



# I DON'T CARE

By Wilson McCaskill

How to deal with students who responded to situations by saying, “I don’t care” is something many teachers find troubling and difficult to deal with.

In many instances, use of this expression is a learned behaviour. It is prevalent in film, television and daily conversation. If adult role models, especially parents and teachers, use the expression it is all too easily absorbed by children and regurgitated in moments of discomfort, difficulty and challenge. Its use defines the child’s fallback position of disengagement and refusal.

In the following scenario I tackle the problem in a way similar to ways I have used many times.

It is of course, a scenario and not a verbatim transcript of an actual event. Consequently, I have constructed the scenario to guide teachers through the process and key points.

I recommend teachers talk to students at the very start of the year about saying, “I don’t care” and hopefully create the awareness that minimises its use.

I hope the scenario will give you the information to tackle the problem in your own unique way. And when you do, if nothing else, I’m sure the children in your care will see that in marked contrast to the dismissive disregard of, “I don’t care” you, in fact, do care and will always care very much.

## **SCENARIO**

Ian is in a group of three playing \*Amoeba Hula. Working with Elsa and Cam he has been trying to be the first group to jump successfully into their hula hoop.

\* The game, Amoeba Hula, is from Play Is The Way® Methodology Manuals Volume 2.

On two occasions during the game they have nearly made it, only to be tricked at the last jump before the hoop.

Once again they are one jump away from being first. The tension is high and Ian is rapidly giving instructions to Elsa and Cam who have each been responsible for the past two failures.

I blow the whistle and the team jumps into the hoop. Ian is ecstatic. He is sure they have won. His hands are in the air and he is shouting with delight.



I walk over to check that all is as it should be. I ask his team to look downwards at their feet. Ian's heel is just touching the hula hoop. He quickly inches it away and looks at me with pleading eyes.

I ask him if his foot was touching the hoop. He does not answer. I ask Cam who reluctantly confirms that it was. Announcing that they have not been successful I send the team to the start to try again.

Elsa says, "See it's not just us," and with that Ian storms to the side of the playing area and refuses to join in their next attempt.

Cam & Elsa have returned to the start line and are calling out to Ian. He refuses to join them and without their third member they ask if they can play as a pair.

I stop the game.

Wilson: Ian would you join Cam and Elsa please so they can continue to have a go.

Ian: I don't want to.

Wilson: I don't understand Ian. Three times you have nearly won the game. What makes you think you won't win it this time?

Ian: My leg hurts.

Wilson: Perhaps it does, but surely not so much that you must suddenly leave the game. Please join Elsa and Cam. Playing the game is the best way to forget the pain.

Ian: I don't want to.

Wilson: Elsa and Cam would you mind waiting a little longer to give Ian a chance to change his mind? Meanwhile, I'll play the game for a bit and see if I can trick a few more people. Remember, Ian, stay in the pain or play the game and forget the pain - your decision.

I play the game for a while longer. During this time Cam has gone over to talk to Ian who continues to refuse to budge.

Finally, a team makes it and I ask everyone to give them a clap. Everyone does except for Ian. I send them back to the beginning and invite them to try, along with everyone else, for second or third place.

Elsa comes up to me and asks if she and Cam can participate as a pair now because Ian isn't going to join in. Once again I stop the game.

Wilson: Boys and girls are you enjoying the game?



- All: Yes.
- Wilson: Is the game just fun or does it teach us some important things?
- Beth: It teaches us to listen.
- Sam: Which we don't do very well! *(Everyone laughs)*
- Wilson: It certainly lets us all practise that. Mary, tell me something else Amoeba Hula teaches us?
- Mary: Staying in control, not panicking.
- Wilson: Yes indeed. Richard?
- Richard: Working together.
- Wilson: Which your team has done well. Linda, give me a few more things that we have talked about before?
- Linda: Not giving up, getting over disappointment, remaining hopeful.
- Wilson: That's quite a bundle. Can you add anything, Ros?
- Ros: Supporting people who make mistakes. Being happy for those who win.
- Wilson: And pleased with yourself if you have been...?
- Ros: Trying your hardest and working hard.
- Wilson: Even if you didn't win. This game, like most games can teach us a lot, and it gives us the chance to practise what we learn. Why do we practise things Alan?
- Alan: To get good at them.
- Wilson: Correct. And to...?
- Alan: *(Interjects)* Make them a habit.
- Wilson: Yes. Because behaviour that is good for others and us needs to become a habit and practise makes a habit of them. So, would you say this game is good for some of us or all of us to practise?
- All: All of us.



Wilson: So let's do that. Cam, you and Elsa can participate as a pair.

Even though Ian looks disinterested I know he has heard most, if not all, of what has been said if only because the one thing he can't switch off is his hearing.

I play the game for a bit longer. Teams are still being tricked and returning to the start. However, Cam and Elsa are finding it easier, as you would expect because they aren't a team of three.

The moment arrives when Cam & Elsa are about to jump in and secure second place. I try my best to trick them but they hold firm. Eventually I blow the whistle and they get into the hoop without touching it. I announce their success.

Wilson: Boys and girls, second place goes to Cam and Elsa. Give them a clap. *(Everyone does except Ian)*. Before we play on for third position, please sit down where you are while I ask Elsa and Cam a few questions. Now, was it easier working as a pair?

Elsa: Yes.

Wilson: So, even though you did well and got second place you would agree that the others, in teams of three, would be finding it harder?

Elsa: Yes.

Wilson: Would you have preferred to play it in a team of three?

Cam: We asked Ian but he didn't want to join in.

Wilson: Elsa?

Elsa: Yes.

Wilson: Of course you would. Having teams of equal size is the fairest way to play the game. Ian, can we ask you to join your team please.

Ian: *(He doesn't answer)*

Wilson: Joining in would make it fair for everyone.

Ian: I don't care.

Wilson: Sorry, I didn't quite hear that.

Ian: I don't care!

*[I pause to let his words resonate and sink in. Without anger, calmly and steadily...]*



Wilson: Well, that's sad because I certainly do and I'm sure many others do as well.

Ian: I don't care.

Wilson: Ian, if you're going to say that, then you have to finish the sentence off. You have to say the rest of it. Go on say it.

*[Ian doesn't answer because he doesn't know what I mean]*

You see boys and girls you can't say; "I don't care," without really understanding what you are saying. When you say you don't care, what you're really saying is you don't care about you. That's what's sad. What Ian is saying is he doesn't care about himself.

Ian: No I'm not!

Wilson: Well you must be Ian that's only logical. Boys and girls, is playing the game good for all of us?

All: Yes.

Wilson: Of course it is. You worked that out a long time ago. That's why you're playing it without giving up. So, if it's good for all of us, is it good for Ian?

All: Yes.

Wilson: *(Without sarcasm or malice)* Correct again. It's not like Ian is some strange beast that's so different to the rest of us that the game is bad for him. The game is good for us and it's good for Ian too, and for all the same reasons we have already talked about.

*[I scan the group and look directly at some students and use their names to keep their attention, and that of the group, on the issue. I point to them as I say their names.]*

Liz, Todd, Van, Win, Lucy, Greg, if playing the game is good for everyone, if being fair is good for everyone, if helping out is good for everyone, if trying hard and not giving up is good for everyone then it's good for each one of you and it's good for Ian too.

But... and try really hard to understand this boys and girls – before you can do something that is good for you, you have to care enough about yourself to want what is good for you. *(I repeat.)* You have to care enough about yourself to want what is good for you.

*[I pause and hold the moment while looking intensely around the group urging them by my look to absorb what I am saying.]*



Does that make sense to you Liz?

Liz: Yes.

Wilson: Todd, do you care enough about you to do what is good for you?

Todd: Yes.

Wilson: Of course you do. Caring about you, wanting to improve yourself takes courage and strength Todd. Do you have the courage and strength, Van to do what is good for you, to do what will improve you?

Van: Yes.

Wilson: And I have seen you do it many times. But, let me ask you this, Van. Would you care enough about yourself to do what is good for you, would you have the courage to do it if you didn't like it, if it wasn't fun?

Van: *(He takes some seconds to think)* I think so.

Wilson: It's pleasing to see you thinking before answering, Van. So, you're not sure?

Van: *(He smiles, not committing himself one way or the other.)*

Wilson: Do you like skipping?

Van: No.

*[If I was his classroom teacher I might have asked him about a subject I know he dislikes.]*

Wilson: Are you good at it?

Van: *(With a laugh)* Nah!

Wilson: However, when we were doing the skipping games in the last session did you give up?

Van: Nah.

Wilson: Did others give up on you?

Van: Nah.



Wilson: In fact, a lot of people put a lot of effort in trying to improve your skills and you put a lot of effort in too. Didn't you?

Van: Yes.

Wilson: Well, to me that proves that you have the bravery to keep trying, to hang in there, to lose and still work with others to better yourself. So, let me ask the whole class. Does Van care enough about himself to keep working at something that is good for him even if he is not good at it and he doesn't like it?

All: Yes.

Wilson: And believe me he is not the only one in this class who does. You see, boys and girls no one can make you care about you. Only you can do that. And often when something doesn't work for us, when we fail or find something difficult we hide our feelings by saying we don't care about whatever it is we were doing.

We think not caring makes it easier to run away from the problem and in some way it does. But few of us are really happy giving in to our feelings and fears and running away. That's why caring takes courage. When you care about you, you care about bettering you and very often we better ourselves by overcoming problems, difficulties and failure. Facing monsters like that takes lots of courage. Van, did you succeed at skipping?

Van: No.

Wilson: Did you better yourself by refusing to give in?

Van: Yes.

Wilson: You see. You cared about you. Remind us, Van, if you're going to say I don't care, what you're really saying is...?

Van: I don't care about me.

Wilson: *(I repeat.)* I don't care about me. *(Seriously)* Understand this. There are few things that make me sadder than young people saying they don't care. Because I do care deeply about them and what they will bring to this world. I will always care – that's a promise. And I will try to convince you to care – that's a promise too.

Stand up please boys and girls. We shall continue the game.

*[I look to Ian, soften my voice and talk directly to him.]*



Ian, you have said you don't care. I hope that what you have heard has helped you to change your mind and care enough about you to join Cam and Elsa. What you need to know is that there is no weakness in changing your mind. *(Pause.)* In fact doing so is often the strongest thing you can do. I believe you can be that strong. Please join in and see if you can, like the rest of us, better yourself in our last try of the game.

***[Without saying anything, Ian gets up and walks towards his team. As soon as he starts to move I divert attention from him by talking to the whole class ensuring that I do not praise him for expected behaviour or reward him in any way, thereby conveying the understanding that he has been able to participate of his own accord and is his own master.]***

Okay boys and girls, the last go of the game. Make sure your holding hands tightly. Make sure your listening well and we are now looking for the team who will get third position. Concentrate and help each other. Ready?

*[I shout, "Jump" and everyone, including Ian's team, does. The entire class is laughing at the ease at which they were tricked and rushing back to the start line to try again. Ian is not laughing but he is back in the game and working with Cam and Elsa.]*

### **ALTERNATIVE**

*[Ian remains seated on the ground and does not get up to join Cam and Elsa.]*

Wilson: *(Without sadness or disappointment. In a factual neutral voice.)* I cannot make you join in Ian. The question you need to consider is why you can't make yourself. Perhaps you just need some time. Please take whatever time you need. The invitation to join us is always open. Join us when you can. *(Lighter, more upbeat.)* Cam and Elsa, are you happy to include Ian when he is ready?

Cam & Elsa: Yes.

Wilson: Thank you.

*[The session finishes and Ian did not join in. He stands up and returns with the group to class. My hope is that the discussion has had some impact and he will, at another time, find it possible to care enough about himself to participate in something for longer than he might have normally.]*

*When and if he does, my comments to him will be short, to the point and informative and for all to hear, unless he is particularly fragile in which case they will be for him only.]*



*Eg. Ian, you faced difficulty and kept trying. Your behaviour says you care about you. Keep trying – stay brave. You are worth every effort you will make. [You will notice that I have stayed away from generalised expressions like, “Well done,” “Fantastic,” “You’re great” or worst of all, “Good boy.”]*

Now that you have read this scenario it will be helpful and worthwhile to read chapter 21 from, *Children Aren’t Made Of China*, titled, “I Don’t Care.” It will help you to avoid using the expression yourself. It’s also a good chapter to put into your school newsletter to help shift the habits of parents. Please make the effort to read this chapter. It will complete the picture for you.