



# Why it's more important than ever to foster positive relationships in children and young people

By Michael Grose

*Three practical ways to promote positive relationships based on respect, fairness and tolerance among young people.*

We live in interesting times. The Donald Trump Presidency has changed the political landscape in many ways, but particularly the way politics is waged and how the major political players treat each other.

Mr. Trump's way of dealing with people could best be described as direct and combative and, at worst, bullying and badgering. Gone are the conventions in international relationships of keeping up civil appearances in public despite what may have happened between parties

in private. As he showed recently following a telephone conversation with Mr. Turnbull, Australia's Prime Minister, Mr. Trump has few qualms about tweeting his disapproval to the world if a private conversation doesn't go according to his plan.

In recent weeks there's been major concern expressed right around the world about how Mr. Trump 'does politics' – particularly his treatment of those with whom he disagrees. This high level of public protest should be applauded by parents and teachers as the tone of public discourse can easily trickle down into schools and families. At a time when peer-to-peer bullying and disrespectful relationships are

ongoing issues in many schools, parents and teachers need to be more mindful than ever of the importance of promoting positive relationships based on respect, fairness and tolerance. Here are three practical ways to foster positive relationships among children and young people.

## 1. Instil integrity in children and young people

Do what's right. Not what's easy.' I heard my wife Sue say this to our children often when social circumstances presented them with a moral dilemma. Times such as when they agreed to visit a friend's house only to get a better offer elsewhere; when they'd hurt a sibling's feelings and they took the easy option of staying out of their way rather than approaching them to make an apology; and when they'd tell a small lie to excuse themselves from a party or school event that they were expected to attend.

'Do what's right' is an integrity statement. It's a declaration of character that's central to children developing respectful relationships with their peers.



## Why it's more important than ever to foster positive relationships in children and young people

Every parent wants to raise kids to be fine young people. But to do this we need to instil in kids more than just skills, attitudes and positive behaviours. We need to provide a compass to help them navigate the myriad of decisions they make every day as children and as teenagers. Integrity sits at the top of that compass.

### 2. Walk the walk

The concern about children and young people being witness to disrespectful, combative behaviours in public figures is that these behaviours soon feel normal. The same principle, of course, applies with adults closer to home. If parents, coaches or teachers harangue, harass or bully others then these behaviours become normalised and in effect, give kids permission to act in the same ways. It's a matter of, *If Mum can do it, then I can too!*

Conversely, when adults treat each other, children and young people fairly; display a willingness to listen and talk things through; and show a propensity to compromise we are teaching the next generation the basics of respectful and positive relationships.

### 3. Talk the talk

Families develop their own proprietary language around the behaviours and attributes that are valued including integrity, respect, fairness, tolerance and other values that underpin strong positive relationships. Take the time to reflect on common statements you already use that reflect relationships

based on respect and fairness. Write them down. Develop them into repeatable phrases such as, 'Everyone deserves a fair go. Let's talk through our disagreements. Ask before you jump to conclusions', to make them memorable. Positive relationships are taught through actions, but reinforced by common language.

At a time when the way many prominent public figures treat others can leave a fair-minded person shaking his or her head in dismay it's worth remembering that through our own fair and tolerant treatment of others we can positively impact how children and teenagers treat others.

### 4. Put integrity top of the pedestal of character traits

Every parent wants their child to have the strength and fortitude to do the right thing and not follow the crowd. This is easier for young children because the pull of the group and the allure of the media doesn't have such a strong hold as it so often does in adolescence. Strong-willed children and those who like to have their own way can also find doing the right thing less of a struggle. But the development of integrity and related traits such as respect, honesty and fairness is an important part of a child's moral compass that will help him/her make smart decisions when you're not around. Generally, integrity is developed in childhood and put to the test in adolescence.

In 2017 put some focus on developing a sense of integrity in your kids – the rock star of character traits.

## PRACTICAL WAYS TO PROMOTE RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS AT HOME

- 1 Show your willingness to listen to kids and talk through their relationship problems.
- 2 Expect kids of all ages to use manners. Good manners are respect in action.
- 3 Talk about how good friends act and treat each other. Conversations about friendly behaviours should also involve how their behaviours make others feel.
- 4 Differentiate between a friendship and a clique with young people. A clique is restrictive and can make a young person feel bad, while a friendship group is inclusive and feels good.
- 5 Respectfully and tactfully question displays of intolerance and challenge bullying behaviour. Be mindful that children and young people are learning how to behave civilly so they need guidance and direction, which sometimes involves challenge.



**Special note:** I'm thrilled to announce that my latest book *Spoonfed Generation: How to raise independent children* is out. It's available at [parentingideas.com.au](http://parentingideas.com.au)

