

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Suggestions For Raising Respectful Children

from the American Counseling Association

Every parent enjoys hearing comments about how polite and respectful their children are. Unfortunately, especially at home, too many kids seem to have missed that lesson on politeness. The good news is that this situation can be fixed. The bad news is that we usually have to change ourselves in order to see it fixed.

While most of us would never think of shouting or cursing at our friends, neighbors or co-workers, this often isn't true when we're communicating with our children. Too often parents find themselves yelling, shouting orders and being sarcastic with the kids.

When angry or frustrated, we parents may find we are raising our voices, making demands, and generally being unwilling to listen to whatever excuses or explanations our child may be trying to offer. Would we do that with a friend?

According to the experts, the best way to improve our kids' respectfulness is simply to set an example ourselves and show our children more respect.

It really isn't that hard to do. It isn't reasonable to expect that we'll never get upset and angry with our children, but how we act when upset will help teach our kids respect, and that will make a big difference in the quality of family relationships for years to come.

So how do you communicate with your children to help foster a more respectful environment?

- Eliminate shouting, name-calling and sarcasm. These all destroy respect and just encourage resentment and more conflict.

- Communicate honestly and calmly with your children when their behavior has left you feeling hurt, scared or angered. You'll be surprised how well they listen to real, meaningful communication as opposed to an angry tirade.

- Give your children choices in how responsibilities are handled. Rather than just commanding "Get in that shower now!" try asking "What time would you prefer to take your shower - 8 or 8:30?"

- Expect and require respectful behavior from all members of your household, not just your children. Simple rules such as, "Don't interrupt when others are speaking," or, "We always say please and thank you," make acting respectfully a natural way of family life when both adults and children follow those rules.

We all want our children to be polite, well-mannered, and respectful. The way to make that happen is to be good examples of such behaviors ourselves, especially in the relationship we have with our children.

Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcornet@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org

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