



Growing Respect

by Genie Stoker

It's Sunday morning, and in a circle of identical chairs your class awaits the beginning of your lesson. But the students filling those chairs are far from identical and pretty far from quiet too. Damien bounces around the room like a pinball with seemingly no regard for others. Rachel agrees to read the Bible story, but she stumbles over the word Capernaum. Jerry calls her "stupid."

I feel challenged to help children form bonds of respect for one another, and I have learned to use four tools; *prayer, modeling respect, setting clear limits, and understanding diversity.*

Prayer

Pray for your students. Before class, join with your team teacher and other staff persons in prayer. Ask the Lord's blessing on your work and your students. Soon after the group gathers, invite them to share joys and concerns in prayer. This serves three purposes: (1) It teaches them how to pray; (2) It helps them lay down their burdens, so they can enjoy more fully the Sunday experience; and (3) As they share joys and concerns, they learn about each other. With that knowledge come empathy and a desire to encourage and respect one another.

Modeling Respect

You may be offering a child more respect than he receives anywhere else. Your example makes a difference. Greet each student as he or she enters. Pray aloud for the students as you reiterate their joys and concerns. If you team-teach, support one another; encourage the class to respect the other teacher as well.

Use *please, thank you*, or whatever words you'd like to model. We naturally tend to compliment some students more than others. Watch carefully for this, so you can compliment and encourage those who might have been ignored.

When children can't think of a way to word their feelings, they may resort to rudeness. You can help by teaching the format, "I feel...when you...because..." (e.g., "I feel hurt when you swear 'Jesus!' because I love Jesus, and I know He loves you too." Or, "I feel so happy that you've cleaned off the table. Now we'll have time to use the computers.")

Setting Clear Limits

Our job is to help children develop a moral compass based on God's law. Paul encourages respect: "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thessalonians

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| R | Recognize and welcome each child. |
| E | Encourage children to help you. |
| S | Show polite alternatives to rude language/behavior. |
| P | Pray for and with your children. |
| E | Empathize with feelings even when you disagree with behavior. |
| C | Compliment a child's efforts, however small. |
| T | Trust God and trust your children's abilities to learn respect. |

5:11). Children can use that verse to calculate the effects of an action. Does it build someone up or tear someone down? Does it help or hurt?

A verbal walk-through can prevent insensitive behavior. For instance, if your class will be visiting a nursing home, you might invite a person who works with the elderly to visit with your students and answer their questions. This can prepare the children to relate warmly to those they visit.

Understanding Diversity

Damien was not being disrespectful when he bounced around like a pinball. He was a child who expressed himself physically; his activity related to his joy. We all learn and express ourselves through at least three modes: visual (seeing, reading),

auditory (talking, listening), and kinesthetic (physical movement, feeling, and touch). Some children favor one mode, but that can change with age and circumstances.

Plan activities that combine seeing, hearing, and movement. Restless teens can debate

ideas as they hike to a serene spot for prayer. Bouncy kindergartners can use action songs or impromptu drama. The 10-year-old who can't sit still can run an errand. Your respect and confidence in him will help him understand the Savior who loves and respects us all.

Questions For Further Study—

1. What are important factors in teaching a child respect for others?
2. Give an example of a time a child may appear to be showing disrespect when he is not being disrespectful.
3. How well are the members of your ministry team able to discern “disrespectful behavior” motivated by other factors? What improvements can be made?