

# RUDE OR RESPECTFUL: *Which child do you want?*

**Lori McMechan**

## PARENTING POINTS

Lori McMechan is a parenting group facilitator at the Elspeth Reid Family Resource Centre, a facility of Child and Family Services of Western Manitoba.  
» 255 Ninth St., Brandon  
» 726-6280

You may have heard the comment, “Children today are so rude.” Many adults admit they laugh at the wise remarks made by sassy kids on television. However, they are less amused by the same comments coming from their own kids.

Most parents feel angry, hurt or helpless when their children talk back and don’t listen.

The following guidelines will help you raise a more respectful child:

### **Parents and caregivers need to discuss and agree on what is considered acceptable behaviour.**

As an example, four-year-old Jimmy is playing in his room. When his caregiver tells him to pick up the toys, his response is, “You can’t make me. You’re not my Mom!” His caregiver has a right to be offended by these comments. Jimmy’s mother thinks he’s funny and his father’s attitude is “he’ll grow out of it.” Jimmy is getting mixed messages about his behaviour. It is very likely to repeat it to see how the adults in his life react next time.

### **Adults must be clear on the expectations they have for appropriate language and behaviour.**

Jimmy’s parents can tell him they do not like his rudeness and give him specific examples of the behaviour they expect while they are away. The caregiver might say, “Jimmy, you can tell me that you wish you had more time to play, but you have to follow my rules while your Mom is not here. She left me in charge of you.”

Six-year-old Samantha is colouring at the kitchen table, while her mother is on the phone in the living room. Suddenly Samantha yells

loudly, “Mom! Get in here right now! I need your help!” If her mother reacts to her daughter’s demanding command to “Get in here!” by storming into the kitchen and yelling, “Don’t talk to me like that, young lady!” Samantha will learn that what she did was very effective; it got her mother into the kitchen very quickly. It would have been better if her mother had established a definite rule, “Samantha, you may not interrupt me when I’m talking” and tell her what she expects by saying, “When I am finished, if you need help you can say, ‘Mom, could you please come here?’”

Mom should ignore further inappropriate bids for her attention.

### **Adults need to let children know exactly how they feel about derogatory comments.**

Eight-year-old Tyler snatches his homework paper from his father, saying, “Gimme that! You’re so dumb you can’t do anything right!” His father could say, “Tyler, that remark makes me mad and hurts my feelings. You can tell me that you’re feeling frustrated, but you can’t insult me.” If the comments continue, Dad could leave the room, letting Tyler know that people don’t like to be around him when he uses insults.

### **Adults must demonstrate to children the kinds of speech and actions that communicate love, acceptance and respect.**

Children learn manners and ways to communicate with others by watching. A parent who yells “Get over here!” can expect to hear the same kind of command from her children. A parent who tells his children to “Shut up!” is teaching them that “Shut up!” is acceptable. Children will imitate not only what you say but how you say it, as parents discover when they hear a child repeat something they have said using the same tone of voice.

### **Give children attention when they are respectful and turn your attention away when they are rude.**

Children learn quickly how to get adult attention and most

children would prefer to be scolded than ignored. Let your child know that you notice and appreciate polite language and courteous behaviour — particularly among your family members. If your child continues to be rude, you can say something like, “You can tell me how you feel but you’ll have to do it in a way that doesn’t make me mad or hurt my feelings. If you want suggestions from me, let me know. But if you want to talk like that you’ll have to go to your own room where we can’t hear you.”

To raise a respectful children, don’t laugh or show amusement when they are rude. Make it clear that you will not allow anyone in your family to be discourteous — to family members or to others. Tell your children specifically what you expect to hear from them.

Accept their feelings but help them choose more appropriate ways to express them. It is especially important to give your child lots of love and attention when they are demonstrating respectful, appropriate behaviour.

*Source: Jennifer Birckmayer, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, NYS College of Human Ecology, Cornell University. “Parent Pages: Fresh Kids: How Can Parents Change Them?”*