying. This is my biggest fear: that she will be

coddled and bombarded with help. I want my daughter to have as close to a typical experience as possible, and I want her to learn. School is not glorified daycare. She can do hard things. Repeat after me: she can do hard things! It may not look hard to some, but all the while, she is learning about resilience, toughness, and persistence. So please, be tough on my kid. Don't let her get away with not trying. She doesn't have to be able to do everything correctly, but make sure to give her the push and the time to make the effort.

Presume the utmost intelligence and competence, and give her a sturdy platform to stand on—just like you would with any other child. I want her to be educated and be the best possible version of herself. I may not know just what that looks like, but I sure know what it doesn't look like.

Sincerely,

A “mean” mom who cares deeply and expects the same of the world.