

# Building Respect

*for Self and Others*



*Ways Families Can Help Their  
Children Do Better in School*



# Why Respect Matters

**C**hildren who respect themselves and others do better in school—and in life. They help to make their school a better place for everyone to learn by demonstrating positive behavior and accepting people's differences. And they grow up to become respectful community members who get along with their neighbors and coworkers.

But schools alone cannot teach children all they need to know about respect. Nor can schools provide enough practice. Children learn about respect through day-to-day living and working with others. That means that home—with parents, brothers and sisters, relatives, friends and neighbors—is an important place to encourage respect.

This booklet is packed with practical tips, ideas and activities you can use every day to help build your child's self-respect and respect for others.

**Tip:** *Don't expect to put all the ideas in this booklet into practice right away. The best way to make changes is gradually. Focus on one or two ideas at a time—and don't forget to celebrate progress!*

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# Respect Is Not the Same as Obedience

**W**hen teaching your child respect, it is important to understand that respect is not the same as obedience. All parents want respect. But some make the mistake of *demanding* respect from their kids.

They might say things like, “Stand up straight!” or “Don’t ever talk to me like that!”

What these parents don’t realize is that they may not be getting respect at all. Parents who demand that children blindly do what they say may only be getting their children’s angry obedience. Or their children may be obeying them out of fear. Fear teaches children something entirely different than respect.

Respect is a two-way street. The best way to teach children respect is to be respectful toward them. Children must learn how respect feels. Only then will they know how to give it to others.

An atmosphere of mutual respect creates an ideal climate for positive behavior at home and at school.

Children who respect adults obey them because they *want* to. They understand that adults are looking out for their best interests.

Respect also creates an ideal climate for learning. That’s why educators are so interested in teaching children respectful behavior. And respect improves family relationships, too.

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## A QUIZ FOR PARENTS

# Do You Show Your Child Respect?

**A** child who feels respected is more likely to have self-respect and respect for others. Take this quiz to see if you are demonstrating respect for your child. Answer *yes* or *no* to each of the questions below:

- \_\_\_ 1. **I really listen** when my child tells me something. I stop what I am doing. I look at my child. I avoid interrupting.
- \_\_\_ 2. **I try to be fair.** I listen to my child's side before I come to a conclusion.
- \_\_\_ 3. **I display common courtesy to my child.** I say *excuse me, thank you, please*—and never use expressions like *shut up*.
- \_\_\_ 4. **I honor my child's privacy.** I give my child some time to be alone. I knock before entering my child's room.
- \_\_\_ 5. **I give my child some choices**—what to do, eat or wear; or when to do assignments.
- \_\_\_ 6. **I respect my child's decisions** on all but the most critical topics—even if they are not what *I* would prefer. I let my child sort things out and learn from mistakes. I avoid saying, "I told you so."
- \_\_\_ 7. **I talk openly and honestly with my child.** I share my feelings and welcome new views. And no subject is off limits when we talk.
- \_\_\_ 8. **I take my child's problems seriously.** I try to answer questions. I ask questions to help my child find solutions.
- \_\_\_ 9. **I ask my child's opinion often.** "Which do *you* think is best?" "What would *you* do in this situation?"
- \_\_\_ 10. **I discipline my child privately**—never in front of friends.

### How did you do?

Each *yes* answer means you're showing your child respect. For each *no* answer, try that suggestion from the quiz to help develop respect in your child.

# Are You a Role Model of Respect?

**T**elling children they need to be respectful is important. But all the advice and lectures in the world won't make a dent if adults don't do themselves what they ask their children to do. To teach your child respect, be a model of respect. How well are you doing?

- **Do you obey the laws** (such as wearing your seat belt and obeying the speed limit)? Do you speak about the importance of doing so?
- **Do you speak respectfully** about teachers and others in authority?
- **Are you courteous and polite?** Do you treat people who have beliefs different from your own with respect?
- **Do your actions show you respect** your own parents and elder family members? Do you speak to them respectfully? Do you help them?
- **Do you treat others** the way you would like to be treated, and talk about why with your child?
- **Do you think moral choices through out loud**—letting your child see you wrestle with such questions as, “What is the right thing to do?” “How would I want to be treated in this situation?” “What are likely consequences of my actions for others?”



# Show Your Child the Value of Rules

The first step in building respect for rules is to make rules important to your family. Children who must obey rules at home find it easier to comply with rules when they're away from home.

## Develop an Understanding of the Need for Rules

Discuss with your child what could happen when people don't follow the rules. Try some of these examples:

- **What could happen** if you make too much noise on the school bus?
- **What could happen** if there were no rules about when students can talk in class?
- **What could happen** if anyone of any age could drive a car?
- **What could happen** if people could drive on either side of the road?
- **What could happen** if you could take things from a store without paying for them?
- **Play a game**—like kickball, Monopoly® or Scrabble®—*without* any rules. After a few minutes, stop and talk about how things are going. Then play the game *with* rules, and discuss how they improve games and other areas of life.
- **Point out when you are following a rule**—such as stopping at a red light or obeying the speed limit. Discuss why it's important that you do. Point out that adults, as well as children, must follow rules, too.
- **Set rules for family discussions**—like rules for “talking and listening.” Point out whenever someone breaks a rule and discuss the effect it is having.

# Teach Your Child to Play by the Rules

There are many ways families can encourage children to play by the rules. Here are just a few:

- Say **“Thank you for remembering the rule”** when your child does so. Your encouragement will increase the likelihood that your child will follow the rule in the future.
- **Encourage your child** to participate in team sports and other activities that promote following rules and working together.
- **Enforce your rules consistently.** Children will test a rule until they know for sure that they are expected to obey it. If you sometimes let your child “get away with” not following a rule, it won’t be effective.

## These Strategies Make Rules Work

To make rules that children will respect and follow, involve them in making the rules whenever possible. Involving children also helps them understand that rules usually exist for a valid reason. It also helps to:

- **State rules positively.** Rules should tell your child what to do instead of what *not* to do. Saying, “Be nice to each other” describes the behavior you want. Saying, “Don’t fight” puts the undesirable behavior in the forefront of a child’s mind.
- **Make rules you’re willing—and able—to enforce.**
- **Make rules simple enough** that everyone can understand and follow them. Be sure you can follow them yourself.
- **Write rules** on a Family Rules chart so everyone can see and remember them.

# Respectful Behavior Starts at Home

Children who behave respectfully at home are more likely to demonstrate positive behavior in school. To create a climate of respect:

- **Teach your child to use respectful language.** Remind your child to say *please, thank you and excuse me*. Make it clear you expect your child to use respectful words and phrases even when disagreeing with someone.
- **Tell your child “I love you” often.** No matter how old children are, they still need to hear it.
- **Show your love for your child.** Actions always speak louder than words.
- **Show respect for your child.** Find specific examples in the quiz on page 2 of this booklet.
- **Explain that you have rules** because you care. Rules help to keep your child safe and to make your household a pleasant place to live.







- **Follow up and follow through.** Just because you establish rules doesn't mean your child will fall into line. Children will test to see what parents really believe and what the rules really are. A parent may *say* the rule is: "All beds must be made and rooms cleaned before leaving for school." But, if a child discovers it's OK skip the cleanup when running late, it will seem like the rule *really* is: "Clean your room before school—if there's time."
- **Be consistent with consequences.** Letting your child experience the results of choices is important. It empowers both of you. It's the only way your child will learn that actions have consequences—both positive and negative. When your child makes poor choices, don't fret over what to do. Just let the natural consequences happen then talk together about what your child learned from them.

# Help Your Child Learn to Respect Others

**A** healthy respect for other people is one of the most important kinds of respect you can teach your child. It is the basis for almost all other desirable behaviors.

## Establish a Fundamental Rule

Make it a family rule that you treat other people only in ways you would like to be treated. And the best way to teach this rule is to demonstrate it.

Try putting yourself in your child's shoes and asking: "Would I want this done to me?" If your answer is *no* ("No, I wouldn't want to be reprimanded in front of my friends," for example), then you also must ask, "Why would I want to do this to my child?"

## Help Your Child Feel Empathy

Respectful behavior comes most naturally to children when they are taught to think about their own feelings and the feelings of others. If you catch your child teasing another child, for example, take the opportunity to teach a lesson about how disrespect feels.

Wait until the scene has cooled off and ask in private, "How would you feel if someone did that to you?" It helps to have your child imagine how the other person feels. Feeling bad for the other person is far more powerful than your threatening, "If you ever do that again, I won't let you have a friend over."

You can also highlight your own acts of empathy by explaining what you are doing and why. "Aunt Martha is feeling lonely these days without Uncle Charlie, so I've invited her to stay with us for a few weeks."

# Teach Your Child to See People's Strengths

It's easier to respect others when you see their strengths rather than their weaknesses. Help your child see that there are two ways of looking at most things. Discuss the following descriptions with your child. Together, try to think of actual people for each trait. See if you can add more characteristics.

*Instead of being:*

- Rude
- Bossy
- Nosy
- Stubborn

*A person might be:*

- Open and direct
- A leader
- Curious
- Determined

## Celebrate Diversity

To live peacefully, children must learn to respect, accept and even appreciate people's differences. Here are some things you can do:

- **Watch the language** you use. Careless use of words that promote stereotypes can make a lasting impression.
- **Introduce your child** to people from different backgrounds.
- **Encourage your child** to study another language. Point out that if a person speaks imperfect English, that means the person knows how to speak more than one language!
- **Teach your child** that it's respectful to pronounce people's names correctly. Explain that it's OK to ask politely if your child isn't sure how to say a person's name.
- **Show your child** that people with disabilities should be treated with the same respect as everybody else.

## Teach Respect for Others' Views

Tell your child how you have learned to get along with people who have beliefs different from your own. Share personal examples of how you got to know someone who seemed very different from you. Talking about how you learned to accept and appreciate them can help your child learn about respect.

Also tell your child that respecting someone's values or beliefs isn't the same as *agreeing with* them. Use personal examples. Talk about some of your own views, customs or traditions that may seem different to others.

# Teach Your Child Respect for School and Teachers

**S**tudents whose families respect education and hard work do very well in school. Here are some ways you can help your child develop a healthy respect for school, school rules and school staff:

- **Get to know your child's teachers.** If possible, spend some time in your child's class. Volunteer to help and participate in school activities.
- **Demonstrate respect.** Talk about the importance of an education. Try to schedule non-urgent appointments and family trips outside of school hours. Always return teachers' calls and emails. Maintain a positive tone.
- **Learn school rules and expectations.** Talk them over with your child. If you disagree with a school rule, discuss it with the principal, not your child. Set reasonable consequences for following—and *not* following—the rules.
- **Monitor your child's school activities.** Make sure your child is prepared for school. Ask about what assignments and tests. Praise effort and achievement.
- **Speak positively about the school.** Your child will pick up on your attitude. If you have a concern, work with the school to solve it. Talk about how both you and the school are trying to help your child. Say that you are sure you can work out any problems.
- **Get the facts.** When there's a problem, talk with the school staff before taking action.

# Promote Self-Respect

Children who respect themselves are more likely to respect others. If they can see themselves as worthwhile human beings—despite their faults and imperfections—they can value other people, too. In addition, they aren't dependent on the approval of others, so they're less likely to be influenced by peer pressure and more able to rely on their own judgment. To boost your child's self-respect:

- **Show respect for your child.** Children who feel respected are more likely to feel self-respect, too.
- **Help your child pursue interests.** Praise effort *and* success.
- **Encourage small steps** toward independence. Learning to perform new tasks successfully can lead to self-respect. Turn over responsibility as soon as your child can handle it.
- **Comment sincerely** on your child's growing abilities every day.
- **Give credit where credit is due.** Create opportunities for your child to come up with ideas. Give positive feedback.
- **Teach your child to “be true to yourself.”** Explain that this means standing up for yourself and your beliefs. It also means being honest with yourself and others by not cheating or lying.



- **Encourage your child to be assertive.** It's important for children to share and be considerate of others. But it's not good when they will do anything to please others. If children always sacrifice or compromise their own wants and needs, they won't earn others' respect—and they won't respect themselves.
- **Show your child how to be responsible member of the community.** Children respect themselves when they know they are making a difference. Encourage your child to find ways to serve others and care for the environment. Your child might help you prepare and deliver meals to a sick neighbor or participate in a community cleanup.



- **Acknowledge and validate your child's feelings.** Show understanding when your child is sad or angry.
- **Accept mistakes.** When children know it's OK to make mistakes, they learn to respect themselves even when they're not perfect. Talk about times when you made mistakes and how you handled and learned from them.

# In Summary:

- **Children learn more** about respectful behavior when families and schools work together.
- **Respect is a two-way street**—and it is not just obedience.
- **The best way to teach children respect** is to respect *them*. Children must learn how respect feels in order to give it to others.
- **One of the most powerful ways** families can teach children respect is to be models of respect themselves.
- **Children respect rules best** when they understand them and help to develop them.
- **Children learn to respect other people** when they learn appreciation for others' differences.
- **When children respect themselves** as worthwhile human beings—they find it easier to respect other people.

Published by:

**THE**  
**PARENT**  
INSTITUTE®

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Stock No:  
(English) 334A  
(Spanish) 434A