

WHAT
EVERY MOM
NEEDS TO
RECOGNIZE IN
HER SON

mother & SON

THE RESPECT EFFECT

EMERSON
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NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF

LOVE & RESPECT

mother & SON

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I dedicate this book to Sarah, my wife, who gave voice over the years to those who attended our Love and Respect Conference: “Had I known earlier about the Respect Effect on sons, I would have been a far better mother to my sons.”

Though as a mother she was twenty-five times better than I was as a father, the Respect message, nonetheless, deeply affected her, and she in turn affected our sons, who have voiced their appreciation. It worked!

I also dedicate this book to my mother, now in heaven, who always showed me respect, even into adulthood when I pastored a church—she attended all four services each weekend! Sarah says, “I think that’s why you have endearingly and regularly said since 2001, ‘I miss my mother.’”

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INTRODUCTION

A Testimony

As I've traveled the world over the last two decades, exploring the dynamic of healthy family relationships, one thing has become abundantly clear.

A boy needs his mother's respect.

Not only her love but also her respect. That's the message of this book, and I believe that it will transform your relationship with your son in ways you've only dreamed about. It won't be because of my writing. In fact, I'll try hard not to get in the way. It will be because the principle is life-changing in its simplicity, and it cuts straight to the deepest part of a boy's soul.

When it comes to respect between a mother and son, the point that most make is that a mother needs her son's respect. And to this point, I wholeheartedly agree. A boy does need to be respectful. In fact, I wrote a whole book about the need of a father and mother for the respect of their children, called *Love & Respect in the Family*. But it's only half of the equation, especially when you move from the parents as one unit into the highly unique and beautiful relationship between a mother and her son.

I explored this relationship briefly in “Parenting Pink and Blue,” one of the chapters of *Love & Respect in the Family*. There, I briefly tell mothers that their “blue” sons need respect in the same way their “pink” daughters need dad’s love. Yes, sons and daughters equally need love and respect, but I show that the felt need during stress and conflict differs among males and females. Research bears this out. Males filter their world more through the respect grid.

Fascinatingly, moms zeroed in on this teaching immediately and began sending me hundreds of stories and testimonials surrounding this revelation. With great excitement, they applied respect talk to their sons, whether they were four or forty. Judging from the letters, many of which you’ll read in this book, they experienced astounding results.

Let me share one such testimony with you in this introduction to set the stage. This mother read the “Parenting Pink and Blue” chapter and applied it to her daily interactions with her son. Here is the Respect Effect.

She wrote:

I had finally concluded—although I wasn’t ready to completely believe it—that my seven-year-old son just had one of those moody, depressed personalities, and I had better just accept it, instead of wanting him to be happier. I should try to teach him to be grateful for all his blessings.

But after applying respect in the way you suggested, he changed. For example, he came up to me the other evening, with an unusually happy, calm demeanor, and said, “I feel so happy,” in the most contented, almost sentimental tone. This was profound for me! This was my child, who according to his consistent behavior since birth would have been labeled melancholy/choleric. He would often tell me—and this breaks my heart—that he was “sad and didn’t know why.” I would try to talk to him about things, work through things, and prayed for him and with him regularly. But he usually only seemed really happy when something exciting was going on, a trip to the zoo or if he went with me to visit friends, but then on the way home would say he was “bored” (I think he was just trying to express unhappiness).

When I began the respect principles, he seemed calmer, less frustrated, less internally agitated (my respect seemed to release his internal tension), and more loving. . . . He has been coming up to me, and instead of acting out for attention, he will hug me, look right into my eyes, smile the sweetest, happiest smile, and say, “You’re the best mom in the world!” Wow! Nothing quite that wonderful has ever happened between us before. Being respectful to him has triggered his affection for me. . . . [I am] seeing beautiful and meaningful results.

He has come up again recently and said, “I don’t know why, but I’m so happy!” And I thought, *I know why, my little sweetheart. Because I have learned to show you the respect you didn’t even know you were crying out for, that I didn’t even know you needed.* He has been far more calm and content. He has been more willing to mind and has had little or no talking back to me. His affection for me has increased greatly; he comes up to me throughout the day and hugs and kisses me. I am beginning to enjoy the rewards of parenting on a much deeper level. It’s like we are friends now, instead of always in a power struggle.

I long to be able to learn even more practical ways on how to show him respect. I am navigating unfamiliar waters . . . stepping out and doing what the book says even though it makes no sense to my “pink” brain. . . .

It has been much more challenging learning how to show respect in parenting because I still want my strong-willed, type A, firstborn little man to know that he is not the boss.

I have also been trying to take time each day to stop what I am doing and look at him and really listen to him, giving him my undivided attention when he wants to tell me something, rather than multitasking so much.

It’s like a little miracle—the connection and affection I longed to have with my son have finally come. He finally feels respected (oh, how I wish I had known how to do this sooner!) and his happiness shows. I can’t mourn over the many difficult years we had; I have to “forget those things which are behind, and press on” because God has many more good years ahead for us and our blossoming relationship.

My mom commented on how much calmer my son was when we went to visit a few days ago. She told my sister, who has five sons, about the wonderful transformation my son and I are enjoying. I will keep spreading the word! God bless!

Is this testimony too good to be true? You will have to decide as you read this book. I can tell you this: other moms chime in with equal enthusiasm. You will hear from them throughout as we proceed with the following:

- Why This Book?
- Understanding What Respect Looks Like to Boys
- A Game Plan: Mom G.U.I.D.E.S. with Respect
- Seeing the Man in the Boy: His Six Desires: C.H.A.I.R.S.
- Conquest: Respecting His Desire to Work and Achieve
- Hierarchy: Respecting His Desire to Provide, Protect, and Even Die
- Authority: Respecting His Desire to Be Strong and to Lead and Make Decisions
- Insight: Respecting His Desire to Analyze, Solve, and Counsel
- Relationship: Respecting His Desire for a Shoulder-to-Shoulder Friendship
- Sexuality: Respecting His Desire for Sexual Understanding and “Knowing”
- An Empathetic Look at the Motherly Objections to Respecting a Boy
- Forgiveness

Sarah, my wife, has said for many years, “If I had known this information when my sons were little (they are now in their thirties), I would have been a better mother.”

This does not mean Sarah’s love was insignificant. Mother-love is vital. In fact, mother-love is the epitome of altruism.

“But, Emerson, I have to ask: aren’t *love* and *respect* synonymous? Using the word *love* should work just fine, right?” No, it won’t work just fine. These are not two words with the same meaning. A husband doesn’t give to his wife a card that says, “Baby, I really respect you!” These words are not synonymous. A mother can love her son but not respect him, just as a mother works outside the home for a boss that she respects but does not love. When a mother thinks about it, she knows these words differ.

I can tell you this: a boy knows his mom loves him, but he can lack assurance that she *respects* him. Sarah, along with me, has observed the Respect Effect among hundreds of mothers who stand in utter amazement, like the mother of the seven-year-old boy. Here are some quotes that I’ve pulled from letters in the last few months:

- What a difference.
- I was totally amazed.
- It kind of blew me away.
- To me that was awesome.
- He has never initiated saying, “I love you.”
- It was life-changing.
- It spoke to their hearts.
- My relationship with my son improved overnight.
- These things make my son smile like I have never seen.
- I was slightly in a state of shock and euphoria at the same time.
- I could hear in his voice and see in his e-mails that he seemed to be more confident in his maleness.
- No lie! He saw me taking the trash out of the can, and he took it from me and said, “I’ll take it outside for you, mommy.” Then he came in and offered to pick up the toys and take them to his room. I about fell over.

Are you ready to find out more? Sarah wants you to know, “As a mother, it is never too early and never too late to apply this message of respect. A boy is never too young and never too old.”

1

WHY THIS BOOK?

A woman responds to love. The woman is in a girl. Therefore, a girl responds to love.

A man responds to respect. The man is in a boy. Therefore, a boy responds to respect.

The first syllogistic statement receives an affirming nod from every mother. For some, the second statement is a bit more difficult to grasp.

I often scratch my head in bewilderment over the lack of understanding of mothers about their precious baby boys. They love their sons more than they love their very lives, but they readily confess ignorance and confusion.

A mom wrote:

I have been really struggling with my nearly four-year-old son lately. Now I understand why every mother wants a daughter . . . because we “get” them! When my sixteen-month-old daughter throws a fit about something, I know what angle to come from because I understand why she’s upset. When my son does something, I’m like, “Why did he just do that?” *Again!*

Every mother recognizes the woman in the girl and her longing for love. In the movie *Notting Hill* (1999), Julia Roberts's character emotionally expresses, "I'm also just a girl . . . standing in front of a boy . . . asking him to love her." The feminine need and traits ring loud and clear to all women. For example, none miss the nurturing nature of women and little girls. All the research bears out the caregiving traits of the feminine soul, but who needs research to tell us this? We see it every day. No one is ever surprised when a little girl walks down the street with her baby doll, then stops to nurse it with a plastic bottle as she affectionately communicates her love. We observe the woman in the girl. We don't need research to educate us.

XX and XY Chromosomes

Yet as I talk to mothers and tell them there is a man in the boy, some respond with curiosity about who that man might be. Yes, they know their sons are "all boy." As one mother said, "He can be 'all boy' one second and the other the sweetest little thing ever." But note her negative contrast. The "all boy" is not sweet to her. These mothers admit they are a bit in the dark on God's virtuous design of testosterone, unlike the way they intuitively grasp the purity of estrogen. One mom quipped (about her son), "We love these kids, but Lord help us; if they don't have the same XX or XY chromosomes that we do, it can be like navigating a foreign country without a map."

To some moms the boy is an alien. But he is not from outer space. God created him male in his gender. When it comes to the boy, this book explains the attributes of the masculine soul. This book helps the mom hear a precious and endearing message: "I am just a boy, standing in front of his mother, asking her to respect him."

Both research and the Bible reveal the male's need for respect. This is a simple and revolutionary insight into the heart of a boy that we have overlooked—and shockingly so. This book is about a mother going beyond her love and applying respect to the heart of her son. But in

addition to the research and the Scripture, every mom will begin to see for herself this need in her boy.

Do Not Beat Yourself Up

When you see his need for respect firsthand, you will find your love and compassion for your son providing you with the natural interest and energy to meet this need. So do not shame yourself. Please hear me. Relax. Do not beat yourself up as your mind races to those moments when you feel you may have failed. Some moms tend to torture themselves, then run to the hills to avoid this topic. But let your love motivate you to switch gears when this stuff about respect per se does not motivate you.

Let me say, I was unchurched growing up; so if you view yourself as secular or unchurched, please keep reading. Though I pastored for years, which enables me to bring the biblical perspective, I have a PhD in child and family ecology that enables me to highlight what we know about male behavior and what I have researched. In addition, I have collected hundreds and hundreds of e-mails from moms. You need to hear their testimonies. You owe it to yourself. You owe it to your son.

Research

As for the research, Shaunti Feldhahn has found that respect is extremely important to men. If men were forced to choose between feeling “alone and unloved in the world OR [feeling] inadequate and disrespected,” 74 percent would rather give up love if they could keep respect, with just 26 percent saying they’d give up respect in order to be loved.¹

Men and boys are far more sensitive, vulnerable, and reactionary to feeling inadequate and disrespected. Sadly, some have profiled these sentiments as rooted in narcissism. But moms know their sons are not egotistical maniacs any more than their daughters are prima donnas for longing to be special, noticed, and loved. A prudent mom gives the benefit of the doubt to her boy. He is a man in the making.

Though we all need love and respect equally, there is a statistically significant gender difference. I asked seven thousand people, “When in a conflict with your spouse, do you feel unloved or disrespected?” An overwhelming 83 percent of the men said disrespected, and 72 percent of the women said unloved. In other words, quite often during the same conflict, she filters his reaction as unloving and he interprets her reaction as disrespectful.

What Does a Boy Need?

Your son feels the same way. But did you know he feels this way?

During a conflict, if you do not filter the event as he does, you will miss the extent to which he feels disrespected. Because you do not intend to be disrespectful, you could dismiss his feelings. You might say, “He should know that I love him and am trying to help him be more loving. He needs to stop feeling disrespected.” In like manner, I suppose it is okay for a dad to tell his daughter to stop feeling unloved.

As Louann Brizendine wrote in *The Female Brain*, “Males and females become reactive to different kinds of stress. . . . Relationship conflict is what drives a teen girl’s stress system wild. She needs to be liked and socially connected; a teen boy needs to be respected.”² Did you catch that? *A teen boy needs to be respected.*

When a mother and son get into a conflict—a very stressful event to both—the son feels far more disrespected than he feels unloved, and he craves respect more than love. But how many mothers detect this, and if they do, how many know what to say or do? Who has coached a mom to ask, “Is what I am about to say going to sound respectful or disrespectful to my son?”

Every mom needs to recognize and accept that her son filters the stress with her through the respect grid. He is not wrong for this, just different. In the same way, a daughter is not wrong, just different for wanting to be liked. A dad must not say to his daughter, “Quit worrying about being liked at school.” The good news is that once mom sees this need in her

boy, she can use this information with prudence. She need only say, “I am not trying to show you disrespect when I confront your misbehavior.” Just using the word *disrespect* eases his stress.

The Crazy Cycle

If mothers do not use Respect-Talk like this, they spin on what I call the Crazy Cycle with their sons: without respect a son reacts without love, and without love a mother reacts without respect. This baby spins. Can you relate? Whatever the issue that first created heated fellowship between mother and son, it has now been relegated to second place. The root issue to the boy is the disrespect he feels, and the root issue to mom is the lack of love she feels, not to mention her feeling disrespected as the parent. It gets really crazy, really quick. He doesn’t see his lack of love because he is feeling disrespected, and mom doesn’t see her disrespect because she is feeling both unloved and disrespected.

To stop this craziness, every mom can use Respect-Talk. Though it is more than verbal and sounds abnormal at first, using the word *respect* is the starting point for a mother. To stop the crazy moments, she need only clarify, as I said above,

“Look, I am not using this topic as an opportunity to send you a message that I don’t respect you. I am not trying to dishonor you. I am seeking to address the issue at hand, okay? Let’s take five minutes to calm down and revisit the matter respectfully.”

This is the native tongue of a boy. He hears it loud and clear, then calms down.

Is this hard for a mom to do? No. A mother loves to use words and communicate. Research has found that women are expressive and responsive. What better way to commence than to learn a few vocabulary words of respect that energize, motivate, and influence the heart of a boy? What could be more thrilling to a mother than to speak words that soften the

spirit of a son and trigger a desire in him to connect with her? She imagines this kind of relationship with her son but never seems to experience it as she hopes—not after age four for many moms.

As the mother said in the introduction, “It’s like a little miracle—the connection and affection I longed to have with my son have finally come.”

The Respect Effect

Respect-Talk ignites affection and endearment in a boy. Let me illustrate this between a father and a son to help you see this from another angle. A dad wrote:

One weekend a few months ago, we traveled as a family up to Prague. We had read your book prior to this trip and so some of the concepts were still fresh in my mind. I spent my weekend helping my brother-in-law build a tree house for his children and then we made a zip line. While my nephew was too frightened to be the first to try the new line, my son volunteered. After that the boys went down the line several times.

About the third or fourth time [my son] let go for some reason. He fell about fifteen feet to the ground. This is what happens when you leave two dads home alone with the kids. My son got the wind knocked out of him but had no broken bones. When the mothers arrived home they were less than happy, but I took the opportunity to show great respect for my son. I began to tell of this escapade and called him a warrior and a hero. These words resounded so much with my son that for the next three days he was glued to my side.

Since the incident I have told the story often, always within earshot [of my son], and I have noticed how he will always stick around long enough to hear me call him a warrior hero, and then he will be on his way. After our return [from your conference], I shared with him that I was able to tell this story in front of 350 people, and that brought a huge broad smile across his face. I know I fail my son often; I know I have

much to learn as a dad, but there are times when I get to tell this story and he knows he is a knight in shining armor.

Note that the dad used Respect-Talk with his son by referring to him as a warrior and hero, resulting in the boy's staying glued to his dad's side for three days. Respect-Talk created affection and a desire to stay close and connect. I want every mom to pay attention to this. The boy bonded in a deep and profound way with his father, and the same can happen between mother and son when she uses Respect-Talk.

A mom wrote:

One night while putting our sons to bed, my five-year-old, in the midst of my monologue about how much I loved him, looked at me sadly and said, "Mom, are you proud of me?" Shocked, I expressed immediately that I was, of course, proud of him. He asked forlornly, "Then why don't you ever tell me so?" Ever since then, I have worked to hold back on my desire to grab him up off the floor and smother his cheek with kisses, and, instead, I practice putting one hand on his shoulder and telling him I'm proud of him. He responds to that simple gesture by puffing out his chest and replying, "Thanks, Mom," with a nod of his head. And he walks away feeling more valued than if I'd kissed his cheek for a year.

Respect-Talk is not to be left to the dads. This boy needed his mother's honor and respect, and he told her so.

By the way, this ignites a new appreciation in a mom for the relationship her husband has with her boys. A mom told me,

I've begun to understand my husband's relationship with our boys. We have three boys, thirteen, ten, and five, and one girl of two years of age. I've been critical of my husband's way of communicating with the boys. This series of Love and Respect has explained the language between males. My boys spend hours talking with my husband about their interests, which include weapons, the military channel, World War I, World

War II, and girls. You must know that my husband is a cop by profession so their conversations are actually very interesting to a point. I've come to understand why they speak this language and how the respect between each other has developed.

The conversations between my sons and husband [are] about honor, respect, wisdom, tactical strategies, and how to apply them to everyday life. But I must say that the content of the conversations is not the only thing interesting to me but also the stern tone of voice my husband uses with them. If he were to use that tone with me or my daughter, we'd probably break down crying. On the other hand, my boys seem to thrive on it. They seek my husband's companionship and always want to seek his conversation.

There we have it. The boys are glued to the dad.

Connectivity

Respect-Talk creates the kind of connectivity every mother yearns to have with her son. Of course, we are not asking mom to put on combat boots, smoke cigars, harness a weapon, and lower her voice. She need not attend the police academy. We are not promoting the idea that a mother becomes a male. Instead, this mother's testimony highlights the importance of *not* passing judgment on this respect message simply because a mother feels uncomfortable with it. As this mother stated, she initially judged her husband's way of communicating as wrong when, in this instance, it was not wrong. A mother must not judge this language as unacceptable but embrace this as part of God's design. She will value this when her nineteen-year-old saves her life against a home invader.

Truth is, the conversation between this father and these boys represents some of the best of Respect-Talk. I am certain their discussions included such virtues as honor, integrity, caution, loyalty, bravery, prudence, service, and sacrifice. I predict these boys will turn into the kind of men that other men follow and women adore.

I invite moms to stop and ask, “Why do boys respond to a football coach? Why do boys join the Marines and subject themselves to a drill officer?” Many mothers declare, “I have no idea.” These male leaders are attesting to these boys, “I believe in you. I admire who I believe you to be. But do you see this in yourself? Do you have what it takes to become what I believe you to be?” This has been a major slogan of the US Army: “Be All That You Can Be!” Boys dream of joining.

Respect-Talk also helps a mother as she connects a son with his father:

The material from the book has been especially helpful with how I am able to support my husband in his relationship with our son and has allowed me to encourage a healthier, more respectful relationship between father and son. Here’s how I have used what I learned from *Love and Respect* when speaking to my son about his father’s wishes and encouraging behaviors that my husband desires.

For example, my husband does not like the kids climbing on furniture. When my son does so, I gently remind him that “we need to respect how hard dad has worked to be able to buy things for our family and his desire to take good care of them.” My son responds well to this. I suppose he understands this language better than hollering, “Dad says to get off the couch!” . . .

I am able to tell my son, “Your dad thinks you should (fill in the blank). Because he wants what is best for you, we need to respect his wishes.” It seems my son can understand this need to respect his father (even better than me!) and can rise to obedience out of pure respect.

Mothers Have an Aha Moment

What fascinates me is that many mothers who have attended our Love and Respect Marriage Conference began to e-mail me their testimonies of enlightenment. In our conference we teach Ephesians 5:33. That scripture commands husbands to love their wives and wives to respect their

husbands; 1 Peter 3:1–2 also address respect. In my marriage book, *Love and Respect*, I guide wives to experience power and influence by putting on respect toward the spirit of their husbands while addressing unrespectable things. This respectful demeanor in the wives ends up motivating the husbands to be more loving and respectable.

After the conference these women start thinking, *Hey, doesn't this apply to my son? He's a male.*

A woman wrote, “I came from a family of all girls, and your information on respect toward my husband was all new to me. It really got me to thinking about how that could also translate to raising my boys, ages nine and eleven.”

Mothers intuitively sensed that if respect worked on the masculine souls of their husbands, then respect would work on the masculine souls of their sons. They tried it and wrote me with the mind-blowing results. “This respect thing really worked with my boy; it blew me away.”

Mothers began asking for more help on how to apply respect to their circumstances with their sons.

“What about my four-year-old? What should I envision doing toward him in these early years?”

“How do I respect my teen son when he should be respecting me?”

“What if I have disrespected my adult son for too many years? Is it too late to change?”

As I relayed ways to apply respect, it proved revolutionary to these moms. This opened up a whole new world to mothers toward their sons, and they shot back e-mails to me that contained story after story of the Respect Effect that left them in shock and awe—no matter the age, no matter the former mistakes.

As these mothers told me their stories, I became intrigued by the maternal refrain, “Why has no one told us this information before? This is incredible! I want to learn more. Do you have a book about mothers and sons?”

A Sense of Urgency

When I told them that I did not have a book but planned on writing one, they exclaimed, “Please hurry up, and sign me up for that book on mothers and sons. I want it! No, I need it! Now!”

What made this all the more urgent is that moms were coaching fathers to love their daughters, but no one was teaching moms how to show respect to their sons. All realized that little girls needed daddy’s love, but who strongly promoted the truth that little boys need mommy’s respect?

One day as I thumbed through the indexes of some leading books about boys, not one index listed either of these words: *respect* or *honor*. None declared that boys need to feel respected for who they are as men in the making. No wonder mothers feel left in the dark on this topic. Who pinpointed respect as central to the core of a boy?

The president of an NBA team invited me recently to address this topic of honor and respect to the team, coaches, and trainers. I was the only inspirational speaker he’s ever invited to speak to one of his teams, and he himself is known as one of the greatest motivational speakers in this century. Why would he invite me? Because he recognized the uniqueness of the masculine soul and the power that exists when it is allowed to flourish. The need in an NBA all-star’s soul is the same need in the young boy who wants to be that star someday.

Pixie Dust?

Having said all this, I do not wish to overpromise. This is no absolute formula. Your son is not a robot, nor are you. This is more art than science. Also, respect is not a theory to try out for a day or two. Your son is not a lab rat for you to test this on, and then conclude it doesn’t work if he does not become perfectly sensitive, sentimental, sensible, and sensational overnight. This is a commitment to meet a son’s need until the son dies—hopefully not from letting go of a zip line.

There is no pixie dust for a mom to sprinkle on her son’s head that

will magically influence him to obey her every wish and command. There is no tricky technique for creating a perfect son any more than there is a three-step process for turning a woman into a perfect mother. Neither mom nor son will ever walk on water.

But neither do I intend to downplay the power of Respect-Talk, just as I would never downplay expressions of love from a father to his daughter. When a mother does what I set forth in this book, even when she and her son have bad days, her son will respond less negatively. I acknowledge that things may not be as positive as she hopes and prays, but they will be better.

The Respect Effect has joyfully stunned many people. The responses of the sons put some folks back on their heels with giddy delight. So if all of this hinges on understanding respect, what exactly *is* respect? How do we define it in relatable terms? That's where we'll go in the next chapter.