

I had a little boy I was referred. Every day when he got off the school bus guess what happened. Instead of coming into the school building he hid behind the bushes. He was punished every day and I basically said to this kid, "Why do you hide behind the bushes?" And he looked at me as if I was a fool and he said, "Why do I hide behind the bushes? Isn't it obvious? I like the bushes better than I like school." Now what do I do, get into a debate about the relative merits of bushes versus school? Or do I find his island of competence. I said, "What do you enjoy doing?" He said, "I love to take care of my pet dog." That's all I had to hear.

I called the school principal — who's a real character who I knew — I said, "Does your school have a pet monitor?" He says, "What is it?" I said, "Then you don't have it if I have to explain it." And I explained the job. He calls the kid in the next day, he said, "We have many pets in this school now. We just got a new pet rabbit." That was true, purely coincidental. "We have so many pets and Dr. Brooks told me how you love taking care of pets. It would be of great help to us if you would be willing to become the first pet monitor of the school." Not only that, this character of a principal gave the kid a union card. He did. Seriously, it said, Pet Monitor Union. The kid was a scream. He came into therapy, you know, what he says to me? He throws down his union card, he says, "I'm union, I'm union."

What is a pet monitor? The pet monitor's job was to start taking care of the pet rabbit. Soon he started taking care of other pets. Soon this kid who never wanted to write because he felt he had nothing to say with the help of his wonderful teacher he wrote a manual, "How to Take Care of Pets." The manual was bound and is part of the school library. And by the end of the year he lectured in every classroom in that building on how to take care of pets and he never hid behind the bushes. See that principal had the courage to change the script.