

**Questions and Answers with Carmella Van Vleet, author of
*How to Handle School Snafus: a Go Parents! guide***

Why did you write How to Handle School Snafus?

As a parent of three school-aged children, I saw a real need for this kind of book. There are all kinds of parenting guides on the market that address a variety of issues. Most, though, focus on a single issue. Who has time to read through a 300-page book on homework or bullying? Sometimes, it's just overkill. Also, I couldn't find any books that addressed other, less glamorous challenges like your child not eating lunch or panicking because she has a male teacher for the first time. I wanted to provide parents with a guide free of technical jargon, fun to read and easy to use.

What do you hope parents will walk away with?

Because families are unique, there isn't any one, right way to handle school problems. There are usually some very good places to start though. It is my hope that parents will walk away with a good supply of common sense, let's-try-this-first solutions to school snafus. It is also my hope that they realize they're not alone and that no challenge is too silly or small when it comes to their child.

Why the humorous approach?

I learned long ago that if you're a parent and you want to keep your sanity, you'd better have a good sense of humor. What else are you going to do but laugh when your child's teacher spends the first ten minutes of a conference accidentally talking about another student? (This really happened to friends of mine!) Things happen. We shouldn't take parenthood so seriously all the time. Being a parent is a huge responsibility, of course, but it's also a lot of fun.

Who else might benefit from reading this book?

I believe teachers and school counselors will find this book very useful. Many of the solutions (for example, helping a child deal with test anxiety or dealing with a know-it-all) are ideas you could use in the classroom.

Where did you get all the snafus?

Everywhere! Once I told people I was writing a book on handling school snafus, it seems everyone and their neighbor wanted to tell me about something they were struggling with or had struggled with in the past.

What is the most difficult snafu you've had to handle so far?

Bullying. Hands down. One afternoon, my six year old came home in tears. After some hugs and cajoling, she admitted she had been bullied for several weeks by an older child on the bus. My first reaction was the typical, emotional one. In fact, I was so upset I didn't even remember what I had written about handling a bus bully. I had to go look it up! Happily, I took my own advice and everything was settled quickly –and calmly.

What kind of research did you do for the book?

With each snafu, the first thing I did was consider how I had handled the situation. As a former teacher, I felt pretty confident about addressing many of the snafus. The next thing I would do was ask around or lurk on parenting chat boards to find out how other parents were handling certain situations. I read books and articles. I also made sure I ran many of the more serious situations past counselors, teachers and other experts for their input.

What are some of the more common snafus parents encounter when their children are in grade school?

Bullies, fights with friends, not clicking with a teacher, failing a test, test anxiety, underachieving – all of these are pretty common challenges.

Believe it or not, I also heard from many parents whose children refused to use the bathroom at school and didn't want Mom or Dad volunteering at school! Those two kind of surprised me.

What is your background?

I have a degree in elementary education from Emporia State University. I was a Kindergarten teacher before leaving the classroom to stay home with my children. Unwilling to give up teaching altogether, I worked with young students at the Thurber Writing Academy, a community program for kids of all ages, for over eight years. I've also enjoyed being an educational speaker and discussing various issues with parents.

How did you get started in your writing career?

I've always considered myself a writer. I wrote throughout grade school, high school and college. Then, like many people, I put aside my writing to earn a living and start a family. I didn't write much again until I was asked to edit the newsletter of a large, mother's group I belong to. (Never tell anyone you like to write unless you're prepared to work on a club or company newsletter!) When I had space to fill, I'd write funny stories about things that had happened to me as a mother. The essays got a great response, and I decided to see if I could write professionally. I wrote an article, sent it off to a parenting magazine and two weeks later had my first sale. After that, I began writing family humor essays and articles for parenting magazines all over the country and for several national publications. In addition, I've sold a handful of emergent readers and a teacher resource guide. I'm currently working on several picture books and another teacher's guide.

Is anything else you'd like readers to know about the book?

Yes. I'm donating part of my profits to the Tom Fennessy Back-to-School Project, a program that provides school supplies and new backpacks to homeless children and children living in transitional housing. One of my favorite things as a child was getting new school supplies. There's just something wonderful about a notebook with clean pages and freshly sharpened pencils. I want to help kids who can't afford these luxuries to experience the same excitement.