I frequently hear mothers of difficult teenage sons say that theirs sons are disrespectful of them. The mothers complain they don’t receive enough appreciation for their love and for giving them whatever they can, maternally and materially.

What’s painful for me to hear is that many of the mothers have to behave like men in order to enforce their values — getting intense, raising their voices and becoming rigid, by not changing their minds. As a result of living this way, mothers tell me they feel less feminine and unattractive to men. They become deeply saddened that the sons they love so much are not becoming the courteous and courageous young man they hoped to have.

The purpose of this article is to help mothers (and fathers), have guidelines to educate their sons how to behave more respectfully around women. This way, parents can maximize their authority and influence while minimizing their stress by not engaging in drawn out, unproductive lectures with their sons.

What Doesn’t Work

When mothers get disrespected, they often say, “I’m your mother – don’t speak to me that way. You’re being rude and I won’t speak to you until you speak to me nicely.”

When fathers instinctually and gallantly want to protect their wives, they’ll say something similar, “That’s your mother you’re speaking to. You don’t speak to women that way. Until you can treat her nicer, you have to go to your room and think about it.”

More often than not, this approach doesn’t get their son to quiet down or stop cursing. By this time, everyone is upset and experiencing a full “fight or flight”, stressful reaction - increased blood pressure, tighter muscles and inflamed organs. This is not going to go well if the parents want their son to learn how to be more respectful to women.

What Does Work

Even if your son is being loud and combative, I recommend that mothers do their best to let their sons finish whatever they’re saying, without interrupting. As long as he’s not threatening you with physical danger, it would be good for you to listen for an important, underlying message – if there is one.

If you can accept that most young men don’t communicate well when they’re agitated, and if you’re able to “ride out the storm” you’ll have gained some respect from your son by not interfering with him.
When he’s done ranting you could say something like this: “I’ve carefully listened to your message without interrupting and I hear what you’re saying. However, in the future, I won’t listen to you if you treat me this way. I’m asking for Respect (a virtue), which means, “to esteem with reverence”, or “to hold someone in the highest regard” (a defined value). I know I’m participating in respectful communication when each person is speaking in a calm voice, with no cursing, and each person is allowed to speak without interrupting (a measurable behavior).

You should end with something like this, “Your style of communication is painful for me. I love you and it’s heartbreaking for me to be treated this way.”

**Teaching Young Men to Feel Remorse**

If you really want your son to learn how to cooperatively behave in a woman’s world then, at this point, there should be no more talking.

The mother (or both parents, if they are present), should quietly sit down and model to their son, without talking, how it FEELS to be in a room where dis-connection with loved ones is happening. This is how you help young men activate their ability to be empathetic – to experience the feelings of other people.

Continuing any conversation with your son is counterproductive to the deeper mentoring you need to provide him, in that moment. Believe me, your son feels just as sad as you do. His immature game is to get you angry because he’s choosing to act like a boy instead of a man, in that situation.

Even if you have a narcissistic son or a son that has Asperger’s or other medical conditions that may limit him from feeling remorseful, it’s best for you to allow your sorrowful feelings to be present. Then you should begin relaxing yourself by using a simple stress management technique. (Listen to our podcast, “Stress Management Techniques for Parents” on the Members Only page).

Your son’s brain can literally rewire itself and develop more sensitivity to the feelings of others. Showing your feelings of sadness, without making him wrong, and showing him how to relax, can activate oxytocin into his bloodstream, the hormone that promotes nurturing relationships.

Challenging teenage sons need to be consistently exposed to those behaviors you want them to emulate.

**How to Approach Your Son**
If you’re going to teach your son how to respect women, you’ll need to continually respect him first. That doesn’t mean that you change your values (virtues that are clearly defined) to accommodate his feelings or because you feel sorry for him. That means that you’re not negotiating your values and are consistently modeling and challenging him to abide by them (see our article, “The Choice Consequence Pathway” to learn how to properly challenge a young man).

When parents lower their standards, their sons don’t respect them and don’t trust them to lead them into successful manhood. Young men will act like boys and try to sucker you into catering to their immature emotional needs. When parents stick to their values, their sons may not tell them that they respect them, but they do.

You’ll also want to engage your son with the virtue of humor – defined as “celebrating with amusement and gratitude.” Ideally, your son should not feel that your intense interactions with him are wearing you down. When he feels you weakening, his competitive edge will be sharpened and he’ll become more resolved to dominate the relationship.

Underneath all of the anguish of having a son who is disrespectful towards you, should be a strong sense of celebration. As crazy as that sounds, my experience with my son and thousands of young men, has proven this to be true. When I convey to young men that I’m thankful that I’m the one who gets to teach them how to be happier and more independent, eventually it diffuses their resistance.

I tell young men, that if they’re not willing to learn from me now, while they’re a teenager, life “out there” is going to teach them how to get things right in a much harsher way. You can playfully, not mockingly, remind your disrespectful son that you love him and you are thankful for having the opportunity to teach him how to be with women.

Helping Your Son Get It RIGHT with Women

I recommend you frequently work into your day to day conversations with your sons how the five virtues from the RIGHT Way® specifically apply to women, as I explain below (respect, intelligence, gallantry, humor and true). Even though your son will protest having to hearing your advice, if you keep them very brief – three to five sentences – he’ll be able to hear your message.

Here are some sample scripts that you can say to educate your son how to successfully be with women. Let him know if he chooses to act in these ways, he’ll find that women will value him, because he’ll be acting in responsible and resourceful ways.

**Respect** (to esteem with reverence)
1) “Women value being respected. Respect (virtue) means, “To esteem with reverence” (value), or, “To hold someone in the highest regard” (value). Women feel safe with mature men when they’re given respect first. Whether you agree with them or not, when you speak in a calm voice and don’t interrupt (behavior), mature women will then respect you.”

2) “Women feel bullied when you don’t consider their feelings. They feel bullied if you try to dominate conversations. Most bullies are guys who act like boys. Bullies are unhappy with themselves or with other people in their lives, but take out their frustration on women because they’re physically weaker and emotionally sensitive. When you demonstrate respect for them, they feel protected – and for women, that’s very attractive.”

3) “Not respecting women by speaking back to them when they’re talking is offensive to women. To them it feels like they’re being attacked, even though that’s not what you’re literally doing. It feels like you’re treating them like objects, not as sensitive human beings. If you want to have cooperative relationships with women, whether it’s with me, your sister, your women friends or a future female boss, you’ll need to behave calmly.”

4) “There are times when women don’t know what they want in any given situation. A good way to partner with a woman to make her feel respected when she doesn’t know, is to offer some choices – like reading from a menu. If you do ask her what she wants to do and she says, “I don’t know” you can make some offers like, ‘How about spending some time together by going for a walk?’, or “Would you like to go and get some coffee?” Providing 2 or 3 choices will do usually work and it shows both interest in her and concern for what she wants – without making her wrong for not knowing.

**Intelligence** (applying intuition and experience into wisdom)

1) “Use your intelligence when dealing with women. Intelligence means using your intuition or your experience to speak or act with wisdom (value). What does your experience say when you become frustrated with women and yell at them? You’re probably not going to get what you want, so it’s not the intelligent thing to do. You can disagree with women without yelling. When you get good at this, women will relax around you and be more likely to consider your requests.”

2) “Women tend to be more intuitional, relational and emotional than men. Men tend to be more logical, isolational and experiential than women. It’s not uncommon for men not to know what women want. Getting frustrated is not going to help. I know men want to be smart in trying to help the situation, but if you don’t know what to say or do it’s intelligent to say, “I don’t know what you mean” or, “I don’t know how I can help”. With women, you don’t have to have answers for them. If you’re a really good listener, they will trust you. They won’t think you’re stupid – they’ll think you’re a kind and caring person.”
3) It’s not intelligent to treat women like men. Women don’t respond well to threats and undisciplined behavior. They don’t treat those types of aggression as a form of competition, the way men might. For women, it’s not safe for them to be around men who can’t control themselves– it shuts them down. When you can calmly say what’s true for you, even if you disagree with them, they’ll appreciate that you’re not trying to fight with them.

**Gallantry** (engaging in heartful acts of courage and courtesy)

1) “Women are attracted to men who are gallant. Being gallant means, “**Engaging in heartful acts of courtesy and courage** (value).” Heartful (virtue) means **being sincere, which requires being vulnerable and honest** (value). Being vulnerable (virtue), **or open to the best and worst sides of yourself** (value), doesn’t mean you’re weak. To a woman, it means that you are strong because you’re not afraid to be real.”

2) “Being courteous (virtue) to women means **being kind and generous** (value). When you get angry you’re going to have to learn to be courteous, not just to women, but to yourself as well. In other words, when you feel yourself getting upset, you’re going to need to be kind to yourself. You do this by accepting what’s happening and relaxing into the moment – not fighting it. If you can’t make yourself safe around women, they’re not going to want to be around you.”

3) “Being courageous (virtue) means **the ability to make yourself and others physically and emotionally safe** (value). Most men naturally want to make women safe - that’s the most important behavior women look for in men. Something as simple as crossing the street together and looking out for their safety is a good way to practice being courageous (behavior).”

4) “Being courageous means that you’ll be able to calmly and clearly say what you mean in conversations with women. You’ll have more self-respect when you voice what’s true for you and they’ll be able to trust you because you’re consistently honest.”

**Humor** (celebrating with amusement and gratitude)

1) “When you’re getting angry it’s almost impossible to stop your instinctual emotions when you become agitated. You can use your past experience to recognize that aggressive fighting with women is not going to help you be heard. Sometimes it’s best just to bring humor to a difficult situation. That means you can **celebrate with gratitude and amusement** (value). It’s better to tell a woman this is not a good time to talk about something and suggest doing something fun together as a way to channel the energy. You’ll be able to return to the challenging situation the next day, when everybody feels more relaxed.”
2) “Men who see challenges as opportunities to remove obstacles, tend to be humorous – they have a playful curiosity that helps them figure things out. If you’re heading towards an argument with a woman that’s going to get loud and unproductive, making fun of yourself or the situation – not of the woman! – will make it easier to resolve the issue. Women like to be around men who have a positive attitude when confronted with tough problems. It makes them feel safe.”

3) “Being humorous with women means that you can stop trying to figure things out to show her how smart you are. Getting out of your head by asking her questions and being curious about who she is, makes you very appealing. Telling her everything that you know will not hold her interest as much as you being interested in what she likes and what she’s thinking about.”

**True** (living life with integrity)
1) “If you’re going to disagree with a woman, you don’t have to make them wrong and put them down. Just because you disagree with them doesn’t mean they’re wrong. It just means you have different values about something. You just have to be true to yourself, which means, living your life with integrity. Integrity means you know your values and you can behave according to them. Women may not like you because of your values, but if you can just state them as being true for you, they’ll probably respect you for being honest.”

2) “When men are offensive in their communications with women, it usually means they don’t know their own values and how to be true to themselves. Arguing becomes a way for them to act out their own frustration for not knowing what’s right within themselves. For women, this looks like they’re talking to a boy, not a man. Women respect men who know what’s true for them and don’t need to offend others or defend themselves.

3) “Not being afraid to say, ‘I don’t know’ is a healthy way to stay in integrity with yourself and others. With men, you may feel like you’re not being as competitive as them when you don’t know something. Most women appreciate a man’s vulnerability when he doesn’t know an answer since they highly value being able to voice what’s true for them – even when there’s no obvious answer.

Lying, by hiding behind, ‘I don’t know’ when you really do know, makes you behave out of integrity with yourself as well as the woman you’re speaking to. This deceitful form of manipulation may work temporarily, but most women will eventually figure out your deceptiveness. That usually ends up damaging or losing an important relationship with a woman, whether it be with family, socially – with friends, professionally or romantically.”

**Never Give Up Educating Your Son**
When I first begin working with mothers on this issue, they’ll tell me that their sons won’t even listen to them when they speak. I tell them to trust that, as long as their son is in the same room with them and as long as they’re not yelling or nagging him by repeating themselves, he’s hearing your message.

Paradoxically, young men who are rude to their mothers are usually not that way with other women. That’s usually because they’re actually doing what you’ve been consistently telling them, outside of the home – they’re just not doing it with you! Mothers should celebrate that.

I understand that it’s painful not to have your son respect you as their mother. However, this is not an excuse to yell, nag or engage in meaningless fights with him. Simply state the virtues, values and behaviors you want him to emulate and make clear the choices/consequences he gets to make if he doesn’t act respectful towards you.

Your altercations with your disrespectful son are opportunities for you to remain true to your virtues and values. When you consistently behave with integrity you’ll respect and trust yourself, which just so happens to be the best way to get your son’s respectful attention.