

## Effective Parent's Toolkit

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### *Respect and Compassion – The dilemma of Self-Centered Children*

#### **Core Material – Reading (Respect and Compassion)**

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#### **The Core Behaviors**

You might say that without respect you will not succeed in this world. Respect is at the core of most behaviors:

- Listening to others
- Cleaning up a mess made
- Picking up after a group activity
- Helping with chores around the house
- Using appropriate language and tone

A child that does not have respect will never master these skills and will have difficulty later in life.

Does your child

- Talk back
- Yell at you
- Refuse to clean their room
- Refuse to or “forget to” do their chores
- Mindlessly break or damage items with little regret
- Do not take responsibility for their actions
- Use inappropriate language or tone with you or other adults
- Believe that their opinion, view, perspective is the only one that is correct?

These are signs of disrespect. You will need to see past their drama, crisis, excuses and demands, and see what is at the core of that behavior, it is usually lack of respect for others, you, siblings, teachers, property, possessions, etc. This is what we might call a Privileged Perspective; they believe they are "owed" respect, possessions and allowances for any mistakes, missteps or offenses. This is not the way life is.

As parents, we often want our children to have what we did not have, or a better life, or to not experience the hardships or unpleasantness of life. In so doing we teach them that if they are uncomfortable, it is our responsibility to change that, if they are hungry, we must jump up to feed them. We are actually depriving them of learning independence, self-reliance and confidence.

## **Compassion**

When there is no respect, you cannot understand the plight of others, as you do not care if others are comfortable or happy, only that you are. Compassion is related to empathy, seeing that someone could use help, in some way, and offering to be of assistance. Taking other's needs and feelings into consideration above your own.

Does your child

- Sit and watch others as they clean or pick up
- Take the last piece of dessert that could have been cut and shared with someone who will now get none?
- Never offer assistance to others
- Leave a mess because they don't want to pick it up and knows that someone else will
- Come into a room and change the channel on the TV, even though someone else is watching a program
- Inflict harm, damage or pain, then not see their part in it, and therefore do not express regret

This is a sign that the child has no compassion. Being able to see other's needs, and put their own needs or interests aside to share, assist or comply.

Compassion is a skill they must see, emulate and have the opportunity to practice. Spending time with grandparents or the elderly, and helping them do their daily tasks, volunteering in a shelter or soup kitchen. It will be important that those participating with the child are not making disrespectful comments, rolling their eyes and making jokes. In the case of unsupervised children, or a group lead by a "Non-compassionate" leader left to help may group together and mock the experience and not learn from it. When providing these experiences you should use the skills explained in the *"Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication," "Improving Behavior"* and *"Recognize the Good"* modules; making sure you model the appropriate compassion and respect, showing them the value and how it makes those being helped feel.

## Modeling behavior

I am sad to say that too often children do not learn respect and compassion as they do not see it modeled at home, and have never experienced it. Some have seen it, but have never been expected to display it, and therefore do not know what it is. But keep in mind, it is often said that respect must be earned, however, respect is also ALWAYS afforded to adults and anyone NEW you meet – Respect in all cases is always displayed.

Am I suggesting that you respect your child when your child does not respect you? Yes – But with the appropriate learning opportunity. Here is an example of how it might work.

*Jessica's parents have invited guests over to watch a football game. Jessica doesn't know these guests, and is irritated that there will be a bunch of loud adults in the house.*

*When the guests arrive, Jessica is in the living room playing a video game on the TV they will be wanting to use. When her mother asks her to continue her game in her room, Jessica says that she just needs a few more minutes to get to her goal, adding, "your game isn't starting for another 10 minutes anyway! AND I was here first."*

OK, let us look at some options for handling this. Mentally check which one would be your natural reaction.

1. Snatch her up by the ear, shut off the TV and drag her up to her room, scolding her the whole way.
2. Ask her nicely every few minutes to please move to the other room.
3. Raise your voice and tell her to move her butt now, or you will break that game in a thousand pieces. Repeat 5 more times.
4. Give up and move your friends to the TV in the Playroom, coz after all, she was there first and the playroom is just as comfortable – no one wants a scene.
5. Bribe her with a treat/activity so she will do as you ask.
6. Sit down next to her and quietly say, "Jessica, we discussed this before you started your game. I respected your wish to be here so you could meet our friends, but now you need to keep up your end of the deal. Come over and meet Joe and Sally, and then go on up to your room to continue your game."

OK, so number 6 is the most respectful approach, but it did take some initial respect before the guests even arrived. The situation was discussed beforehand and agreed upon, so when it came time to act, the respect was baked in, and you only needed to remind her, without embarrassing her in front of the guests. All of that was very respectful. Give respect, identify that you are respecting her, then, expect respect in return.

In the beginning it will seem like you have to talk about respect all the time. But once you have established the behavior, it will come naturally.

You cannot tell a child to be respectful, if they were never fully taught how to be respectful. And teaching a child to respect you out of fear is not repeatable, that means in order for the child to respect anyone they must fear them. So little old ladies who need help in the grocery store are not scary, and therefore need not be respected. Respect and compassionate behavior must be taught AND modeled, which in turn will diminish selfish behavior.

If you can start with young children, you will have an easier time, but with older children, they are easily provoked to surly, belligerent and obnoxious behavior. This is when you will be either glad you started when they were young, or glad you are starting now, before it gets any worse.

### **Self-Centered behavior**

Great news, young children have an inborn capacity for compassion. They naturally identify with other kids, pets, stuffed animals and underdogs. The biggest obstacle is that their compassion and empathy is at the mercy of their other developmental factors, including limited impulse control—which makes them pull the cat's tail—and their belief that their needs absolutely must come first—which makes it hard for them to let their cousin push the cool fire truck.

These days, it seems more important than ever to raise kids who can understand and be kind to other people. You can make it part of everyday life: how you answer your child's questions, how you react to situations in your own life, how you solve conflict, and how you support their growing capacity to understand and think about other people. Some kids are naturally more tuned in to other people's feelings and difficulties, while others are a bit more clueless.

### **For smaller kids, promote sweetness, for older kids, discuss their behavior and how to change**

Teaching your child ways to treat things with care helps him develop the understanding that actions have consequences.

Show how to be gentle. Your child wants to be friendly but ends up grabbing the baby roughly? Demonstrate another way. You can actually take his hand and show him physically what a gentle touch is.

Speak softly. Your kindness will be a role model for how to treat others. When your child's in pain, be warm and caring. "It's all about the tone in your voice," says Emily Mihalchik, a mom of 2-year-old Sam and director of the Johnnie Appleseed Preschool, in Lawrence, Kansas. If a child's friend is crying, "I say, 'Maybe a hug would be nice,'" says Mihalchik. Young toddlers

don't have a very consistent long-term memory, so you'll have to repeat your lessons more times than you thought possible.

Role Model always. Children will mimic and mirror their parents behaviors. Even older kids pick up on how their parents or role models behave in new situations. Take opportunities to identify these situations and discuss why you are behaving the way you are, so they understand when and how to use respect and compassion.

Reject rudeness. What is rude? Spitting at someone, talking back, yelling at your parent or others, using curse words. I have seen parents laugh when this occurs, or pass it off as just how kids are these days. This is unacceptable. Compassion requires that your child respect others, including you. Correct the behavior immediately, and identify why that is unacceptable.

Not sharing is self-centered behavior. Faced with another child who has no toys to play with or is alone, a selfish child will keep his toy and continue enjoying himself. A child that has learned compassion, will recognize that they could help make that child happy by sharing, or including them in their own play.

## **Summary and Review Questions**

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Ask your child what they think compassion is.

Ask how they show respect to teachers – give suggestions if they cannot provide them

Ask older children how you can show them respect – guide this discussion to keep it in the context of Respect or compassion

Ask older children how, as a family you can show compassion to people

## **Action Steps – Putting it All into Action**

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Choose a few things to change this week in the way you interact with your child that teaches or models compassion and respect

Choose a few things this week that you want to address in their behavior – language, tone, wording, etc.

Find ways to model respect or compassion, or find ways to point out that behavior in others, or movies, etc.

Review the lessons in "*Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication*," "*Improving Behavior*" and "*Recognize the Good*" modules.