

## Do Your Kids Respect You? 9 Ways to Change Their Attitude

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We often forget that children aren't born with a built-in sense of respect for others. Our children need to be taught to be respectful.

Think about it, from birth, kids have to manipulate their world to get their needs met. Usually by crying. It's natural and appropriate.

But as kids get older, it's our job as parents to teach them respectful ways of getting their needs met. And crying, manipulation, and disrespect are certainly not respectful ways to accomplish this.

### Why Are Our Kids Disrespectful?

People wonder why kids can be so disrespectful. Indeed, it's common to see children and teens arguing with adults (or ignoring them outright), using foul language, copping an attitude, and not using manners or respecting those in authority. Sadly, this has become the norm for many children and teens.

In my opinion, YouTube, movies, music, and video games all seem to glorify a disrespectful, angry, rude way of dealing with others. This means that in some ways we have to work harder as parents to teach our kids to be respectful.

More important, though, is that many parents have not established a firm culture of accountability in their home. Part of the problem is that parents are often busy, which makes it much harder to respond immediately to our kids. Let's face it, it's easier to let things slide when you're worn out and stressed from working so hard.

Finally, I believe that many parents have a hard time looking at their kids in a realistic light. I can't overstate how important it is to be willing to look at your children realistically, noting both their strengths and their areas of weakness. This allows you to see inappropriate behaviour as it happens and address it—and not make excuses or ignore it.

So how can you change the culture in your own house if disrespectful behaviours are starting—or is already a way of life? Here are 9 things you can do as a parent today to start getting respect back from your kids.

#### 1. Remember That Your Child Is Not Your Friend

It's not about your child liking you or even thanking you for what you do. It's important to remember that your child is not your friend. He's your child. Your job is to coach him to be able to function in the world. This means teaching him to behave respectfully to others, not just you.

When you think your child might be crossing the line, a good rule of thumb is to ask yourself, "Would I let the neighbour say these things to me? Would I let a stranger?" If the answer is no, don't let your child do it, either.

Someday when your child becomes an adult, your relationship may become more of a friendship. But for now, it's your job to be his parent: his teacher, coach and limit setter—not the buddy who lets him get away with things.

#### 2. Catch Disrespect Early and Plan Ahead If You Can

It's good to catch disrespectful behaviours early if possible. If your child is rude or disrespectful, don't turn a blind eye. Intervene and say:

*"We don't talk to each other that way in this family."*

Giving consequences when your kids are younger is going to pay off in the long run. It's really important as a parent if you see your child being disrespectful to admit it and then try to nip it in the bud.

Also, if your child is about to enter the teen years (or another potentially difficult phase) think about the future. Some parents I know are already planning how they will address behaviours as their ADD daughter (who is now 11) becomes a teenager. They're learning skills to prepare for their interactions with her at a later time. This can only help them as they move forward together as a family.

### **3. Get in Alignment with Your Co-Parent**

It's so important for you and your co-parent to be on the same page when it comes to your child's behaviours. Make sure one of you isn't allowing the disrespectful behaviours while the other is trying to intercede. Sit down together and talk about what your bottom lines are, and then come up with a plan of action—and a list of consequences you might give—if your child breaks the rules.

### **4. Teach Your Child Basic Social Interaction Skills**

It may sound old fashioned, but it's very important to teach your child basic manners like saying "please" and "thank you." When your child deals with her teachers in school or gets her first job and has these skills to fall back on, it will really go a long way.

Understand that using manners—just a simple "excuse me" or "thank you"—is also a form of empathy. It teaches your kids to respect others and acknowledge their impact on other people. When you think about it, disrespectful behaviour is the opposite of being empathetic and having good manners.

### **5. Be Respectful When You Correct Your Child**

When your child is being disrespectful, you as a parent need to correct them in a respectful manner. Yelling and getting upset and having your own attitude in response to theirs is not helpful. In fact, it often only escalates their disrespectful behaviour. The truth is, if you allow their disrespectful behaviour to affect you, it's difficult to be an effective teacher.

Instead, you can pull your child aside and give them a clear message of what is acceptable. You don't need to shout at them or embarrass them.

One of our friends was excellent at this parenting skill. He would pull his kids aside, say something quietly (I usually had no idea what it was), and it usually changed their behaviour immediately.

Use these incidents as teachable moments by pulling your kids aside calmly, making your expectations firm and clear, and following through with consequences if necessary.

### **6. Set Realistic Expectations for Your Child's Behaviour**

This may mean that you need to lower your expectations. Don't plan a huge road trip with your kids, for example, if they don't like to ride in the car. If your child has trouble in large groups and you plan an event for 30 people, you're likely to set everyone up for disappointment and probably an argument!

It is often helpful to set limits beforehand. For example, if you're going to go out to dinner, be clear with your kids about what you expect of them. This will not only help the behaviour but in some ways will help them feel safer. They will understand what is expected of them and will know what the consequences will be if they don't meet those expectations. If they meet your goals, certainly give them credit, but also if they don't, follow through on whatever consequences you've set up for them.

### **7. Clarify the Limits When Things Are Calm**

When you're in a situation where your child is disrespectful, that's not the ideal time to do a lot of talking about limits or consequences. It is best to talk later with your child about his behaviour and what your expectations are.

### **8. Talk About What Happened Afterward**

If your child is disrespectful or rude, talk about what happened once things are calm. Talk about how it could have been dealt with differently. This is a chance for you, as a parent, to listen to your child and hear what was going on with her when that behaviour happened. Try to stay objective. You can say:

*“Pretend a video camera recorded the whole thing. What would I see?”*

This is also a perfect time to have your child describe what she could have done differently.

## **9. Don't Take It Personally**

One of the biggest mistake's parents can make is to take their child's behaviour personally. The truth is, you should never fall into that trap because the teenager next door is doing the same thing to *his* parents. And your cousin's daughter is doing the same thing to *her* parents. All kids have conflicts with their parents. Your role is to just deal with your child's behaviour as objectively as possible.

When parents don't have effective ways to deal with these kinds of things, they may feel out of control and get scared. As a result, they often overreact or underreact to the situation. When they overreact, they become too rigid. And when they under react, they ignore the behaviour or tell themselves it's "just a phase." Either way, it won't help your child learn to manage his thoughts or emotions more effectively. And it won't teach him to be more respectful.

## **Conclusion**

Understand that if you haven't been able to intervene early with your kids, you can start at any time. Even if your child is constantly exhibiting disrespectful behaviour, you can begin stepping in and setting those clear limits.

Kids really *do* want limits, even if they protest. And they will protest! The message that they get when you step in and set limits is that they're cared about, that they're loved, and that you really want them to be successful and able to function well in the world. Our kids won't thank us now, but that's okay. It's not about getting them to thank us, it's about doing the right thing.