



## Teaching Children and Teen about Respect

Children and teens learn respect best by example. The younger the child, the more influence you as the parent have on that child's ability to show respect for other people. As children become teens, the influence from peers and the media come more into play.

**Families should have basic rules** about how other family members treat each other. This is the first step in teaching respect. Remember, this includes the parents and any other adult that lives in the household. Everyone must adhere to these rules. The rules should include the following:

1. Name calling is not allowed.
2. No family member should ever put another family member down.
3. Negative talking of other family members is prohibited.
4. Forgiveness is important within the family and should be encouraged.

Setting clear expectations for respect within the family is of utmost importance. There should be clear consequences for disrespect, even if it involves a parent. Everyone has to be on the same page in this regard for the child or teen to understand where the boundaries exist. Respect is always mutual, if the child or teen is not respected, neither will be the parent.

**Self-respect is central** in learning to respect other family members. If a child or teen does not have self-respect and self-esteem, then their ability to respect others might be impaired. Listed below are the things necessary for a child or teen to maintain their self-esteem.

- A sense of security.
- A sense of belonging to the family and feeling wanted by the family.
- A sense of purpose, that the family has a need for them.
- A sense of personal competence and pride, a sense that they are capable of being successful.
- A sense of trust.
- A sense of responsibility towards the family.
- A sense of contribution that they have something to offer the family.
- A sense of making decisions that influence the family.
- A sense of self-control and a sense that in any circumstance, they are capable of controlling what is said and how it is said.
- A sense of encouragement.
- A sense of acceptance and forgiveness.



- A sense of family self-esteem.

By example, parents must learn to keep themselves under control when talking with their children and teens. Showing them respect, even when discipline is needed is important. Parents must never use name calling or say things like, “you will never amount to anything.” These comments are hurtful, decrease self-esteem and will not teach your child or teen to respect you. Never laugh at your child when there has been a mistake or infraction of a rule.

When arguing or discussing issues that affect discipline or boundaries for you children, it is important to have clear expectations as to what is acceptable. It is okay for parents and teens to have different opinions. It is okay to state your case, but even if the discussions get heated, neither party should ever cross the boundary of respect. If a “time-out” is needed for everyone to maintain control, take one. Come back to the discussion refreshed and ready to discuss the issues while maintaining control and respect. These tools will become valuable tools for your children and teens to use as they become adults. This helps them sooner rather than later.

A few words about the media would be important. Many lyrics of popular music today contain phrases that seem very disrespectful towards adults. If the music is otherwise not offensive to you, then allowing them to listen to these songs is fine, but you can use this to your advantage. One way of handling this situation is to say to your child, “if you can listen to these lyrics and still treat family members with respect, then you are old enough and mature enough to listen to these songs. If you cannot maintain manners or treat family members with respect, then you probably lack the maturity to listen to lyrics like this and it will be forbidden.” This puts the responsibility back on the child or teen, where it belongs. This approach would also help with certain TV shows and movies where teens might be portrayed as lacking respect for adults and family members. If they can watch the shows and not reenact the behavior themselves, then they are mature enough to watch those shows or movies.

Learning to use “I” messages rather than “you” messages, can be a good way of showing respect. For example, “look at your room, you are a slob!” This is a “you” message; changing it to an “I” message could be like this. “I get upset when I find your room messy and clothes all over the floor.” Expressing “I” statements is an easy way of avoiding name calling, being disrespectful, and letting them know how **their** actions make you feel. Learning these techniques ourselves will assist us in teaching respect to our children and teens.

At the end of the day, respect is learned mostly by **example**. Children and teens will learn respect quicker if they are treated with respect first. They also learn respect more easily if you have set boundaries and set expectations for their behavior towards other family members. Encouraging positive self-esteem will also be a valuable part of teaching respectful behavior.

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