

Pressure to Perform

You are a fourth-grade teacher in a suburban elementary school, which caters to the children of a largely professional population. Most parents are quite interested in the school's keeping to high academic standards and expect good performance from their children. It is late in the school year, and you have been approached by the parents of a third-grade boy named Derek. They would like you to tutor their son for the rest of the spring and possibly during the summer. You tell the parents that you would like to think it over for a week. Since Derek's current third-grade teacher is a close friend, you speak to her.

She seems to know Derek well, and a picture emerges of a pleasant, cooperative, and hard-working boy who is performing right up to his capacities. He is a slow reader, has trouble with abstractions, and experiences difficulty with instructions when they become at all complex. His second-grade teacher says basically the same things. The school psychologist tells you that Derek's performance and these difficulties are confirmed in his test data. Everyone who knows Derek says that if there is a problem, it is the unrealistic expectations of his rather intense parents. One is a lawyer and the other is an accountant. They are convinced that Derek is performing at "C level," as they call it, simply because he is being lazy and not applying himself. They dismiss the psychologist's views as "just so much silly psychobabble" and claim that Derek simply needs to be given more work to do and to be held to higher standards. Further, they feel that if Derek doesn't "catch fire" soon, he will get accustomed to mediocrity and will lose all chance of attending a good college. They have not asked you for your opinion, but you support the professionals: Derek is working well up to his capacities.

Derek's parents want you to tutor him after school two days a week and for five hours on Saturday. They have offered you \$250 a week to do so. You have the time, and the money would mean that you could buy a dependable car to replace the clunker you currently drive. You also are aware that if you do not accept the assignment, there are several other teachers who will, teachers who are not as skilled and conscientious as you are. What is the right thing to do?