



ALICIA FARRELL PHD
COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGIST

Civility: Teaching Children Respect, Tolerance and Empathy in a Complicated World

- I. **State of the Union March 2021: The Emergence of Uncivil Behavior and How it Happened**
 - A. Last 20 years society has become more informal. No longer agreed upon rules for respectful behavior. (Poor adult role modeling)
 - B. Web: allows for anonymous communications with no responsibility attached. Encouraging uncivil and uninformed criticisms.
 - C. Reality TV shows model self-importance over the common good.
 - D. Plethora of information allows us to choose what we digest based on what we believe so only hear one side of the story. Often there are many sides that have legitimacy.
 - E. Belief that opportunities are scarce. Creating a culture of immaturity and insecurity leading to anxiety and a belief that "I can't handle it."
 - F. Reinforcement of perfection over normalizing risk/failure and resilience.
 - G. Emphasis on performance over moral character.
 - H. Incivility leads to unhealthy communities/societies paralyzed by conflict and political division.
Just as civility has been -- Incivility is passed down from generation to generation.
- II. **Civility:** Cultural belief system that the greater good is ultimately more important than individual's needs and wants. Based on cultural expectations (respect, tolerance, acceptance), self-control/regulation and a willingness to put others before yourself, even when it is difficult to do. It involves: ASSUMPTION OF GOOD WILL. Being civil is NOT being weak or putting your success/status at risk. It is demonstrative of your courage to treat others as equals and accept/forgive others imperfections. It is the cornerstone to a fulfilling life and a successful society.
- III. **Teaching civility to our children:** (1) Lead by example! Be civil yourself. Make sure your children experience your civil behavior. Point it out to them and explain your choice. Specifically, model and teach acceptance/tolerance of others, forgiveness, self-control/regulation, apologizing when wrong, perspective taking, thoughtful assignment of blame; don't take things personally (Book: Four Agreements) (2) Parent so your children believe in themselves as confident, competent, capable, resilient and compassionate (Authoritative Style). Roots of civility are inside ourselves -- when you feel civil towards your own self you will be more likely to be civil to others. Know thyself! (3) Emphasize your children's character over their performance (4) Teach them how to problem solve collaboratively even when they disagree with others' opinions/perspectives using active listening skills and without attacking a person's character. (5) Talk to them about civility and how it is on the decline (use age appropriate examples) and why it is important. Etc.
- IV. **Benefits to learning civil behavior as a child:** Greater self-esteem/self-respect; Stronger social skills and ability to connect authentically; Lower stress levels; Less likely to be depressed/anxious; Able to contribute positively to a productive society; Can create purpose and meaning in their lives; Knows how to depend on others and be depended on by others; Greater peace of mind attained through acceptance and forgiveness etc..
- V. **Civil Parenting with Positive Discipline (Authoritative)**
 - A. Way of communicating that puts responsibility for child's behavior into their hands and out of the adults. The child chooses both their behavior and the resulting consequences.
 - B. Use Collaborative Problem Solving: Id problem, Brainstorm solutions, Pick solution, Test it out, Evaluate. Why? Builds trust, respect, skills, responsibility, opens up communication.
 - C. Praise: Judges child "Good boy for setting the table!" "You are so smart."
 - D. Encouragement: Focuses on positive behavior or trait "Thank you for setting the table." "Your hard work is really paying off." "I can tell you really care about your friends."
 - E. Consequences:
 1. Natural: Anything that happens without adult intervention
 - 2.



ALICIA FARRELL PHD
COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGIST

3. Logical: Requires intervention of adult but is not punishment. Four elements: Related to behavior, respectfully delivered, reasonable, revealed in advance if possible.
 4. Additional elements: Be brief, be specific, be positive, label your feelings, offer an understanding statement, take partial responsibility when possible, offer to help, ask permission to communicate, stay calm, learn to negotiate when appropriate, set clear and reasonable limits/hard stops, practice, practice, practice – start with things not so important.
- F. Characteristics of Parents who have an easier time using positive communication
1. Look at their behavior first and make changes as necessary.
 2. Never give up authority as the parent
 3. Not held hostage by threats.
 4. Good self-control.
 5. Don't take things personally.
 6. Willing to be wrong, make a mistake and apologize.
 7. Willing to be vulnerable
 8. Maintain a sense of humor
 9. Take care of themselves and their relationships

“I have learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did but people will never forget how you made them feel.” Maya Angelou