

Mutual R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Standing in a supermarket checkout line, I overheard a woman express to another customer,

"Your daughter ran into me with her cart."

The mother, next to her approximately 12-year-old daughter, said, "I am sorry." The woman looked at the mother and stated, "You don't need to be the one to express an apology" (insinuating the daughter was the preferred choice).

The mother appeared authentically puzzled and did not seem to comprehend the woman's message that she believed the daughter was the appropriate one to apologize for her behavior.

Another customer, observing the conversation between the two women, chimed in by stating, "I witnessed the situation and your daughter intentionally rammed into the woman." The mother ignored this man. In turning around, I recognized the woman who was



**HOMERPOINT
CONSTANCE
JOHANNESSEN**

hit. She is a local well-liked elementary school teacher. My fond memories of her were filled with children gravitating to her, and enjoying her as a teacher. She embraced children.

She similarly recognized me and sadly said, children have significantly changed over the years, they don't seem to respect others. Children have become very rude.

As I left the store, I worried about the mother and her daughter. Did the mother reprimand her? Did she discuss the importance of not mistreating others? Or, did she simply let the incident go?

When I returned home, I shared this simple vignette with my family, only to be inundated with examples of people young and old disrespecting them or others they cared about.

Where is respect in our current lives? Has importance of respecting others declined? Has a culture of rudeness become a strong feature of our current society? Do families embrace and value this concept of respect and teach it in the home?

Let's begin with defining respect. Respect is a reciprocal process, involving consideration for oneself and others and experiencing courtesy from others. Respect for oneself developmentally begins at an early age and forms the basis for self-esteem. Self-respect means having a positive identity, dignity and a healthy awareness of one's worthiness. This includes taking satisfaction for hard-won accomplishments.

Respect is the expression of courtesy, consideration and admiration for others because of their personal qualities or achievements. Often it involves holding others in positive regard. It is communicating to another with words or actions that they are important. In demonstrating respect, we are supporting another's integrity and positive identity. The typical rule of thumb is to treat others the way you would like to be treated.

Anna Gould states, "Be beautiful if you can, wise if you want to ... But be respected—that is essential." Being the recipient of others' respect strengthens integrity and character.

What if we are not being respected, when we deserve to be? Mahatma Gandhi said, "They cannot take away our self-respect if we do not give it to them." Children typically experience this dilemma when faced with bullying behavior from others. As a consequence, they are encouraged by family and teachers to maintain their dignity while the adults address ending the bullying. This may be the most difficult lesson to teach children, even adults.

Research indicates that children tend to respect others when they experience it themselves. The first learning environment is the home. Respect taught in the home is something that needs to be shown to everyone. The following are some suggested recommendations for families to implement.

1. Parents exemplify and communicate respectful ways to talk to others. To develop a child's repertoire, this may require practicing with your child respectful communication alternatives.
2. Help your child deal with conflict effectively. Discourage violent behavior and offer tools

that help resolve problems by listening to others, expressing their positions and learning to negotiate or compromise.

3. Teach your child important traditions from your culture/heritage. Encourage them to be sensitive to those who came before them, as well as respecting their own culture and others' heritage.

4. Support and encourage your children's strengths and constructively criticize their weaknesses, allowing for growth. Teaching self-respect does not mean praising their every behavior.

In summary, parents can instill self-respect in children by encouraging good values, emphasizing the development of character and integrity through healthy actions and decisions that are based on positive regard for self and others.

Dr. Constance Johannesen, a licensed psychologist in New Hampshire and Maine, has practiced for more than 20 years and specializes in couples, individual and group therapy. She is with Woodland Professional Associates of North Hampton.