

Teaching Our Children Respect

Respect for Authority, for Differences and for Themselves

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Happy Holidays!

There are many activities in the month of December. Parties, plays, vacations, shopping, all contribute to a very busy and exciting month. There are only three weeks of school, and our educators are working hard to keep your children focused and learning during this brief period before the winter break. One of the attributes that I want to focus on during the month of December is the concept of “respect.” I am referring to respect for teachers, each other and of yourself. We have children at Thurgood Marshall ES from many different religious, racial, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Respect for diversity is paramount to having an optimal learning environment. If a child does not have respect for authority, peers, belongings and themselves, it will be very difficult for them to succeed in school.

There are several ways you as parents can reinforce the values and tenets of respect. You can show respect for your child, model respect, teach about authority and diversity at home, and practice respecting peers. Additionally, elementary children have a strong sense of fairness. They show the most respect for adults who make fair rules and apply them fairly. It is helpful them to have a say in the rules they’re expected to follow. Middle and high schoolers sometimes use disrespect to make themselves feel independent. Continue treating them with respect, and don’t let them mistreat you. Allow them to show independence in other ways, such as with clothing or hairstyles.

Showing Respect for Your Child. I feel there is no better way to teach your child about respect than to give him/her respect. This shows your child how good it feels to be respected. It also helps your child become more considerate of others. Here are some ways to show respect:

- *Be a good listener.* Give your child your full attention. Do not interrupt or dominate the conversation. See things from his/her point of view.
- *Be reliable.* Arrive on time, take care of your responsibilities and keep promises.
- *Be polite.* Use “please” and “thank you.”
- *Be fair.* Listen to your child’s side of the story before reaching a conclusion. Make reasonable family rules and apply them to everyone – including you!
- *Be positive.* Use compliments more than criticism. Don’t embarrass, insult or make fun of your child.
- *Be trusting.* Let your child make choices and handle responsibilities.
- *Be honest.* When you do something wrong, apologize.

Model Respect. Your child needs you to respect him/her, and they also need to see you respect yourself and others. Children learn from everything we do or say. Here are some ways you can model respect for your children:

- *Obey laws.* Follow the rules at home and elsewhere. Don't speed and then expect your child to become a safe driver.
- *Keep yourself healthy.* Exercise, eat well, and get enough sleep. Take a *strong* stand against smoking, drugs and alcohol abuse.
- *Be accepting.* Treat all people as equals, no matter how different they are from you. Try to appreciate and learn from others' backgrounds and views.
- *Be caring.* Show your concern for people, animals and the environment.
- *Notice good role models.* Talk about relatives, friends and celebrities who are respectful. Discuss what you admire about them.
- *Avoid poor role models.* Limit your child's exposure to people on TV and elsewhere who are disrespectful. When you see examples of disrespect, discuss better ways of behaving.
- *Practice moral reasoning.* Let your child see you struggle with questions like "What is the right thing to do? How would I want to be treated in this situation? How will my actions affect others?" If your child sees you do something wrong, correct yourself in your child's presence.

Teach About Authority At Home and at School. Parents teach the best lessons about authority because they care so much. When children see how authority helps them at home, they are more likely to respect it elsewhere. You can teach respect for authority with these steps:

- *Explain why rules are important.* Tell your child that you make rules because you care.
- *Use consequences.* Help your child learn from the natural or logical results of their action. If your child regularly leaves his/her math book at home, don't fix it by going to school and getting the book. Eventually, your child will remember their math book.
- *Enforce good rules and consequences consistently.* If your child can talk you out of the rules, then s/he won't respect your authority. S/he will learn that you really do not mean what you say.
- *Show love for your child.* Spend time with your child, and tell them you love them. Give them hugs and compliments.
- *Get involved with the school.* Keep in touch with your child's teachers. Let your child know that you are communicating with his/her school.
- *Encourage good homework habits.* Require your child to study every day, even if s/he has no homework. This will instill good work habits (See my November 2007 article).
- *Show interest in school work.* Ask your child about what s/he is studying. Look over assignments. Praise efforts and achievements.
- *Make attendance a priority.* Don't take your child out of school for non-medical reasons such as vacations or shopping.
- *Support the school.* Learn about school rules and expect your child to follow them. If you disagree about a school policy, complain to the school, and *not* to your child.

- *Talk about the importance of learning.* Explain how your education helped you in your life. Say things like “I’m glad I paid attention in math class. Now I can balance my checkbook.”

Practice Respecting Peers. Children who get along with peers have learned how to be respectful. They show concern for others’ needs and feelings – even during times of conflict. Parents can teach this skill at home and practice it with children. Here are some examples:

- *Develop empathy.* Help your child consider how others feel. Say “That wasn’t nice to tease Tommy. How would you feel if he did that to you?”
- *Teach tolerance.* Encourage your child to accept and enjoy other people’s differences. Introduce your child to people with different backgrounds. Cook ethnic foods, or suggest that your child learn a difference language.
- *Encourage courtesy.* Expect everyone in your family to be polite and kind to others.
- *Improve listening skills.* Teach your child to actively listen. This means your child should pay close attention while someone is talking, then restate what was said to make sure your child understood.

Teaching children respect is one of the most important things parents can do. Children who respect people, property, and themselves make decisions that improve everyone’s lives, including their own. By working together to teach your child respect, we will be putting your child on the path to success in life, school and beyond!

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