

Teaching Respect

How to teach kids to respect authority.
Interview by Clay Renick

It's every parent's nightmare. The phone rings. A teacher is upset. Your middle school child had a problem at school. "It was open disrespect," the teacher explains.

Issues with authority are common in the middle school years. This is the age when young teenagers want to know the reasons behind the rules. And even then, many teens think they're exempt. This above-it-all attitude is especially frustrating to teachers and administrators, who rely on parents to teach their children to respect authority, even when they disagree.

Take a proactive approach by role-playing scenarios where a teacher asks your child to do something he doesn't want to do, like redoing an assignment. Help your child come up with respectful ways to ask clarifying questions when he doesn't understand an instruction. If your child feels like he's being treated unfairly, tell him not to react and talk back—you will discuss the problem with him and then decide what to do. Remind him that respect is one way we can show God's love to others. By taking these steps, you will equip your child with an invaluable life skill.

When the Teacher Calls

It's in your best interest to support the teacher and other authority figures. If you make excuses or cover for your child, he learns that his actions have no real consequences. If you argue with the teacher or question her judgment in front of your child, you will undermine the respect that teacher deserves. In *Helping Your Child Succeed in Public School* (Tyndale), author Cheri Fuller offers some suggestions on how to handle a call

from a teacher. Remember, your child is watching you.

1. Listen to the teacher's explanation, and tell him you will call him back after you speak to your child.
2. Without anger or judgment, ask your child to give you his perspective on the story. Ask him: "What can you tell me about this? Is there anything that you are aware of that is causing this problem? Let's talk about your day and the behavior your teacher is talking about." If you aren't getting the answers you need, do an activity together like throwing the ball or taking a walk. Kids tend to open up when they are doing something active with you.
3. Call the teacher back and schedule a conference. Go with an open mind—we don't always see our kids objectively. You need to be willing to hear the teacher without letting your urge to defend your child get in the way. Be prepared with questions such as: "How do you see my child functioning in the classroom?" "Does he seem happy at school?" "What have you done about his problem so far?" and "How can I help at home?"
4. Before you leave, schedule a follow-up conference to discuss your child's progress.

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