

Dignity Conversations: Talking to Your Kids about Dignity

CONVERSATIONS THAT LEAD TO INSIGHT AND ACTION

The best time to bring up the topic of dignity with our kids is when they feel like talking. When are your kids usually in the mood to talk? Is it on a drive when long pauses don't kill the conversation? Is it after a disappointment at school when they were angry or felt something was unfair? Whatever the setting for your best conversations, watch for a similar moment when your child might be open to discussing something that just happened – then introduce dignity to help explain how people behaved. The first point you might want to make is: The most important thing for human beings is to feel like we belong. We all want to be treated like we matter. Then you might want to say:

- If you look at the way people acted, can you see that they're trying to feel like they matter?
- Think of some of your happiest moments: Did you feel special, like you mattered, like you belonged? How were people treating you that made you feel that way?
- When you want to make friends with someone or make up with someone after a fight, how do you treat them? What are the kinds of things you say? Why do you use those words?
- What happens when someone does the opposite, makes you feel like you don't belong, you don't matter? What is that like? What do you do then?

Introduce the words “dignity” and “contempt” to your child. Tell them that treating someone with *dignity* means treating them like they matter, and treating them with *contempt* means treating them like they don't matter. Explain that when people are treated with contempt, they feel so bad that they want revenge.

- Ask your child to think about bullies – do bullies treat people with dignity or contempt? Do they have any real friends, or do people pretend to be friends with bullies out of fear?
- Do people usually want to get back at bullies? Why would that be true?
- Ask your child to think about peer pressure – can they see that peer pressure runs on the threat of contempt? If you don't do what the group says, they will make fun of you. Is that what true friends do? Or do real friends treat you with dignity?

The most important lesson to teach our kids is that treating others with contempt tears us apart, and treating others with dignity brings us together. That is true for kids and adults, and for friends, families, and countries.

- Ask your kids to look for a story in their lives, in the news, or in history – and use the principles of dignity and contempt to explain how people behaved.
- Then ask them to explain how the story might have turned out if people had used more dignity and less contempt, or vice versa.