

Respectful Relationships

Respect, Responsibility and Relationships are the three catch words we use to define and promote positive behaviours at our school. This week we would like to combine two of these and look at **respectful relationships** and how we might help our sons and daughters to recognise and develop these most important facets of a happy and fulfilled life.

Respect can be demonstrated in different ways but primarily it is about how we treat others and how we treat ourselves. It means having regard for another's feelings and views and valuing our own. It is about treating people with dignity and about being dignified. Respect is a quality that is learned. Children learn about respect by watching and listening to the adults around them. Be assured they are much more likely to mimic our behaviour and values than they are to simply do as we tell them to.

Respect is a vital ingredient in any healthy relationship. Developing and maintaining respectful relationships requires a range of capacities and skills. When respect is absent, conflict can occur and relationships can breakdown. Children look to adults for guidance in how to behave in most circumstances and this includes how to behave towards other people. So as parents and carers we need to be very mindful of the behaviours we are modelling to them.

You can assist your children in the following ways:

- Help children to develop empathy by helping them to see a situation from an-other's perspective. This can be modelled by striving to see your own child's point of view. Reading novels and stories with children is also a good way to open up discussion about how someone might be feeling in a non- threatening, third party way.
- You can help your children to be respectful of others' feelings by giving them the opportunity to talk about their views and ideas and feelings about a situation without rushing in with your own ideas and solutions. Here you can model showing interest and respect for a different opinion.
- You can help children manage anger by taking responsibility for, and managing your own. This does not mean bottling up hurt or angry feelings but rather expressing them in a calm and respectful manner. Teaching children skills like counting to 10, or practising some deep breaths can be helpful, or even saying something like, 'I'm feeling very angry about what's happened. I am going to go and calm down for a minute and have a think before we talk about this.'
- Parents can help children resolve conflict in relationships by modelling healthy discussions where differing views are considered, or resolving issues where one person gets their way and another can capitulate without embarrassment or loss of face. This helps a child to accept that sometimes they won't get their own way and that's OK. On the other hand, allowing your children hear you stand up for yourself and say, 'No', while still giving consideration to another person's request can help your child learn to be assertive without being aggressive. This can also help them to build and maintain appropriate boundaries in relationships.
- Helping your child with a problem by encouraging them to talk about the issue and their feelings builds trust. Helping them to consider options and possible outcomes, and how outcomes might impact on others, helps them to effectively think things through before making a decision or before acting.
- What are you teaching your children about respectful relationships? Is it OK to make a mistake and still be accepted and respected? Can people both listen and be heard in your home? Are others' viewpoints valued? Is it OK to be different? Do you model respectful posting on social media? What do you say out loud in front of your children when those electoral ads are aired? This may be a good place to practise!

Gai Bath and Andrea Maver
SMC Counsellors
gbath@smc.tas.edu.au
amaver@smc.tas.edu.au