

# Teacher Training

## THE IMPORTANCE OF RESPECTING CHILDREN

by Lois Truman



**Y**ou may be familiar with the term, “the pecking order” which simply refers to there being someone at the top, followed by the next person in power, then followed by the next person in power, and so on down the line. Many times adults see themselves at the top of the chain, with the youngest children at the bottom of the line. This is true when we speak of authority, maturity, experience, and many other areas. However, the pecking order should not apply to showing respect from one person to another, regardless of age, ability, ethnicity, or other differences in status. The Bible clearly admonishes us to give honor where honor is due, but to not show preferential treatment to someone who appears to be wealthier, more educated, or for any reason that someone may think they are “better” than others. Jesus was also teaching this lesson to his disciples who wanted to send little children away, thinking they were worthless and a bother. Instead, Jesus said we must become as the little children they were disrespecting and disregarding, or we cannot be part of His kingdom.

How we treat children is important to God. He knows when someone treats children as though they have nothing to offer, and are not of value. These negative attitudes toward children are most often seen when a child has challenged an adult in some way. It is important to understand the purpose behind the child’s behavior. There are many reasons a child may be testing authority, and it is more important to

address the root of the problem than to forcibly squelch a child without giving any thought as to the child’s needs. A way to show respect for children is to set limits that they can clearly understand. Allowing them to give input regarding their limits as they mature is a good way to show they are valued by you. “Children are to be seen and not heard” is not found in the Bible. The Bible, however, does advocate that children are to respect their parents, and to obey them who have the authority. The same Bible also says adults should not provoke children to anger. There is a fine line between maintaining reasonable boundaries for children and simply giving in. Being consistent with allowing or not allowing certain behaviors is critical for letting children learn that you care enough to define boundaries for them. However, you should always make certain that your boundaries and expectations are developmentally appropriate for each child.

The basis for everyone showing mutual respect, regardless of age or status, is for each person to truly value the other person. Going a step further, it is good to analyze the reason we value others. Again, the Bible gives us a marvelous guideline to follow by telling us to treat others as we would like to be treated. God created each person with a desire to be valued.



# The Importance of Respecting Children (Continued)

So, how do teachers know they are maintaining order in their classrooms while respecting each child? Some simple guidelines are:

1. Take time to understand what a child may be feeling;
2. Learn about the children's different temperament types and work accordingly;
3. Be honest but kind when interacting with children, even during times of discipline;
4. Find each child's special strength and build on it;
5. Allow children to have their own personal space.

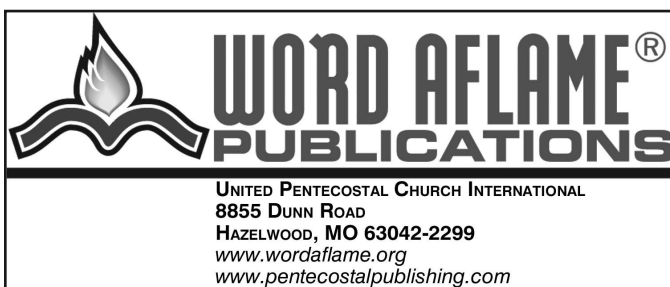
You may add a few ideas of your own to this list for ways you have learned to show respect to children. Infants and toddlers who are unable to clearly verbalize their feelings and opinions are especially easy to be misunderstood.

Too often, a child's behavior is completely misinterpreted when the child is reacting to something that is not even considered by the teacher. For example, a toddler may have a particular toy that he plays with each week. As he enters the class and finds another child playing with the toy that he considers to be his, an unknowing teacher may simply see a child walking in and being aggressive to another child, and completely overlook the underlying issue. The child is thinking another child has his toy, and to a teacher who is unaware of her students' play habits and behaviors, she may think she needs to put the "aggressive" child in time out or to punish him for his "bad" behavior, thus, disrespecting that toddler. In reality, a toddler is not intentionally being mean. He is simply thinking, "That is the toy I always play with and I want to play with it now." The ideal teacher will not assume this toddler is coming into the class with an evil intent to hurt others. Rather, she will know the real source of the problem and either produce a second identical toy (recommended for toddler classes to have two or more of the same toy, and more if a toy is popular), or find a way to divert the child with the toy to something else of interest so the child who usually has that toy may have it.

This practice is not the same as we do with older children who have developed their ability to reason. Toddlers are in their own stage of development that does not yet include reasoning and critical thinking. The rules of fairness and justice are different for toddlers, and should not be confused with "adult" courts of law and justice. The child who originally had the toy and is diverted to another activity will not have a sense of being treated unfairly if this situation is handled correctly. In fact, both children will feel as though the teacher has treated them in a special way, which equates to the teacher showing them respect. The teacher shows value to the child who originally had the toy by giving special attention to helping them find an alternate toy/activity. The toddler wanting the toy feels valued that the teacher found a way to make him happy by knowing what was needed. The grabbing or pushing done by toddlers should be viewed in a different way than grabbing and pushing done by older children. This concept of "fairness" among toddlers is perhaps most unknown to teachers who are the least familiar with toddler developmental stages. Teachers who can respect their toddlers as they are learning to socialize will most likely have the best bonding with their students.

Ultimately, toddlers learn best by imitating the behaviors they see in others. When a classroom exhibits lots of respect, where everyone is considered to be friends, toddlers will learn to develop respect for themselves and others. Even though toddlers are known to do "parallel play" (rather than "cooperative play"), they tend to copy the behaviors that they see in others. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has resources and information for anyone wanting to learn more about understanding typical toddler behavior ([www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)).

Another good source is [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org).



## Toddler Teacher Training, WINTER 2011-12

Editor: R. M. Davis • Field Editor: Lois Truman  
Children's Editor: Linda Short • Editorial Designer: Chris Anderson  
Manufactured in USA., December/2011 • [www.wordaflame.org](http://www.wordaflame.org)  
[www.pentecostalpublishing.com](http://www.pentecostalpublishing.com) • All rights reserved.

©2011 United Pentecostal Church International  
8855 Dunn Road, Hazelwood, MO 63042.