



Affective Center for Therapy

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Respect & The Value for Value Relationship...

“I am your parent; you must respect me.” Is respect earned or does it come with holding certain positions? The answer is that it sometimes can be either one or both. “If you cannot respect the president, at least respect the office of the president.” Does this respect thing apply to all parents? If it does, I’m not sure that all children have gotten the message.

A great family is one where everyone is treated with respect. Most people would agree with that concept, but have you ever wondered what respect looks like. In the army, respect is standing straight and saluting. When spouses say that they do not feel respected, what behaviors are they looking for? What does it look like for children to respect their parents or for parents to respect their children? Is the respect you would give to another adult different from what you would give to a child?

If I were late getting to your home, would you yell at me? If I rested my feet on your coffee table, would you yell at me and send me home? If I spilled a glass of milk, would you yell at me and call me clumsy? If you were angry at me, would you call me lazy, stupid and dumb? So, how is it okay to treat your child that way? Using threats, name calling, putdowns, guilt trips, and sarcasm may get you compliance, but will not get you respect!

A large part of respect comes from having value-for-value relationships with all family members. Respect is a two way street. If you don’t respect others, adults or children, do not expect to get respect back.

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We often think of value-for-value relationships in terms of work or business. Everyone wants to work for a company who values and respects what you produce. How much more important are value-for-value relationships in families? Nobody, child or adult, likes to feel taken advantage of or used. In families where there is not a value-for-value feeling between all members, there are angry outbursts, getting even, and/or shutting down/giving up behaviors.

The first step to creating this type of relationship is clarifying your values. “Children should be seen and not heard” is not as popular as it used to be. What

can be heard is parents yelling at their children and calling them names. “That was stupid, can’t you do anything right?” You hear it in stores, at churches, and in homes.

When my son Darren was a freshman at a new high school, he was meeting lots of new friends. One day, I reminded him about doing one of his regular chores. The next thing I knew, I was being subjected to an angry barrage from him. I had never heard this tone, language, and intense hostility from him before. I was shocked and confused at his response and stood there open mouthed. It took a few minutes to regain my composure. Finally I was able to respond with, “Darren, I have never talked to you or treated you that way. How is it okay for you to treat me that way when I have never treated you that way?” Now it was his turn to look at me with a surprised and confused look. He mumbled something and left, but I never had that problem with him again. My guess was that some of his new friends treated their parents the way he had just treated me.

To get respect, you must first have given respect.

A Parent-Child Contract

In homes where there is a value-for-value relationship, it is often important to spell out agreements between parents and children. What does each person expect from the other and what are they willing to give?

These agreements work best when they are developed, clearly stated, and accepted by both sides. I suggest you sit down with your children (one at a time) and start a dialog about what he/she wants from you. Do not expect to finish in one sitting. It could easily take a month or more. Work with your child to make a list of “**What You Want From Your Parent(s)**”. (This requires you to be a good listener and paraphrase.) Remember, this is the child’s list of what he/she wants from you as their parent. Then take a break and say, “Let’s think about it more and come back in two days at 7 PM.”

About halfway through the second session, bring up the idea of a second part, “**What You Are Willing to Give in Exchange**”? Talk together about the concept of a value for value relationship where each of you respects the other. The following examples are expectations from young people of their parents and what these young people are willing to give in exchange. *(Thanks to Boy Scout Troop 58, Fresno, CA and the late Keith Williams, Committee Chairman for these ideas.)*

What I Want From My Parents:

- Someone who will take part in activities with me.
- Someone who will be fun.
- Someone who will “hang loose” – let us kids be kids.
- Someone who is approachable, who doesn’t yell or get scary.

- Someone who will be understanding and listen to my point of view and paraphrase me without giving me answers or tell me I don't feel that way.
- Someone who wants to be a parent, and **wants** to spend time with me.
- Someone who does not expect perfection from themselves or from me.
- Someone who will be honest and admit that they blew it.
- Someone who will set fair standards and be firm.
- Someone who makes kids do what they need to do even if they (the kids) don't want to do it.
- Someone who will trust us and let me learn from my mistakes without getting mad, "Wow, that is a hard way to learn. How do you think you could do it differently next time?"
- Someone who will be a teacher, not a preacher, and not give too much detail.
- Someone we can look up to and be proud of.
- Someone who is able to talk to us at our level.
- Someone who does not always have to be right.
- Someone who will not judge or call me names.
- Someone who will not give me answers unless I ask for them.
- Someone who will "suggest" ideas to me instead of telling me what to do.
- Someone who accepts what I feel and doesn't try to talk me out of feelings.
- Someone who will not tell me, "You shouldn't feel that way," or "That is a dumb way to feel."
- Someone who will be honest and admit when he/she makes a mistake.
- Someone who I can depend on and who does what they say they will do.
- I will give you all the freedom you want when you can make me feel safe about where you are and what you are doing. (You can ask me what it would take to make me feel safe for different situations.)

What I'm Willing to Give in Exchange:

- I will do what needs to be done now, and I will not stall or have to be told over and over to do something.
- I will do the best I can the first time.
- I will respect you (no smart mouth).
- I will trust you and listen to what you have to say in making decisions.
- I will be willing to learn from my mistakes if you listen to me.
- I will be willing to say "I'm sorry," and tell you how I will do it differently next time.
- I will try to see and understand what it is like to be a parent.
- I will work as a team with the family.
- I will say "thank you" once in a while.
- I will be responsible for myself, my room, my pets, etc.

- I will be honest with both my content and feelings, even if it is scary or painful to do so.

Your list may contain some of these same expectations and your child may have others that are important to him/her. If your child gets stuck, it is permissible to offer suggestions, but don't offer them too quickly. It is okay to say, "Let's think about it and come back tomorrow." You might ask some of your child's friends what they want from their parents. Maybe they will have some ideas. One of the fringe benefits of doing this exercise is an increase in your child's feelings of self-worth. "I must be important; Dad/Mom is really interested in me."

Holding Yourself Accountable

Agreements are only as good as our word and our memory. Therefore, you both need to agree to review them at least once a month towards the beginning of the agreement. Later, it can be lengthened to once a quarter or when school report cards come out. Now is the time to grade each other and talk about any new agreements or changes you might want to make and how each person can do their part.

PS: I would also suggest that you can work out lists that you and your mate would be willing to give to each other. What this amounts to is a list of expectations that you have for each other. Missed expectations are the major cause of conflicts between couples.

The key to the success of this process is your ability to listen. Below, I have a poem on listening. I would suggest that you read it at least three or four times or until you can listen without giving answers or getting defensive.

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Listen

*When I ask you to listen to me,
 And you start giving me advice,
 You have not done what I asked.
 When I ask you to listen to me,
 And you begin to tell me why I shouldn't feel that way,
 You are trampling on my feelings.*

*When I ask you to listen to me,
And you feel you have to do something to solve my problems,
You have failed me, strange as that may seem.
Listen: All that I ask is that you listen,
Not talk or do—just hear me.
When you do something for me
That I need to do for myself,
You contribute to my fear and feelings of inadequacy.
But when you accept my feelings as a simple fact,
Then I can quit trying to convince you
And go about the business
Of understanding what's behind my feelings.
So, please listen and just hear me
And, if you want to talk,
Wait a minute for your turn—and I'll listen to you!*

—Anonymous