

BE RESPECTFUL OF YOUR CHILDREN AND EXPECT RESPECT FROM THEM

Expecting respect from your children is one of the main components of healthy family life. It is also something that is being lost in our culture. Think of the times you hear people lament the lack of respect children show to parents, teachers, etc. I have often heard teachers say that they no longer can count on parents to cooperate in requiring their children to behave respectfully in the classroom. The general culture encourages children to be consuming, demanding, entitled individuals who see their parents as providers of goods and services. You, as a parent, must not let your children be like that. You need to expect respect from your children and be respectful of your children.

In the book *Take Back Your Kids*, the author, William J. Doherty, Ph.D., offers strategies to establish a respectful, trustful relationship between parents and children. Much of the advice which follows can be found in more detail in Dr. Doherty's work.

Respect Your Child

You, as a parent, are a child of God who has a great calling to be a father or mother to your children who are also children of God. As you show true love and respect for your children, they learn to do the same towards you. If children experience you speaking and acting respectfully towards them and expecting the same from them, they will follow this family norm. "Respecting children means giving them (according to their ages) the psychological space to have and express their own opinions, tastes, etc. in areas that are not really objects of direct parental control." Our children need our love, care, guidance, and protection based on a bedrock of respect for them who are God's gift to us. Children are entrusted to us—they are not our possessions.

Expect Respect

The commandment to "honor thy father and thy mother" is a central element in Christian family life. For millennia this has been seen as an essential aspect of healthy family life. Disrespect of parents is a deeply troubling trend in our culture. Respectfully, consistently expect respect. Speak in a respectful tone to children and expect them to do the same.

Be Alert to a Tone of Disrespect Coming from Your Children

You are not a peer of your children. You are their parent. In our counseling work, some of the parents who come to us have encouraged or accepted a peer-type relationship with their child. As a result, the child pays no more attention to them than to another peer and life at home becomes unpleasant for all. We assist these parents to recognize what has happened and encourage the parent to be the "grown-up" that the family needs. Parents learn to detect the disrespectful tone, to stop the conversation when this happens, and to respectfully request a respectful tone. The parents need to stop being a peer and start being a parent. As the parent respectfully takes charge, the parent becomes a source of security and positive guidance for the child. A child's raised voice is not necessarily disrespectful. A child can express anger (for example, a frustration with cleaning their room) but they cannot be allowed to attack their parent.

Stop Disrespectful Behavior Immediately

When you hear disrespect, immediately and respectfully state "That is disrespectful and needs to stop." Do not continue the discussion or respond to the request until there is a proper respectful tone.

Develop a Manner of Responding to Disrespect that Respectfully Gets the Child's Attention

Think of someone in your past who had the knack of calling for respectful attention—a parent or teacher or aunt who could convey a tone which says "don't mess with me buddy." Often, these folks could convey the message with a look and few words. Use that person as a model in developing your style of doing the same.

If You Have Allowed Disrespect, Explain That There is a New Policy in the Home

Clearly state what you expect and provide a model for the child with your own behavior. Encourage the child to join in the new policy of establishing a respectful climate. They will be

happier in a respectful environment and it will have a positive effect in other aspects of their lives.

When Disrespect Occurs, Focus on the Disrespect

If your child is disrespectful when asking for something or when explaining something, etc., focus on the disrespect and not the content of the communication. Dr. Doherty says “Imagine someone kicking you in the shins while asking to discuss the presidential election—you deal with the kicking and forget the politics (the content) for now.” Develop a family language that calls for “polite” behavior and tone and not “rudeness”. When parents, aunts, uncles, etc. are seen being respectful with each other, an excellent tone is set.

As a Consequence, “Time-outs” Can be Used When a Child Does Not Stop the Disrespectful Behavior

A child persisting in disrespect should be directed to “time-out” in a place where the child can cool-off. With an adolescent, you may want to remove yourself from the heated conversation. This can be a way of showing you will not accept disrespect without putting energy into enforcing a “time-out” on a resisting adolescent. Later, when the time is right, a conversation can occur concerning the unacceptability of disrespectful words and behavior. The child needs to know that they can express their concerns, opinions, anger in a respectful conversation and be heard.

Parental Cooperation, Composure, and Consistency

If disrespect has developed, both parents or the significant adults caring for the child need to be on the same page in communicating clearly, consistently, and in a firm, calm manner the type of behavior that is acceptable and unacceptable.

Christian parents know that they have a responsibility to provide honest, spiritual leadership and guidance to their children and expecting respect and giving respect are important parts of this role. Hopefully, by following the above suggestions, you will establish the type of respectful interaction that is your goal for your family. The adults can immediately begin modeling respectful behavior. Let the children hear and see you speaking and acting with mutual concern and respect. If your statements to each other as husband and wife and to the children are respectful with words like “please”, “thank you”, “can I help you”, “would you want me to . . .”, echo through your home, a powerful model will be in place in which your child can learn.

Ask God to help you carry out your vocation as parents and you will have His graceful assistance. God has called you to a life of holiness as a committed husband or wife. As committed parents you have the Sacraments (particularly the Eucharist and Confession) and the Scripture as sources of grace and guidance along with the Christian community of your parish. Focus on your calling and do your best to create a Christian home that will help your children avoid the pitfalls in our shallow popular culture.

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