

Children who are taught to respect others remain respectful in later life (adapted)

SCMP By Cici George 27 January, 2015

1. Julie Fecteau has noticed an interesting development in her four-year-old son Julien. He has started giving up his seat to older people in the MTR. "Hey mummy, I respect him," Julien told Julie, to her surprise.
2. Fecteau had been trying to cultivate respect for other people in her child, and was heartened that he seemed to have grasped the concept. "I can't believe how much they absorb and notice. Now, sometimes when I need time to do my own work, I ask him if he could please respect my need for space, and he understands and goes off and plays by himself."
3. Rather than simply telling Julien to respect other people, Fecteau had decided to be a respectful parent. This approach shows that respect goes both ways. Respect is expected from children, but parents must also show it to their children.
4. Marie Marchand, a parenting consultant with more than 25 years of experience in early childhood teaching, suggests that respectful parenting might be the way to raise children who are considerate of others in the 21st century.
5. "Rather than one person telling another what to do, and the other doing it, both parties feel like they're listened to and heard and loved. They acknowledge each other's desires, hopes and choices," says Marchand, a mother of three.
6. The approach is gaining some traction among young Hong Kong parents, who might have been raised differently. At a recent workshop she delivered, Marchand says that about 85 per cent of the parents were Chinese.
7. She stresses that ensuring children feel listened to and heard is a process that starts young. "Then when they're teenagers they're happy to talk to you and will come to you when they have bigger issues."
8. Marchand recommends "reflective listening", which involves "really validating the person's feelings, not panicking or jumping to conclusions right away, and helping the child solve the problem".
9. Lisa Williams has found the approach useful both at home with her two children and in her role as a kindergarten teacher.
10. "Children aged two to five are just learning to be more independent. They want to do things

their way and they're entering an environment, either at school or at home - with the arrival of a younger sibling - where they have to share," she says.

11. "We have to help them with the language and show them the best way to handle their emotions. We need to find language that doesn't crush them, but gives them information so they can understand why they can't do something. That way, they'll learn from it."
12. Marchand differentiates between discipline and punishment. Both seek to teach the child something, but a punishment such as hitting is disrespectful to the child.
13. Discipline, she says, means guiding children so they can decide on good solutions to their problems and can function in society positively.
14. Marchand emphasises that it's important to take time for training. "Don't expect your children to know everything. If you don't teach your children to put their clothes in the laundry basket, how will they know that's what they should be doing?"
15. "Some people don't teach their children and then yell at them. Also, encourage them when they get it right."
16. Nurturing children who are respectful of others involves role modelling and training. Williams, who has received compliments on her children's social skills, says she practises role-modelling and reminds her children to be polite.
17. "If I'm talking to my children and they answer without looking at me, I stop talking until they do," she says.
18. Cultivating considerate behaviour is a process, she says. "Parents can be frustrated that their kids don't seem to 'get it'. I remind them that manners are learned over the course of years," she says.