



How to handle backchat and disrespectful behaviour

Why is he/she being disrespectful?

Various factors may be related to children behaving disrespectfully:

1. Being frustrated by limitations and wanting to test limits.
2. Copying the behaviour of other people around them.
3. Realising that being disrespectful gets a reaction: laughs, shouting, shock - either way it's attention.
4. Feeling they are being treated unfairly or are not being listened to. This can particularly be the case with backchat or mumbled comments.

How to react to disrespectful behaviour

- Ignore minor disrespectful behaviour such as backchat or sulking. Say "I will not tolerate being talked to like that" and do not respond until your child is communicating appropriately.
- For behaviour which is more offensive or rude, you can use the naughty-step technique. Before taking your child to the naughty step, make sure you give one warning clearly stating why the behaviour is disrespectful and not acceptable. "In our family, we don't talk to each other rudely."
- When your child is rude, don't laugh as this will give your child positive attention and encourage them to continue being rude.

"However much you cringe when you see or hear your child being disrespectful in public, resist the temptation to correct them in front of others."

Instead, take your child aside and describe the behaviour you disapproved of and provide guidance. For example, "I noticed you ignored the librarian when she asked you to stop talking. She seemed upset by your lack of respect. Either you can act more politely or we will have to leave story-time."

How to prevent disrespectful behaviour

Children learn how to respond appropriately by watching and imitating those around them. This is called modelling. The most effective way to get your child to act respectfully is to treat them with respect and also to let them see you act respectfully towards other people. Remember 'actions speak louder than words'.

- Let your child know exactly what behaviour is not acceptable by including statements about respectful behaviour in your house rules e.g. "No swearing", "at dinner time, we sit nicely at the table".
- Teach your child social manners by giving continual, gentle reminders about appropriate communication and behaviour. When adults provide clear information about appropriate behaviour, children learn what is expected of them. For example, "When you leave a friend's house, it's good to say 'thank you for having me'. People like it when you do that". Or, "When I'm talking to someone I expect you to wait until I've finished before asking me a question, or if you're finding it hard to wait you could say 'excuse me'"
- Pay close attention to your tone of voice, words and body language, not just with your child, but with everyone else around you as well. If your child hears you using put-downs, making snide comments, using sarcasm, swearing or shouting or sees you rolling your eyes or making faces at people, you are not modelling a respectful attitude. Be polite, courteous, considerate and well-mannered, and you will soon see such an attitude from your child.
- Make sure that you use good manners and a respectful tone when correcting disrespectful behaviour. Firmly state your disapproval by commenting descriptively and asserting expectations. Tell your child what you want, not what you don't want. Rather than "Cut the backchat!" say, "Jamie, I heard you being rude to me under your breath. I don't like that kind of behaviour. If you're feeling frustrated please tell me directly."
- Make sure you respond positively to good behaviour. When your child behaves nicely, respond with praise, approval and affection. Every time your child uses the type of manners and behaviour you want to see more of, comment approvingly. For example, "Thank you for waiting for me to finish talking on the phone before asking me for a drink." Or, "I noticed that you asked your brother before taking his toy. That was very considerate".
- Keep an eye on the type of communication your child is exposed to. Swearing on TV, negative attitudes in video games and even disrespectful lyrics in music can all be absorbed by your child and may filter into their vocabulary and behaviour.
- Make sure you listen to your child and enable them to give their opinion or share how they feel. A child who feels listened to is less likely to try to have the last word. You may want to try using a thought box to encourage communication.
- Backchat is often associated with your little one's resentment at being asked to do things he/she doesn't want to do, or not getting his/her way. Minimise this frustration by using minimal, clear commands (avoid long lectures) and by offering choice. "Would you like to tidy your room before dinner or after?"

