



New Mexico Boys and Girls Ranches CORRAL

Winter 2020

The Struggle with Accountability

By Heath Kull

The Ranches is, at its very core, a place for kids to get a fresh start and to develop new tools and learn new ways of navigating life. In most cases, kids come to The Ranches with inadequate and unhealthy ways of dealing with relationships and with conflict. Initially, we start the process of orienting kids to their new living environment. New room, new roommate, new schedule and new rules. While we've all had to navigate these situations in our lives, for young people this can be fairly traumatic and a fairly abrupt entry into a place that they have little to no experience with. Everything is new. It is in this first phase that we begin to see how kids naturally operate. How they handle peers. How they handle change. How they deal with and view authority and, in many cases, how they see themselves. We see boys who've had to navigate the label of toxicity and how much of their behavior is associated with shame and fear. We also see girls who've had to navigate expectations, shame and isolation. When kids first arrive at The Ranches, we see them at their most raw and their most vulnerable...and often scared of what is to come.

As kids adjust, we start to introduce accountability to them and help them to see how accountability effects their daily lives. It is unfair to say that they have never experienced accountability, but it many cases they have experienced inconsistent, unpredictable and sometimes violent accountability. For most of the kids, this creates a resistance to accountability and to being held accountable.

Definition of accountability: the quality or state of being accountable - especially: an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions

As you can probably imagine, most kids – really most people – struggle with accountability...especially when it comes from perceived strangers. Along with accountability usually comes conflict, stress and a plethora of negative behaviors. For the staff of The Ranches, this is often uncomfortable and difficult to emotionally process. Why does this child that I don't really know seem to hate me and everything that I try to communicate with them? Well, this is the work that we do.

To understand the struggle with -accountability, it helps to know what kinds of behaviors that we deal with in kids when we attempt to introduce consistent, caring, committed accountability. In working with the kids at The Ranches, our goal for accountability is for them to achieve competence and competence requires accountability. Their resistance to competence and accountability usually comes in several forms.

Transfer of Blame – Kids often seek to transfer blame to others. In transfer of blame situations, we see the blame become the most relevant part of accountability to the child. "It wasn't my fault! My roommate did it!" or "You're not my parent!" are typical utterances at The Ranches.

The Ranches Alumni

"Do your best/apply yourself, always BE yourself, but at the same time, respect and honor your peers, as well as the adults there...and through this, all of the bad in your life, can be erased by all the good The Ranches has to offer you, not only during your stay, but I'm talking about the positive life lessons and awesome brotherhood/sisterhood/friendships that stick 13yrs AFTER you leave the program! And this I know first-hand! Stick it out, and give it your best!"
- Jordan R.

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Rekindling Hope in Today's Youth - Since 1944

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

How could a fellow Christian vote like that?



Heath Kull
President

I spend most of my time on the silent side of politics and I only rarely delve into the discourse surrounding American democracy and our 2-party system. While it probably allows for me to lag behind in “friends” and “Likes” on social media, I am not one to tell others how to vote or even what to think...unless asked or a voluntary display of stupidity deems it necessary. I have a firm and deep belief in everyone’s First Amendment right and I follow it up with an equal belief in the Second.

Just writing that paragraph has me on the wrong side of my comfort zone, but “in for a penny, in for a pound” right?

Recently, I have seen and read and heard a plethora of discussion regarding our president and impeachment and the vitriol accompanying both issues. Both **MARK GALLI** and **TIMOTHY DALRYMPLE** of Christianity Today have written eloquently and thoughtfully about these issues and done so through the lens and context of Christianity. While both reference a dialogue, I have no way of knowing if one is really wanted or if someone in my position would even qualify to participate in a dialogue with such intellectual and faith giants. In this scenario, I am the equivalent of a little shepherd that is neither prepared nor qualified to be in such a massive fight. I am just a guy that runs a small charity in a small state that helps what the Bible would call “the least of these.” While Caesar routinely infringes upon how we offer help, healing and hope to kids, we have successfully facilitated the voluntary transfer of wealth from our donors to the children that we serve without taking any of Caesar’s money or resources. In my work, I don’t spend a whole lot of time talking about politics, but I do spend quite a bit of time teaching young people about morality and about Christ’s love for them that flows through our donors and through us towards them. For many of these kids, they don’t care who is president as they don’t see how it affects them.

Recently though, there has been a marked increase in the vitriol and caustic behavior towards our fellow man because of who they might support politically...and kids are watching.

Timothy Dalrymple, seemingly rhetorically eluded to a question, “With profound love and respect, we ask our brothers and sisters in Christ to consider whether they have given to Caesar what belongs only to God: their unconditional loyalty.”

These words have weighed heavily upon me since reading them. As a Christian – a very flawed and imperfect one who sins more often than he should – I value and rely upon forgiveness and redemption. More importantly in this context though, I have thought about Caesar and what now “belongs” to Caesar in The United States. More poignantly, what Caesar and the multitude of politicians that cumulatively form our multifaceted Caesar, believe belongs to them.

As the Bible says in Mark 12:17 - *Jesus said to them, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” And they marveled at him.*

If we take for a moment – regardless of politics – the view that our faith is personal and that Caesar represents the government in our lives, what have we rendered unto Caesar?

If we take for a moment – regardless of politics – the view that our faith is personal and that Caesar represents the government in our lives, what have we rendered unto Caesar?

As a Christian, I have seen rendered unto Caesar:

- The education of our children
- The definition of gender
- The ability to pray in school
- When life begins
- An ever-increasing percentage of our earnings
- Which speech is “free”
- The definition of “shall not be infringed”
- The definition of a child or man or woman
- The care of widows and orphans
- Healthcare
- What bathroom labels should be
- How much one is allowed to work
- My use of energy
- What can be designated as Hate and Love
- Where my earnings, that were freely given to Caesar, are spent – Foreign Aid, bailouts, social programs, political payoffs

And I watch as Caesar now wants us to render even more unto him:

- The push to eliminate the tax exemption for churches
- The definition of discipline in our homes
- How we define science
- What we are allowed to teach our children
- What we watch or view for news
- Whether we are capable of raising our own children

...I’m sure that this list could be expanded exponentially if Christians took the time to create a list of all that Caesar has demanded be rendered unto him in each of their lives.

I, and many of those that I talk to, are tired of giving to Caesar when Caesar has done, in our opinion, a terrible job of ethically, responsibly and morally managing what was and is given to him.

When I vote, I am not driven to vote based on my social standing or the opinions of others. I just want someone that will go to Washington (or Santa Fe) and punch Caesar in the mouth for me at least one time. Punch him for all the times he wanted more rendered unto him that my faith allows me to be in support of. I have reached the point where I disagree with the size, power and scope of Caesar more than on the existence of Caesar.

In order for society and civilization to exist, there will always be a need for Caesar and there will always be a discussion about what should be rendered unto Caesar. Unfortunately, Caesar isn’t content with that and now wants Christians to render unto Caesar what many believe is God’s and, in my opinion, should be God’s alone. My undying loyalty and faith will never be given to Caesar as it only belongs to God. I will also never give my children to Caesar to raise as I also believe that my faith informs my politics. I will never believe that there is room to reverse that and allow my politics to inform my faith. My faith is in God and Caesar may change multiple times in my lifetime. After all, I’ve loved God since I was six years old and haven’t even really liked, much less respected, Caesar since the late 80s.

Sincerely,

Heath Kull - President
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THE RANCHES

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While one is true and one may indeed be true, these statements serve the child by transferring the all-important blame for the transgression onto someone else. "It isn't my fault," therefore you can't, or shouldn't, hold ME accountable.

"I need (vs. want) this!" – We work tirelessly to meet the needs of the kids at The Ranches. It is part of our mission. Because of our deliberate choice in meeting the needs of our residents, the kids often attempt to turn their wants in to needs in an effort to force us, through guilt, to give in to their wants. If accountability is to be avoided, turning accountability into an accusation of not meeting their needs is a powerful strategy. "I lied because I didn't feel safe enough to tell the truth" is just one example of this behavior. Safety is a basic need and reshaping situations to be a need unmet is typical and, at times, prolific. "How can you hold me accountable for how I attempt to get my needs met?"

"Just kidding" – In many cases, accountability is applied to kids for the hurtful things that they say to staff and to other kids. "Just kidding" is an oft employed strategy for escaping accountability for what is said. While it is rarely effective, it is a "go to" for many kids. The idea is that, if they didn't mean anything negative and were simply making a joke, they shouldn't be held accountable for someone else taking offense to their statement.

"That other kid is worse than me!" – Pointing the finger at someone else is a longstanding strategy in crime and in politics. Unfortunately, the kids of today have grown up watching this strategy play out on the evening news and on near every crime-based television show. As long as someone else's behavior is worse, mine isn't that bad...in comparison, right?

"I didn't have time!" – We usually hear this in reference to chores or school responsibilities, but it is used at least daily at The Ranches. In reality, we schedule our days so that there is plenty of time to handle responsibilities, but kids rarely say, "I didn't manage my time well" in reference to incomplete tasks.

"You are mean, and YOU hurt my feelings!" – This is often uttered when attempts at accountability have escalated due to our initial attempts falling upon deaf ears. When we attempt to hold a child accountable and those attempts go ignored, an escalation is needed. Unfortunately, a good old-fashioned victim statement is often uttered as a response to this escalation. Most kids – really most people – view ignoring another person or an authority figure as a passive act. Conversely, addressing the disrespectful nature of ignoring a request is often seen as aggressive and, if allowed, mean. If I only had a dollar for every time that someone at The Ranches accused me of being mean for holding them accountable for their actions, I could fund The Ranches for years to come.

"You Don't Understand" – This is often said in an attempt to avoid and escape accountability as it is meant to communicate to an adult or authority figure that their expectation is unrealistic. In reality, it is often true as well. I don't understand the feelings and hurt that others have experienced.

I can acknowledge my lack of understanding without forfeiting my responsibility for accountability. "You're right. I don't understand. Please explain it to me" is the best response to "You don't understand."

If we're being honest - and I try to always be honest with you – the kids that come to The Ranches are far from being "bad kids." In most cases though, they have learned to ignore and escape accountability with the authority in their lives, using one of these strategies. From parents to teachers to school administrators to law enforcement, escaping accountability is the root of being "at-risk." As a result, this is where our work often begins. No matter how much dysfunction, abuse, neglect or mistreatment someone has received, there is no healthy or logical escape from being accountable in life. When kids leave us, they will have bosses, spouses and friends that will attempt, with varying degrees of success, to hold them accountable. Losses of jobs and relationships are the most common symptoms of an aversion to accountability. We hope while they are with us, we can teach, mentor and disciple kids in such a way that we can limit their losses as they pursue a life on their own. To do this, we try to establish a better view of accountability by following a few principles and steps toward success.



1. Getting their attention – Whenever a change is needed, the first step is to get the attention of the child and present to them a boundary and barrier to their default strategies for escaping accountability. This step is often ugly and is often filled with conflict. While the prevailing advice for setting boundaries is to disengage – either emotionally or physically – from the person who is violating the boundaries that are set, we can't do this at The Ranches. While I understand this advice, we simply don't have that option. If we emotionally disengage, kids feel a sense of abandonment that hurts and often retraumatized them. And if we disengage physically, they are left unsupervised. As a result, we have to work to stay engaged. This often causes an emotional escalation that involves name-calling, disrespectful language and further attempts to escape accountability. It is in this escalation that we have an opportunity to stay engaged and to get their attention.

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#RAISETHEMUP @THERANCHES

Sharing with “the least of these.”

Again, this year, a lot of adult groups took their time and resources from the heart to share with our residents for Christmas. The month began with a Christmas party hosted by the Sojourners Club, with lunch, fun, and gifts for the children. Santa Claus made an early appearance to distribute gift cards to the kids and share the spirit of the holidays. The day was highlighted with clowns, activities, and remarks to the group by several of our Veteran friends.

Next up was a day of lunch, snacks, gifts, and new high-quality sports shoes for each resident. The Albuquerque Breakfast Lions, joined by members of the Edgewood and Albuquerque NE clubs provided, prepared, and served lunch and desert as they were entertained with Christmas carols sung by residents; another top-notch day. Both the Sojourners and Lions have been sharing with The Ranches for decades and demonstrating the love of the community to all at The Ranches.

A bit later in the season, our Board of Directors, joined by our generous friends of Faith Baptist Church, Artesia, NM provided a wonderful array of individualized gifts for each child which were presented at the Board Christmas party; another exciting day for all. Many other groups, like the members of Monte Vista Christian Church of Albuquerque, Discount Tire of Los Lunas, Buffett's Candies of Albuquerque, Believers Center of Albuquerque and several individuals provided kind and generous gifts, candy, and treats to our children. Each one of these encounters and gifts reveals to our residents the depth of unselfish caring by people that don't even know them, but in true Christian fashion, demonstrate caring for “the least of these.” Thank you all and God bless each of you.



Photo by Lani Kull



Photo by Chris Flores



#RAISETHEMUP @THERANCHES

Christmas Musical Outing

The kids and some of the staff from The Ranches kicked off the Christmas season by attending the dress rehearsal for the First Baptist Church Rio Rancho's (FBCRR) presentation of “An Unexpected Christmas.” The musical was set in a busy airport terminal on Christmas Eve. Many of the travelers were excited about the season and the opportunity to celebrate with family while others were struggling with sadness and discouragement when flights were delayed by weather. The message of the musical was inspiring, and the songs were contagious. The entire group left singing the theme song from the play, “Coffee makes everything better.” This was a memorable time for the residents, and we were grateful for the opportunity to provide an audience and to experience this well put together production. FBCRR has been putting on this event for 21 years and several of our staff members went back for the dinner and show that ran for 5 performances.





THEIR JOURNEY





THE RANCHES

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Knowing how to “fight back” appropriately against disrespectful kids in an effort to get their attention is often more art than science. We must, however, engage the conflict with the goal of getting their attention and this is key to our work...no matter how ugly it can be.

2. Ignore the Deflections – Though it isn’t easy, we have to, as authority figures, ignore all of the deflections that attempt to distract or shift blame. “We’ll deal with that in time” or “Their behavior isn’t the issue that we are dealing with” can help to move past distracting deflections. It takes practice, but it is possible to get to the point where deflections are minimized because they become ineffective with you.

3. Address and Respond to Every Negative Behavior – While it can often seem like nagging or “nitpicking,” we must address all negative behaviors in the time that a kid is with us. If we give up or give in, we give them permission to give up or to continue their negative behaviors. This is exhausting and often leads to “burn out” or adults leaving the organization. Despite this, addressing and responding to every negative behavior is a necessary component to what we do.

4. Get Back to Good After Every Conflict – In striving to get kids attention and address every negative behavior, conflict always ensues. While many view conflict as always “bad,” conflict is a part of relationships and a part of life. Relationships end when there is no path for those in conflict to “get back to good.” To make matters worse, I sincerely believe that this is always the responsibility of the adult and the most important part of being an authority figure. Sometimes, it’s as easy as just starting a normal conversation without residual emotion. Other times, it comes down to a peace offering like a compliment or bringing a snack to a child after the conflict has subsided.

5. Follow Up Conversation – In many cases, escalated emotions cause a “fight, flight or freeze” response in kids. Things are uttered in anger and frustration during these periods of conflict. These utterances are often meant to hurt the other person and meant to stop the conflict. Often, a heinous statement is meant to cause a disconnection in the relationship. Caring adults, parents and authority figures who are effective with kids know that unresolved conflict leads to unresolved emotions that are often buried alive and left to come back in uglier ways; usually in the next round of conflict. A follow up conversation that is calm, emotionally tranquil and explanatory in nature can often help to resolve both the conflict and the emotions that accompany conflict. These follow up conversations are best when the adult focuses on “I” statements instead of “you” statements. “I lost my cool” or “I am sorry for getting so emotional in addressing the issue” are seen as taking responsibility for our part of the escalation of conflict. This also allows the child, if willing, to accept and express the part that they played in the escalation of the conflict. “You” statements often feel accusatory and lead kids to express their own “you” statements that often lead to another escalation. Adults are best served by calmly acknowledging their mistakes and expressing the reason for the attempt at accountability that led to the conflict.

6. Active Listening – The hardest thing to do in conflict is to listen to what a child or other person has to say and how they view your actions. We have to do it anyway. We don’t have to agree with what is being said in order to listen but listening places a higher value on the relationship than on being right.

7. Tell Me More – When in conflict with a child, asking the child to tell you more often shifts the conflict away from escalation and towards understanding. We still have the opportunity for accountability, but we can take a break to listen and understand where they are coming from.

8. Back to Normal – Typically, the last step in resolving conflict associated with accountability is getting back to normal. Feelings have been hurt, disrespect has reared its’ ugly head and emotions have run high. Getting back to normal is a choice and usually requires a deliberate effort. “Can you help me take out the trash?” or “Can you help me at the grocery store?” are opportunities to get back to normal. We have to keep in mind that kids are looking for every hint or indication that it isn’t back to normal and in many cases they may even try to derail our attempts. We have to act as normally as possible and ignore their attempts to rekindle the conflict. We have to get back to normal despite their reluctance and our own. We just have to do it anyway.

Truthfully, getting someone to change their behaviors and to abandon their default strategies for avoiding accountability are among the hardest things to do. Kids and adults are both dedicated to their behaviors and their strategies. At The Ranches, this is the first step in Rekindling Hope. From the most difficult child to the most successful adult, we all have room to grow and that growth requires us to engage in the most difficult of endeavors; changing behavior. Adults that are unwilling to change their approach and their behavior tend to produce kids who are unwilling to change their approach and their behavior. This leads to a dysfunctional cycle of conflict and relationship failure. For this reason, it is such an important part of what we do and is at the core of the reason that we do it. The earlier this concept is recognized and addressed, the healthier the child will be as they grow into adulthood.

The struggle with accountability is a significant problem in our world and those that choose to offer help to those who are “at risk.” Those “at risk” and struggling are often held more accountable for HOW they help and for the methods necessary to provide real, long lasting help than the person in need of help. Many have chosen to just avoid people who are hurting and struggling. “It’s not MY problem” is the mantra of those who see the problem but don’t want to address the actual problem that creates the risk in “at risk” youth. While we don’t always relish the criticism of those that judge how we offer help to kids, I personally understand the tendency to judge the helper and sympathize with those in need of help. Help is messy. Help is difficult. Help is filled with conflict, resentment and hurt feelings. But alas, hope is only rekindled by those willing to attempt to help those who have lost hope. We don’t always get it right, but we remain dedicated to helping. Accountability is the first step in helping and the first step in rekindling hope.



THE RANCHES

The Silversmith

There was once a group of women studying the book of Malachi in the Old Testament. As they were studying chapter three, they came across verse three, which says: "He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." This verse puzzled the women, and they wondered what this statement meant about the character and nature of God. One of the women offered to find out about the process of refining silver and get back to the group at their next Bible study.

That week this woman called up a silversmith and made an appointment to watch him at work. She didn't mention anything about the reason for her interest beyond her curiosity about the process of refining silver. As she watched the silversmith, he held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up. He explained that in refining silver, one needed to hold the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames were hottest as to burn away all the impurities.

The woman thought about God holding us in such a hot spot – then she thought again about the verse, that he sits as a refiner and purifier of silver. She asked the silversmith if it was true that he had to sit there in front of the fire the whole time the silver was being refined.

The man answered "Yes," and explained that he not only had to sit there holding the silver, but he had to keep his eyes on the silver the entire time it was in the fire. If the silver was left even a moment too long in the flames, it would be damaged.

The woman was silent for a moment. Then she asked the silversmith, "How do you know when the silver is fully refined?"

He smiled at her and answered, "Oh, that's easy. When I see my image in it."

If today you are feeling the heat of this world's fire, just remember that God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ are refining you. "You are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ."

- Author Unknown

THANK YOU

Thank you to all the businesses, organizations and churches that made monetary or in-kind gifts during the period September 02, 2019 - December 31, 2019. We deeply appreciate your commitment to children and families!

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BECOME A PARTNER

Become a Partner

First of all, I don't think there are many people that have everything, but I could be wrong. What I can tell you is that giving is contagious and generational. Teaching young ones (of all ages) to support great causes can start by giving a monthly gift to a great cause in the name of someone that you love. Not only can you help a worthy cause, you can teach your loved ones about the causes that are important to you and, hopefully, help them to catch the "giving bug" this winter season. While I am partial to The Ranches, there are a plethora of great causes out there. Can you spare to share \$75 a month for kids at The Ranches in honor of our 75th year?

We appreciate your continued support.

 Heath Kull - President
HeathKull@theranches.org

Help Us Share Our Story

Representatives of New Mexico Boys and Girls Ranches are available to meet with clubs, civic organizations and fellowship groups to share our story of bringing hope to hurting youngsters.

If you are interested in arranging a speaking engagement for your organization, simply give us a call at (505) 881-3363 or (800) 660-0289.

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