
ChangemakerTeens

The World Is Waiting For You...



Parent Changemaker Challenge

Request #1: Respect

If you RESPECT me, I will hear you.

What is RESPECT?

There are two camps that define the role that “respect” plays in the family structure. Sometimes, to the dismay of all who live there, a member from each camp resides in the same household. Quite the challenge, I’d say!

I remember being involved in a heated discussion with a neighbor about the one sided way that respect is given, even demanded, in his household. In a loud and angry voice, he explained that it was not his job to respect his kid. At least not while he was providing food, clothing and shelter for his son. It was the **kid** who had the duty of respecting the **dad**, at all times and in all circumstances.

UGH!

Now don’t get me wrong, I get it. Of course the child has to respect the parent. Of course he does! But it is most definitely NOT just a one way street, as the father demanded. Far from it! And now we know which camp you reside in, because you are either scathing right now or you are agreeing with me. But please allow me to explain.

Here is the definition of respect:

“To treat with special consideration or high regard.”

Notice that the word “deserve” is left out of the definition. Respect is something that all people, ALL PEOPLE, need and want just because they are members of the human race. We must treat our teenagers, and yes, our younger children, with consideration simply because they are human. And as humans, they are doing their job, whether we like it or not, of maturing into young adults.

Actually, respect is the number one behavior to learn as a parent because it is the foundation for all relationships. It is the first request that teenagers asked of their parents in the poem, "A Message To Parents." And honestly, without mutual respect in the home, you might as well forget about ever having a solid relationship with your kids, especially your teenagers.

Think about a homeless bum on the street, begging for money. Is he worthy of your respect or should you just step over him while you hurry to the other side of the road? Yes, he is worthy. And why, you might ask? Because he is human. Period. We have absolutely no idea why this poor soul is in the situation that he is in. We don't know the circumstances of his life, just like, believe it or not, you don't always know the circumstances of your teen's life.

We are not with our kids 24 hours a day. We don't know every single detail of what happened to them in school or on the bus or at the store.

Respect vs. Pride

Here's a question for you. Have you ever told your teen, or child, that you are proud of them? Of course you have. We all have. It's what parents do. But let's make a distinction here between pride and respect. We already know the definition of respect. Let's look at a definition of pride:

“Pleased or satisfied with your possession.”

Hmmmm. So pride, or being proud, is all about you and ownership. It's all about how the other person makes YOU look and feel. Respect, on the other hand, is all about THEM. Here's some examples to help you distinguish between the two.

EXAMPLE #1

- * I am so **proud** of your grades.
- * I really **respect** how hard you worked to get those grades.

EXAMPLE #2

- * I'm so **proud** of you for being here! It's awesome that you want to do something about this.
- * I have such a deep **respect** for your commitment to save your marriage with a new baby on the way.

See the difference? Pride is something they have done. It's an accomplishment, action or a behavior. Respect is something that they are. It's a quality that your teen or child has. It's compassion, sensitivity, forgiving, hard working or caring.

We, as parents, usually focus on accomplishments. But what our teens **DO** is not who they **ARE**. They need our respect because of their human qualities. And it's never too early to start focusing on qualities. Kids as young as 3 years old are able to understand the difference in how you talk to them.

We say we're so proud of their band performance or their skills as a baseball player or their art project. And yeah, I get that. They make us look good when they do something well. But what

about how much they practiced to be so good at their musical instrument? What about the dedication your son shows by going outside, day after day, to hit a hundred baseballs off the tee or the amazing concentration your daughter shows by painting the finest detail of her art project. It's not about what they do. It's about how they do it.

EXAMPLE #3

Let's say your son is an excellent athlete, and his athletic abilities totally defined who he was as a high school student. He was always known as the sports guy and his world, and yours, revolved around when his next game was. Then he goes off to college, but the competition is fierce so he doesn't make the team. No big deal, right? He'll just be a regular college student.

Except at the end of the first year he flunks out of college and comes home depressed and different. So what happened? He was always acknowledged for what he did. Baseball, football, basketball, etc. Maybe the proud parents didn't acknowledge him for who he was. When he wasn't playing sports anymore, he felt as though he wasn't anything. Even if he did continue to play in college, he will eventually have to get a job and leave his status as an athlete behind. Then what? Maybe he'll be the same, depressed, and lost young man. Maybe if he was truly respected for his hard work, determination, and perseverance instead, he could handle this differently.

Choosing Respect Over Pride

Start thinking in terms of respect, not pride and you will totally shift your relationships. Pride breeds co-dependence. And your teen or child will have to keep doing the action to make you happy. That doesn't sound like a good situation for either one of you. But if you challenge yourself to acknowledge the quality under or behind the behavior, you will be able to show him or her that it's not the behavior you love, it's the person! If the high school athlete was acknowledged in this way, he would have sailed through college, AND life!

So respect is a positive, unconditional expression of esteem. It is NOT attached to your child's performance or behavior and it should be shown to children, and all people, just because they are individuals. Let's go back to my neighbor at the beginning of our discussion. Are you still on his side?

There's an even more important reason to get your feelings toward respect figured out as soon as possible. Think about what we are doing here. We are trying to give your teens, children and young adults something bigger than themselves to believe in; a cause to work toward, a wrong that needs to be righted. Do you think we are going to be successful if your teen is not respected at home? Do you think they're going to think twice about respecting the environment or a kid in school or the teacher that gives them a bad grade?

Here's an eye opener for you. When Diana Sterling was doing the research for the poem, "A Message To Parents," she asked the teens about the importance of being respected by their parents. One teen answered in a way that Diana will never forget. She said, "If I'm not respected by my parents, then how am I supposed to respect myself?" Let's think about that for a second. A teenage girl with no self-respect is a recipe for disaster. With all the factors influencing the behavior of teenagers in today's world, not being respected at home shouldn't even be in the mix.

I want you to think of this discussion as an introduction to a new model of communication for you and your family. Regardless of whether your children are still young, or fully engulfed in the teen years, use this as the foundation to think and talk to your kids differently. And don't stop there! Treat your spouse with your new language abilities too! There is no age limit for treating

people with respect, and more importantly, telling the people you love how much you respect them.

And it IS a two way street. I firmly believe that. Sorry, neighbor!

Practicing Respect

The following “practices” are suggestions for incorporating the art of respecting others into your life. Quick question. Has anyone ever said, “I respect you” to you? How did it feel? Sadly, it’s not a word that is commonly used in daily conversation. Most people never even hear the word, nor do they say it to others. Acknowledging your respect for someone is an affirmation of their being. Teenagers are ravenous for this type of confirmation. It lets them know that they are not alone and that they’re on the right track. And when young children are raised knowing that they are valued, everybody wins.

It’s not too late, even if your kids are grown and out of the house. Begin practicing respect today! Get some sticky notes and post reminders to yourself on your refrigerator, on the bathroom mirror, in your car for when you pick up your kids....wherever you could use a gentle reminder.

Remember, the term “practice” is open ended. Practicing something guarantees improvement, not perfection, so keep at it. The more you use the word, the less foreign it will sound! Here we go!

PRACTICE #1 - SAY IT

Try using the word “respect” daily in appropriate situations with your teenager (or tween or spouse or parent or friend). Say it in a respectful tone, paying particular attention to your body language. You’ll probably have to look for opportunities to genuinely say “I respect you for...” Try to say it at least once daily over the next several weeks. Watch their reaction. Make sure what you say is from the heart – it might take some practice to make it sound natural, not forced, but keep trying! It’s very difficult to use the word respect in our American culture but you can change that. Well, at least in your own home! Spend a few moments at night remembering what you said and what the result was.

PRACTICE #2 - REHEARSAL

Do you respect yourself? Every morning, look in the mirror and say “I respect you” to yourself. Mean it. Get used to it, how it sounds, how you feel when you say it. It will be easier to say and show to others if you can first learn to say it to yourself.

PRACTICE #3 - QUALITIES

Write a list of all the adults whom you respect, and why. What particular qualities, not accomplishments, do you respect them for?

Now add teenagers to your list, especially your own teenagers. Write down the good qualities of each teenager on the list. Put the list in your purse or pocket and look at it daily. Start using words that describe the qualities, not the actions, that you respect in your teen.

Now make a list of your young children (if appropriate) and write down the good qualities of your little ones. Chances are the qualities will remain and even grow stronger if you recognize them now and nurture them as your child grows. Way to be proactive!

PRACTICE #4 - SHOW RESPECT

Pay attention to your actions and show respect to your teen. Then practice showing respect to other teens, especially those who you would normally bypass or ignore. What is your own personal definition of respect and what is the best way for you to show your teen that you respect them? They may not know that you respect them until you actually say it out loud. Telling other adults that you respect your teen does not create the same connection as when you tell them yourself. If you're struggling, or are embarrassed, refer to practice #1.

PRACTICE #5 - ASK

Ask your teenager, "How do you like to be respected?" Maybe they want you to say it, or maybe they want you to show it by handing over the car keys. Whatever they say, don't criticize, just listen! And by doing that, BAM! You've shown respect!