“Learning the Ropes”
Early Childhood Case Study

Today is Mindy’s first day in Mr. Corbet’s kindergarten class. Never before has she been in a room with so many other children her own age. She gets to sit at a blue table with two other girls and two boys. She has her very own chair, which is also blue; it even has her name taped on the back of it. Right now, she is coloring a nametag that will be taped to her place at the table, and she is chattering along with the other children who are sitting at the table with her.

“Hmmm...I think I’ll color ‘M’ in pink,” Mindy says. “I like pink. It’s my favorite color.”

Tanya, who is sitting next to her, says, “I think this letter is looking good. Oops, I colored outside the lines on the other one. Oh, well. What should I color the rest of my letters?”

“This is so easy,” Jonathan pipes in. “I did this stuff last year when I went to preschool.”

“I wonder if we’re going to learn to read today,” Grant muses.

The fifth member of the group, Tabitha, scans the room. “When did my Mommy leave?” she cries. A bit unnerved, she runs across the room to seek comfort from Mr. Corbet.

Pressing a little too hard, Mindy breaks a green crayon as she begins to color the letter D on her nametag. She looks around to see if anyone else has seen what she did; unfortunately, Jonathan has observed the mishap. She walks over to Mr. Corbet so that she can tell him she broke his crayon, but he is preoccupied with Tabitha and sends her back to her seat. Mindy hides the broken crayon in a box and resumes coloring her nametag.

Jonathan raises his hand straight up in the air. Mindy looks up to see what he is trying to touch, but there’s nothing there.

As Mr. Corbet approaches the blue table, Jonathan puts his hand back down. “Well, Jonathan,” Mr. Corbet says loudly enough to attract the attention of the entire class, “where did you learn to raise your hand?”

“At preschool,” Jonathan replies. He points to Mindy. “That girl broke your crayon.”

Mr. Corbet squats down between Mindy and Jonathan. He gently covers Jonathan’s hand with his own and curls the boy’s pointed finger inward. “It’s not nice to point at others and tattle on them.” Johnathan frowns and pulls his hand out of his teacher’s grasp.

“What is your new friend’s name?” Mr. Corbet asks, looking at Mindy.

Jonathan shrugs his shoulders. “I don’t know.”

Mr. Corbet smiles at Mindy and asks, “Would you like to tell him your name?”

Mindy looks at Mr. Corbet, then whispers, “Mindy. I...I didn’t mean to break your crayon.”

“It’s okay, Mindy,” Mr. Corbet reassures her. “Sometimes that happen with crayons when we press on them too hard. I know you didn’t mean to break anything. It’s not a big deal. In fact, the more practice you have using crayons, the less likely you will be to break them. So, then...lets find out who else is sitting at the blue table with Mindy and Jonathan...”

After the children have finished coloring their nametags, Mr. Corbet announces, “Okay class, it’s time to go to recess.” Mindy isn’t sure what this “recess” things is, but she can tell by her classmates’ excitement that it must be something good.

Mr. Corbet continues, “I’m going to have you line up at the outside door one table at a time. Hmmmm...I see that the children at the red table are waiting very nicely. So, red table, you may be the first ones to line up. Please walk, walk slowly and quietly, to the outside door.

Two members of the red table run to be first in line. Ignoring them, Mr. Corbet says, “My, I like how Sam walks to the door. Did you see how he walked, class? It shows that he is definitely ready to be a kindergartener!”
Mr. Corbet next summons the yellow table. “Wow! Did you notice how everyone in the yellow group walked? I can tell that I have a smart class this year.”

Mindy squirms in her seat until she hears her teacher call the blue table. When he does so, she makes a concerted effort to walk, not run, to join the line.

Once outside, Mindy stands near Mr. Corbet and watches the other children play on the playground equipment. She has finally concluded that recess must be a special place that has swings, monkey bars, tricycles, and other things to play on. A recess is like a park, she thinks, only smaller. Unlike her kindergarten classroom, recess is a place where running is allowed. Mindy runs to play with Tanya, her new friend from the blue table.

While the class is outside, Mr. Corbet sometimes blows a loud whistle at particular students. Mindy realizes that the sound of the whistle must not be a good thing, because the children he’s whistled at have to stop what they’re doing and talk with him, and they usually don’t look too happy afterwards. Mindy wants to avoid the whistle at all costs, although she’s not exactly sure how to go about doing that.

Mindy and Tanya spend most of their playtime on the swings. At one point, a girl in a yellow dress pushes Tanya to the ground and then climbs on Tanya’s swing as if nothing had happened. Tanya begins to cry, and Mindy looks around for Mr. Corbet seeing him close by, she raises her hand and waves it to get his attention.

As Mr. Corbet approaches the girls, Mindy starts to point at the girl in the yellow dress, but then immediately closes her fist tight. She nods her head toward the guilty child. “See that girl in the yellow dress?” she asks her teacher. “Well, she pushed Tanya off the swings...”