

S

oon after he started kindergarten, my sweet 5-year-old came down with a whopping case of bad attitude. “Please may I have some juice?” became “Where’s my juice?”

Words like *stupid* and *lazy* started peppering his speech and, most glaring of all, he started issuing ultimatums. When I heard “If you don’t give me that ice cream, I’m going to spit on you,” I felt like shouting—but instead, I forced myself to bite my tongue. After I regained my composure, I said: “That’s not an okay way to talk. It’s hurtful and unkind. I need you to speak to me with respect, please.”

Respect. Thanks to Aretha, we all know how to spell it. But sadly, in today’s world (where rudeness is so pervasive that even our president gets heckled while making a speech), we no longer expect that everyone will show respect for others. The good news is that we can teach our kids this critical value—and in doing so, we’ll end up imparting crucial lessons in kindness, consideration, honesty, open-mindedness, and gratitude as well. The most effective way to teach kids respectful behavior is to model it yourself, says Victoria Kindle Hodson, coauthor of *Respectful Parents, Respectful Kids*. But beyond walking the walk, there are plenty of simple strategies you can use.

DEMAND GOOD MANNERS

Acting polite isn’t merely a formality, says psychotherapist Ingrid Schweiger, Ph.D., author of *Self-Esteem for a Lifetime*. “When kids say ‘thanks’ after something is given to them, they acknowledge that there’s a mutual exchange going on, a give-and-take,” she explains. And by going through the motions, they eventually learn not to expect the world on a silver platter.

Even toddlers can learn to say “please” and “thank you,” while preschoolers should be expected to look people in the eye when they greet them and to say “hello” and “goodbye.”

Be prepared to give plenty of gentle reminders. “When my boys were younger I was constantly cueing them to say ‘I’m sorry’ or ‘Excuse me.’ Now, as a result, it mostly comes naturally to them,” says Debbie Oser, of North Wales, Pennsylvania. But sometimes a nudge isn’t enough: If you’re taking your kids someplace that requires a specific kind of behavior (say, your office or an upscale store), make sure they understand what’s expected of them. “Before we go out to eat, we review proper manners and warn our kids that if they don’t act appropriately, they’ll be removed from the restaurant. And we make sure we follow through with that—even if we really want to stay,” says Sarah Natividad, a mom of four in Tooele, Utah.

When your kids successfully mind their p’s and q’s, reinforce their behavior by offering praise—and mentioning why

those good manners mattered so much, says Dr. Schweiger. “I tell my boys, ‘It was very nice the way you thanked Tommy’s mom for the cookies. I know it made her feel appreciated for all of her hard work,’” says Patricia Rossia, of Tampa Bay, Florida.

DON’T TOLERATE RUDENESS

Bratty behavior and back talk are so common these days that it can be easy to just roll your eyes when your kids call each other names or your daughter throws a fit after you announce that TV time is over. But a child who’s allowed to speak that way to his family may come to believe it’s okay to sass other people too, so it’s vital that parents respond to the behavior immediately.

Make it clear that no matter how annoyed your kid may be, it’s never acceptable for him to lash out at another person. Then help him express himself by making “I” statements (as in “I feel frustrated!”) rather than ones that start with “You” (as in “You are a jerk!”), says Dr. Schweiger. You can also encourage him to put his feelings into words by asking him questions, suggests Hodson. (If he’s making sarcastic comments, say, “You seem upset. Let’s talk about it,” or if he’s yelling at his brother, you might ask him, “You sound really mad to me. Can you tell me what’s going on?”). Giving your child a positive way to express his

■ Children become more open-minded when they have a variety of different experiences.



emotions lets him know that while it's natural to feel angry or frustrated from time to time, that doesn't make it okay to insult others or scream and shout.

Of course, little ones are still mastering impulse control and learning how to articulate the things that they're feeling, so don't be surprised if it takes a lot of work to help your young child get a handle on her temper and if she slips up quite frequently. Part of teaching respect is teaching kids that when we make mistakes, we say we're sorry—it shows that you care enough about the person you've disrespected to take responsibility for your mistakes, explains Dr. Schweiger. So lead the way by apologizing yourself when it's appropriate, and urge your kids to do the same, once they've calmed down about what's bothering them.

TEACH LISTENING SKILLS

By giving someone your time and attention, you let him know that you value him, explains Dr. Schweiger; it's one of the most fundamental ways to show respect. The first step toward being a good listener: removing distractions and making eye contact. So teach your child to put down the Wii control and focus on you when you're talking (by the same token, make sure you look up from your iPhone when your kid has something to say too).

You can further educate her in what it takes to be a courteous conversationalist—not interrupting, waiting for a turn to talk—by role-playing. Start with the *don't's*; your child will get a kick out of pretending she's an "interrupter" or someone who looks away when she's speaking. Then she can tackle the *do's* (wait until a person is done talking to comment, follow up on what the other person just said with a question) and notice the difference.

ESTABLISH RULES

Setting boundaries teaches kids that the world doesn't revolve around them; they also have to consider others with their actions. Moreover, "if they can't follow your house rules, they won't be able to do it in kindergarten and beyond," says Dr. Schweiger. "By allowing them to do whatever they want, without consequences, you're setting them up for failure later on." So it's important to instill a regard for authority in your little ones, starting at home.

In order to respect your house rules, your kids have to know exactly what they are, so sit down and explain them (post them on the fridge too). Also

Respect That Stuff!

When we teach kids to treat belongings with respect, we're helping them develop a sense of gratitude and consideration. How to do it:

EXPLAIN VALUE

Help kids understand what gives something its worth. So if your son picks a neighbor's flower without asking, don't just scold him; mention all the time she spends tending her garden so everyone can enjoy it.

THINK LESS IS MORE

Children don't need a ton of stuff, and the more playthings they get, the less they'll appreciate each item. Offer them fewer toys, and try to choose ones that they can use in a variety of creative ways.

MAKE IT CLEAR

Before you hand over a prized object, spell out the rules: "If you would like to use Mommy's music box, you must be willing to stay seated, make sure you don't shake it, and let Mommy turn the key."

take the time to talk about why these rules matter. Your child may not immediately understand the connection between respecting the rules and respecting the people who set them and live under them, but you can break it down for him. (Leaving toys out may seem harmless, but it creates a messy household for everyone; roughhousing might seem like fun, but someone could get hurt.) Next, be clear about what will happen if the rules are broken. Finally, be prepared to repeat the rules regularly and to follow through with those consequences if necessary.

ENCOURAGE OPEN-MINDEDNESS

Treating others with respect means taking the time to get to know them and trying to see where they're coming from—even when you don't immediately hit it off. "We make it clear to our

Continued on page 239



Part of being a polite person is knowing how to take turns—nicely.

