

## There is no Debating Civility



I'm at Starbuck's. Mask on. In line, six feet from the person in front and in back of me. All wearing masks. A young man enters—not wearing a mask. The lady in back of me requests that he put on a mask. His response, “F\*\*\* you lady” and takes off.

About a week later, I read that a rabbi was attacked at a synagogue about a mile from where I live. A 14-year-old boy jumped off his bike, punched the rabbi “spewing” racial slurs and yelling “white power.” He was arrested on battery and hate crime charges.

Some say “civility” is on the decline because of technology, the Internet, television, Instagram, Facebook, etc.

Some say most of our citizens believe that “civility” has declined for a variety of reasons including ideological differences, individual and group conflicts, and our political difference and divisions.

Some say just look at the rate of bullying, rudeness, lying, ridicule, vulgarity, and physical violence one witnesses in this country.

Some say that in local schools, communities, neighborhoods, and households, for the most part, people are civil to one another.

### **What say you?**

The purpose of this blog is to discuss two questions:

1. What do we mean by “civility?”
2. How do we teach it to our children and youth?

**Civility** is imbedded in these and other character strengths: self-regulation, social responsibility, citizenship, empathy and kindness, respect and responsibility, humility and modesty, love, social-emotional intelligence, and putting the “common good” over self-interests.

You are well aware that these are learned behaviors.

The Pew Research Center reported that of the ten skills Americans say kids need to succeed in life, communication skills was selected by most of the respondents. In another report about 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, respondents noted that there is a need to teach children and youth two very important skills: communication and collaboration.

Neither report says it, but I bet they mean, **civil communication**.

So, let's see what the experts say about how to teach **civility**. Here are about 25 plus ways to teach your students the skills necessary to be **civil** human beings.

Melissa Benaroya writes:

*“**Civility** goes beyond being polite and courteous; it involves listening to others with an open mind, disagreeing respectfully and seeking common ground to start a conversation about differences. Acting with civility requires children to be respectful, reflective and self-aware. Learning the skills of perspective taking, empathy and problem-solving helps children understand that their actions and words affect individuals as well as their entire community, encouraging them to rise up and act with civility in tough situations....By teaching skills like empathy, problem- solving and perspective taking, we can help nurture civility in our children.”*

(How to Teach Civility During Divisive Times, Committee for Children, February 2017)

Matthew Lunch suggests seven ways to teach **civility**:

- 1) manners matter,
- 2) show tolerance,
- 3) give examples,
- 4) listen well,
- 5) apologize regularly,
- 6) encourage empathy, and,
- 7) practice what you preach.

(7 Ways To Teach Children Civility, The EDVOCATE, 2-23-18)

Marilyn Price-Mitchell, PhD, suggests 15 Ways to Foster Respectful Behavior. She writes: “We can teach kids the foundations of civility every day in the way we communicate with them and others, including the following:

- *Think about the impact of words and actions on others before you use them.*
- *Apologize when you are wrong.*
- *Set ground rules for civil behavior at home and in classrooms.*
- *Teach kids how to become engaged citizens.*
- *Treat children and adults with the respect that you expect from them.*
- *Demand civility of politicians and public servants.*
- *Use respectful language when you disagree with someone.*
- *Don't let anger and emotion get in the way of listening to others.*
- *Be tolerant of people who are different from you.*
- *Teach character strengths, like respect and empathy, at home and in classrooms.*
- *Challenge people's views, but don't attack the person.*
- *Acknowledge others for their civility and respectful behavior, regardless of their viewpoints.*
- *Remind kids often why they – and you – should be civil.*
- *Empower children to take a stand against bullying.”*

<https://www.rootsofaction.com/civility-101-whos-teaching-the-class/>

I do not know where I read this—it was in my notes without a reference. The author suggests these five ways for a teacher to “help students learn to engage in productive, **civil discourse** in the classroom.”

1. *Begin with yourself—be the model in your classroom.*
2. *Monitor your classroom climate—start small and build as skills develop.*
3. *State your dialogue expectations—the basic rule of civil discourse is to be respectful and don't make it personal.*
4. *Have students watch civil debates [a challenge these days].*
5. *Have your students use a “private journaling” strategy.*

When you get a chance, try out this **civility quotation lesson** with your students. In this lesson, your students will be asked to:

- compare and contrast quotations,
- find information about the author of each quote,
- determine the meaning and implications of each quote,
- write and/or draw how the quote may apply to what they do and say.

I also suggest that your students discuss the meaning of the quotes with classmates, friends, and family.

1. *“I think **civility** is important to getting things done.”* —Amy Klobuchar
2. *“You can disagree without being disagreeable.”* —Ruth Bader Ginsburg
3. *“**Civility** costs nothing, and buys everything.”* —Mary Wortley Montagu
4. *“**Civility** includes courtesy, politeness, mutual respect, fairness, good manners, as well as a matter of good health.”* —P.M. Forni
5. *“**Civility** is the art and act of caring for others.”* —Deborah King

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BLOG, October, 2020  
See *News You Can Use*-October Issue