

THE LOST ARTS OF
**DIGNITY,
RESPECT,
AND
COMPASSION**

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THE LOST ARTS OF DIGNITY, RESPECT, AND COMPASSION

Dear Caring Adult,

I firmly believe that it's possible to counter what our teens learn from the media and to teach them the lost arts of dignity, respect, and compassion.

We can also combat the lure of drugs and alcohol by easing loneliness and creating connection.

We really are the biggest influence in their lives and it's up to us to connect with our teenagers and make them feel valued.

I grew up in a family impacted by addiction. I'm a father of two and my son is a child with special needs who falls on the autism spectrum. A good friend's daughter succumbed to addiction and suicide.

I started speaking and helping teenagers because I hate to see them in pain.

When I speak to students, I use my own story to connect with them on an emotional level.

**“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may
remember, involve me and I learn.”
– Benjamin Franklin**

People can tell when you are being genuine, so when I'm in front of an audience, I'm real and show vulnerability. When we show teens that adults can feel vulnerable and be genuine, then they feel empowered to do the same.

When I'm at a school, I consider it a “home run” when students start to open up about their challenges and problems. Whether it's an addicted parent, a special needs sibling, or challenges with loneliness.

When we understand what our students are dealing with outside of school walls, we have the tools to help them in the classroom.

I hope you find some of these strategies and tips helpful.

Thanks for all you do,



“[Since your talk](#) I have been doing my best to build up my bank of kindness...thanks to this conscious effort to go above and beyond to make others happy and benefit those around me, I have felt noticeably happier, less worried and anxious, and more satisfied with myself. Whenever I am feeling down I am able to think about the positive impact I had on someone that day...Thanks for helping me realize quite possibly the easiest way to boost my self-confidence and happiness in a totally unselfish and awesome way that lets me benefit others just as much as it does myself.”
– Massimo, Student



THE LOST ARTS OF DIGNITY, RESPECT, AND COMPASSION

People show each other less dignity, respect, and compassion than they used to.

Political candidates lashing out at each other with crude comments.

News outlets glorifying bad behavior—and playing it on repeat to amp up the angst.

Twitter wars. Facebook battles. Crude Instagram feeds. Snapchat clashes.

TV shows that celebrate rudeness, selfishness, and insults.

Our teens spend an average of 9 hours a day consuming media—and that's not including time used for school or homework.

That's more time than they spend sleeping. More time than they spend with their parents and teachers.

Is it any wonder that our teens are picking up this bad behavior?

You've probably heard of Danielle Bregoli. She became an internet star after her disrespectful appearance on *The Dr Phil Show* in 2016. She was described as a “car-stealing, knife-wielding, twerking” teen who tried to frame her mother for a crime, and when the audience didn't like her behavior, she told them, “**Cash me outside, how bow dah?**”



Image: Dr. Phil

After her first tv appearance she quickly gained millions of followers on Facebook and Instagram, signed a deal to star in a reality show, and is trying to launch her music career.

When our teens see bad behavior rewarded with instant fame and riches, are we surprised when they start to emulate it?

THE LOST ARTS OF DIGNITY, RESPECT, AND COMPASSION

But we can make a difference

The good news is that we, educators and caring adults, can battle this trend. We can teach our teens to treat others with dignity. To show respect. To be more compassionate.

But first we need to understand why instant fame and riches are so appealing to our teens.

It's not the riches and fame in and of themselves—it's what they represent.

They represent love. Acceptance. Worth. They represent an escape from pain, hopelessness, and sadness.

We have a loneliness problem in our country.

We have a connection problem.

We have a “looking you in the eye” problem.

We're always plugged in with social media and texts, so it feels like we are always communicating...but in many ways, we're more isolated than ever.

They might have thousands of online “friends,” but our teens increasingly feel lonely.

You can text an emoji of a crying face and get a sympathetic text back.

But it's no substitution for having someone hug you and wipe away your tears.

Understanding dignity, respect, and compassion—*feeling and giving* dignity, respect, and compassion—begins with **connection**.

Our teens crave connection. And they are looking to us to help them figure it out. As parents and educators, we play an incredibly influential role in shaping our teens' lives and the way they move in the world.

We don't have to surrender our teens to the values presented through media.

We can teach our teens the right combination of dignity, respect, and compassion so that they can learn to take care of themselves, but more importantly, so that they learn to take care of those around them,

Over the next few pages, I will share some simple strategies, tips, and ideas for school and home to help teens learn dignity, respect, and compassion.

THE LOST ARTS OF DIGNITY, RESPECT, AND COMPASSION

At School Strategy #1: Personify Dignity, Respect, and Compassion

As our children grow into teenagers, they increasingly look to the adults in their lives to figure out how to navigate the world.

So the first way to teach dignity, respect, and compassion is to model it.

Speak respectfully about others.

Our teens see cable news channels and online media outlets choosing sides and belittling anyone who doesn't agree with them.

They see adults sinking to the level of yelling matches and shutting down any conversation that they don't like.

They hear adults making rude comments or putting other people down.

The art of healthy, respectful debate is being lost.

It's up to us to show our teens that respectfully listening to someone else's opinion - even if you don't agree with it - is how you learn.

And that you can have healthy, thriving friendships with people who don't think exactly the way you do.

Speak respectfully to others.

Make it a point to speak respectfully to everyone.

School administrators, coaches, teachers, parents, janitors, students... make a point of showing respect to all.

This is even more important in tense situations when it might be tempting to make a cutting remark or vent our frustrations.

When we conduct ourselves with dignity and grace—and treat others with kindness and respect—we become powerful examples for our teens.

Take time to show kindness to others

It's the small, simple actions - done consistently - that will make an impact on our teenagers.

Saint Theresa said "never worry about numbers. Help one person at a time and always start with the person nearest you."

If you see a teen struggling with their locker, stop to give them a hand and smile.

If you see a student alone at lunch, sit down with them and have a chat.

If you volunteer, let your students know. Share with them why you choose to volunteer, what you love about it, and how volunteering to help others shows dignity, respect, and compassion to people who don't always receive them.

THE LOST ARTS OF DIGNITY, RESPECT, AND COMPASSION

At School Strategy #2: Encourage Connection

Our days are jam packed and educators have a lot to cover in a short amount of time, but any way we can encourage our students to connect will pay dividends in the way they treat others.

Some ideas to encourage conversation and connection:

- If it can fit into lesson plans, have students introduce themselves and share something about themselves. Try asking questions like, “what is your favorite weird food?” or “What is the furthest you’ve been from home?”.
- When a new student transfers to the school, have an upperclassman paired up as their “sponsor”. The sponsor can show the new student around, get to know them, and make introductions to other students.
- Encourage students to form a “lunch bunch”. Students would take turns searching out anyone sitting alone, join them, and strike up a conversation. Or, you could set up “topic tables” to encourage students to join conversations.

At School Strategy #3: Say This, Not That

“Life isn’t fair. Get over it.”

“So what? Toughen up.”

“You need to get it together.”

“Just wait 10 years, you’ll see.”

We probably all heard things like this when we were teenagers.

While there might be some nugget of truth in each saying, do you remember how it felt to hear them coming from a trusted adult?

It felt cynical. Frustrating. Dismissive. Like your thoughts and ideas didn’t matter.

Maybe it felt like you didn’t matter.

Phrases like this don’t demonstrate to our teens dignity, respect, and compassion because they aren’t conversation starters - they are conversation stoppers.

When we toss off a trite phrase, we don’t give people a chance to tell us how they feel. It shuts down any possibility of using that conversation to make a connection, to feel heard and validated.

When a teenager is railing against a perceived injustice, instead of falling back on a threadbare adage, try saying:

- *“Why do you feel that way?”*
- *“Tell me more about what you’re thinking.”*
- Or simply asking, *“Are you ok?”*

When we model dignity, respect, and compassion to our teens by asking questions and listening to them, they learn how to show it to others.



**“Life is hard;
it’s harder if
you’re stupid.”**
– John Wayne

THE LOST ARTS OF DIGNITY, RESPECT, AND COMPASSION

At Home

The following strategies are geared towards the time we spend with teens outside of school.

Educators can share them with parents looking for ideas to teach their teens dignity, respect, and compassion.

At Home Strategy #1: Car time is key

Most people think that the amount of time we spend with our young children has the largest influence on their future success.

But a [large scale study](#) by the University of Toronto, Bowling Green State University, and the University of Maryland showed that the amount time we spend with our teenagers has a bigger impact.

While quality time with young children is important, it's the quantity of time we spend with adolescents (ages 11 - 18) that helps shape them into successful adults.

In the study, teens who spent more time with their parents showed less delinquent behavior—less bullying, less cheating, less lying and less arguing. More family time resulted in better behavioral health and less risk taking through substance abuse and sex.

Luckily, you're probably already spending a substantial amount of time with your teens - in the car.

Car time is important for two reasons

First, your teens are a captive audience and see how you interact with the world.

Do you get frustrated in traffic? Yell at other drivers? Make unpleasant comments? Cut people off? Do they hear you telling your boss the not-quite-true reason you'll be late for work? Or hear you gossiping?

Your teenagers are watching and car time is a great opportunity to model the behavior you want them to learn.

Second, it's a great place to chat.

Have you ever noticed how some of the best conversations happen while driving? It's more relaxed because teens can look out the window while you're talking to each other. Sometimes it's easier to think out loud and share thoughts or feelings when we don't have the intensity of eye-to-eye contact.

Try turning down the music, having everyone put down their phones, and take advantage of this quiet time together.

THE LOST ARTS OF DIGNITY, RESPECT, AND COMPASSION

At Home Strategy #2: Random comments aren't random, they are conversation starters

When I'm shopping with my wife and she asks if I like a dress, she doesn't really want my fashion advice... she's trying to start a conversation with me.

Our teenagers do the same thing. Sometimes they want to talk about something important or embarrassing, but they aren't sure how to start.

Instead of jumping right in, they'll make a seemingly random comment, hoping to get a conversation started that might lead to what they are really thinking about.

Be on the lookout for casual comments. Ask questions and listen more than you talk. Your teenagers are probably looking for advice, but first, they need to feel understood.

Don't try to move through the conversation too quickly and jump to advice before you get to the heart of the matter. Ask clarifying questions and see where it takes you.

If you only get part of the story, tell them how to fix the problem, and then move on, teenagers can feel frustrated and like you weren't really hearing them.

Try saying things like,

- *"I went through that too, it was tough..."*
- *"I remember feeling (this) in a similar situation... How does it make you feel?"*
- *"Here is what I did in that situation... do you think something like that might work for you?"*

Sometimes, teens aren't even looking for advice, they are just looking to feel understood.

Talk with them, not at them. Take the opportunity to make them feel heard and valued. Make a connection in that moment.

At Home Strategy #3: Create A Success Team

It starts with simply reaching out.

Parents can introduce themselves to teachers and commit to keeping in touch.

Teachers can have clear guidance on the best way to stay in touch and respond to parent questions or concerns as quickly as possible.

And teens should know that their parents and teachers are working together to help them.

Make success at school a team effort.

You're demonstrating dignity, respect, and compassion to teens when you make them feel like they are on a team with their parents and teachers.

When people feel like they are a valued part of a team, they learn how to make other people feel the same way.

THE LOST ARTS OF DIGNITY, RESPECT, AND COMPASSION

At Home Strategy #4: Say it out loud

We've all started using texting as a primary form of communication. It's a really efficient way to keep all the moving pieces in order.

But sometimes we're so busy that we forget that showing dignity, respect, and compassion isn't about efficiency. It's about connection.

So don't just text your teens to tell them that they're awesome.

Walk up to them and tell them that you love them.

Or that you value them.

Or that you are proud of them.

Tell them that they are important.

Go the extra mile and give them a hug. Or a high five. Or even an awkward fist bump.

But say it out loud. Say it in person. And do it often.

You might get a hug or you might get the teenager grunt. But no matter what response you get, they will feel special and valued.

And when our teens feel valued, they learn how to show dignity, compassion, and respect to others.

Dignity, respect, and compassion aren't lost forever.

Our teens are yearning for these "old fashioned" values just as much as we are. And simple strategies are the most powerful way to teach them.

**“WE ALL HAVE THE
OPPORTUNITY
TO POSITIVELY
IMPACT THE LIFE
OF A CHILD.”**

– DAVID J. FLOOD

THE LOST ARTS OF DIGNITY, RESPECT, AND COMPASSION

ABOUT DAVID FLOOD

[David is a featured speaker](#) at middle school assemblies, high school assemblies, and teacher/counselor conferences throughout the United States and Canada.

With 20 years of experience helping teens and young adults, his straightforward approach and personal stories have inspired over 150,000 students to look at people and situations in a different way.



Known for connecting with students on an emotional level, David's student assembly programs use simple, relatable examples that show students how to improve their lives and how to have a profound impact on those around them.

David will reinforce any social and emotional learning (SEL) that your school is already providing. He believes in proactive emotional literacy to encourage dignity and respect throughout the building.

Considered one of the best youth motivational speakers in the country, David draws on his own life to communicate dignity, understanding, patience, forgiveness, and most of all unconditional love.

He speaks with passion and conviction and through his humility, inspires his audience while teaching them the crucial life skills of dignity and respect.

How To Book David For Your School

To request David for an assembly or conference, visit TopYouthSpeakers.com

If you have concerns about funding, you can download our [Speaker Funding Guide](#)

This free guide will show you:

- How To Hire A World-Class Speaker On A Shoe-String Budget
- 5 Simple Strategies To Secure Speaker Funding
- Templates for Securing Local Sponsors

We want to help you bring World Class Speakers to your School.

Visit [Top Youth Speakers](http://TopYouthSpeakers.com) for more information.

THE LOST ARTS OF DIGNITY, RESPECT, AND COMPASSION

“David Flood created a rapport with all of our students from the moment he stepped in the door. From the popular students to those with substance abuse issues to our special needs students, David made time to speak with our students before and after his discussion, staying for hours. David doesn’t approach the students as a lecturer. He both laughs and cries during his talk and through his stories, we as a school community followed the same emotional roller coaster. He has already changed the lives of many of our students. I personally watched him help 5 students individually with their struggles at home. And that was during his informal walks. Imagine what his assembly is like.”

– Chris Carriere, HS Health Teacher

“Mr. Flood will spend a full day in your school giving assemblies and visiting classrooms as well as lunch periods. The focus of his presentation is on integrating an awareness of people around us through social skills training. His PD models for teachers by training them how to speak more appropriately and interact with students in a better way. It also improves teachers’ social skills and interpersonal interactions through modeling and redirecting. His topic focuses on treating all people with dignity and respect especially those with special needs. Through personal stories and role playing, he inspires children to reach out to others.”

– Dr. Tani Foger, Ed.D, Principal

“Thank you for bringing such a beautiful message with you today to share with our students and staff. As you spoke, I observed the faces of my students light up, realizing that they were making personal connections to what you were saying. What a priceless feeling! How refreshing to know that there are people like you in this world that make life changing impacts on the people around them.”

– Kari Purdy

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