

# TEACHING RESPECT

Leah was looking forward to the end of term at a small school in Mildura where she'd taught year 5/6 for almost three years. It had been a busy term, one where she'd had to deal with ongoing issues of disrespectful attitudes and behaviours towards girls from the boys in her class. The boys had been speaking disrespectfully to the girls, name calling, teasing and threatening to post hurtful comments on the girls' social media pages. Leah had often thought that if parents could talk to their children more about respect, then her students would have more respect for each other.

She had recently phoned the parent of a young boy, PJ, whose disrespectful behaviour was escalating in the classroom and playground. As a teacher she knew that unless those boys learned about respect, then there was a chance they would grow up thinking disrespecting women was a normal part of life. She had scheduled a meeting with PJ's parents that afternoon. She hoped she could get through to them because PJ was a good kid and had a lot of potential.

When she got to the interview room, PJ's mother and father were already there.

"Good afternoon Mr and Mrs Williams,"

"Call me Gus," said PJ's father. "I'm Lizzie, nice to meet you," said PJ's mum.

Leah smiled warmly. "It's lovely to meet you both, and thanks for coming in to have a chat about PJ's behaviour."

"What's the trouble?" asked Gus.

"Well, PJ has been disrespectful towards the girls in his class and I think you can both help me teach him about respectful relationships."

Gus leant back in his chair, considering what the teacher had said. "Leah, isn't that your job, you're his teacher?"

Leah leaned forward. "I can help PJ learn about maths and science and about respect too, but as his father you are one of the most important role models in his life. What you say to him matters. If we can teach PJ about respectful relationships now, then he will grow into a young man who thinks respect is a normal part of life, not disrespect."

Gus and Lizzie sat for a moment not talking, just thinking about what Leah had said. Gus started thinking about his behaviour around PJ. He wondered, 'could I have done some things to cause PJ to behave this way?' He thought about the ways he sometimes excused PJ's disrespectful behaviour, such as when he said hurtful things to his sister Ruby.

Lizzie remembered only last weekend when PJ upset Ruby. Lizzie had said to Ruby, "don't worry about it Rubes. It's just PJ being a typical boy."

"I see what you mean, and you're right, it's something all us parents should be more aware of," Gus said. "What can we do?"

She smiled warmly, appreciating Gus' willingness to help. It made her job so much easier when parents worked with her,



instead of blaming the teachers and the school for their child's problems.

"Sometimes it's hard to start talking with our kids about disrespectful and aggressive behaviour but there are ways we can begin the conversation. You can talk to PJ in the car, playing footy in the backyard, fishing, shopping or watching television. Be prepared to talk when you see or hear something you're not comfortable with, when he asks a question or when he just wants to have a yarn with you. For example, think about how PJ might respond if one of his friends was bullying a girl and was encouraging PJ to join in and what you might say to him."

"So, you mean having a yarn with PJ when I notice him being disrespectful, and maybe use some examples that I've seen that show disrespect to women and girls," Gus said.

Leah nodded. "That's it; draw on your own thoughts and experiences. It doesn't have to be a formal talk. We don't want him to think he's being punished. The more you can talk to him about respect, the more he might think twice before he starts teasing a girl or using disrespectful language."

It was Gus' turn to smile. Leah got the impression that he'd finally realised she was trying to help his boy, not punish him for behaving badly.

"So what topics should I yarn about?" Gus said.

She got out her notebook and wrote down a web address.

"There's a conversation guide on this website which can help, and other resources too. Have a look at [www.respect.gov.au](http://www.respect.gov.au) when you get a chance. You can start the chat by explaining what respect is and why it's important, and maybe use some examples in the community, like the way you respect Elders in your community whether they are older men or women. I also think it's important to be positive by showing him what respectful relationships look like; treating other people how you want to be treated."

"Makes a lot of sense," Gus said, turning to Lizzie who smiled back. "I think it's important to let PJ know these attitudes are not ok and that everyone deserves to be treated with respect. Respecting our women and girls also makes our community stronger."

Leah nodded. "Being more aware of our behaviour as adults and the examples we set for our young people will help to build more respectful relationships in the community. It all starts with talking to our children."

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*The above story is a fictionalised account of a teacher encouraging parents to reflect on their attitudes and behaviour. This story accompanies the Storybook Respect Starts With Us and other resources that have been produced for the Australian Government's national campaign to reduce violence against women and their children. The campaign aims to help break the cycle of violence by encouraging adults to reflect on their attitudes, and have conversations about respect with young people.*

*Resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been produced as part of the national campaign, including a conversation guide to help parents talk with their children about respect. For more information about the campaign, resources and tools, visit <https://www.respect.gov.au/campaign/atsi-materials/>*