



Leadership COMPASS

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In The Real World: It's All About Respect

Schools can foster positive behavior by teaching students about respect.

Christopher Peal

Three general guidelines should underpin every student action in school:

- Respect yourself;
- Respect others; and
- Respect your school.

Every year, during the first two weeks of school, I visit each classroom to talk about these three expectations, which many teachers subsequently use to develop their classroom pledges and guidelines. The talks give me a chance to set the tone for the year and set the framework for future conversations surrounding positive or negative behavior.

Respect Yourself

This is my first and favorite guideline. Looking children straight in their eyes, I remind them that no matter who they are or where they are from, each is an extremely important person who helps to make our school the wonderful place that it is. I remind them that by respecting themselves they are valuing all that is inherently good within themselves in making the daily choices that can profoundly affect their well-being and their future. They begin to understand that on days when they are not present, our school is a different place because the special qualities that are unique to them are not being shared with their class and the school.

My discussions include some easy ways students can take care of themselves, such as eating breakfast, brushing their teeth, and looking both ways before crossing the street. Other, more difficult, measures deal with persevering with what they know is right, by saying “no” when others tell them to do otherwise, and by keeping a positive outlook when what life brings them is not rosy.

Respect Others

Students can—and should—reach out to others to be helpful, considerate, and kind. I start this discussion by asking them: Are you calling other students names? Making fun of them? Hitting them? Kicking them? Spreading rumors about them? Their responses are a resounding “no!” But these openers allow for quick movement to deeper discussions of appropriate ways to show respect for others.

The underlying message is that we are all part of a larger community. Each one of us comes to school as an individual, but once here we are a team. We need to work together. We must care for and respect each other. It becomes our job, once we have diligently taken care of getting ourselves ready to be in school and to learn, to help others do the same.

Understandably, each of us never has a perfect day, and we all have times where things are not going well. In good times and bad, we need to be there to lift each other up and to help make school a safe and fun place to be and to learn.

Respect Your School

Finally, the conversation moves to respecting our school. My lead question is always “Who owns this school?” Typically, the initial answers refer to the principal or the teacher. Ultimately, I give in and tell them this: Our school does not belong to me, and it does not belong to the superintendent or to their teacher. It belongs to every one of us. Each student owns as much of our school as any other person.

With ownership comes responsibility. If there is a piece of paper on the floor, it is for whoever sees it to pick it up. If someone is vandalizing or destroying school property, it is for whoever sees it to tell that person to stop (or to find an adult to do



so). This responsibility applies to everything in the building, from books and walls to cafeteria tables and bathrooms.

Getting everyone to follow these three guidelines takes more than a one-time discussion. But by weaving them into your daily conversations, they can become the heart and soul of your school, and can help each student see his or her relationship to the whole.

From the field,

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