

10 Ways to Teach Your Children About Respect

A good friend of mine is an upstanding member of the community. He is hard-working, profitable in business, conducts himself with integrity and has played leadership roles in a number of local charitable causes.

He has made a concerted effort to be respected in his town and has succeeded. The one person who should most respect him is his son, but that has been a struggle. Respect can't be demanded—yet that's exactly what we try.

Families can't function without respect, but the more we push, the more elusive it seems to be. So what's the answer? Why won't children fall into line? What kind of plan can possibly help?

There are no easy answers, but there are positive directions. First, try backing off. Families are not the military, and there is no uniform code of conduct.

If you want to earn respect from your children, I recommend these 10 things:

1. Respect your children. This will look different from child to child, but you know when you're disrespectful—and so do they. As parents, this is something we can teach by doing.

2. Respect their mother. The relationship between parents sets the tone for the greater family dynamic. When children witness Mom and Dad treating one another with love and respect—despite their differences—the standard has been set. On the other hand, when kids witness their parents tear one another down, respect is an uphill climb.

3. Be consistent. Children need to know what to

expect. Inconsistency on the part of parents leaves kids floundering. Consistency is both a compass and an anchor.

4. Follow through. Another way to say this is “Tell the truth.” Think carefully before you lay out a potential consequence, because the moment you fail to follow through, your credibility and your respect fly out the window.

5. Spend more time teaching love than teaching rules. Children who are taught the connection between love and discipline can accept consequences more easily than those who are governed exclusively by “chapter and verse.” Love does not demand respect; love commands respect.

6. Live with integrity. Children are master observers. Personal work ethic, paying bills, charitable giving, helping others, being generous with tips, talking positively about others behind their backs, etc. are all areas in which we build and sustain the kind of character to which our kids will respond with respect.

7. Be a family. Do you consider your family worthy of your best? Is your family Job One? This means being proactive about family life. Have meals together, go on special trips and events. Do game nights; go on vacation.

8. Be a leader. Don’t just love, love from the front. Parents are family leaders, and one way to lead is to love from the front. Serve them. Listen to their needs and respond with care.

9. Don’t try to be their friend. This can be hard because we all long for our kids to like us. But that’s not something we should strive for. Don’t worry about being loved—be their father instead. The “like” part isn’t a real factor, because that’s not why you’re there, is it? You are there to love them, and part of that is protecting them from themselves. Do what’s best for them even when they disagree.

10. Tell the truth. We're not just talking about words here. Tell the truth about what you believe—and then follow through. Tell the truth about what your values are—and then live them. Tell the truth about your love—and then love with as much energy as you can muster. Be genuine, let your gifts come through and do your best at being who you are. Your children won't love anything short of your authentic self. {eo}

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