

Respect – Commit To It! Redcliffe State High School and the Bays Cluster

A case study
for the national
strategy to address
the abuse of
teachers, school
leaders and other
school staff.

The development of the Respect – Commit to It! Project (the Respect Project) was prompted by the recognition that negotiating challenging interactions with parents and being subjected to abusive behaviour on school grounds was having a significant toll on the mental health of school staff.

Engaging parents and community stakeholders are critical steps in establishing a respectful community culture in schools and can significantly shape students' attitudes and behaviour towards school staff. The Respect Project acknowledges that parents and the broader community play a vital role in supporting young people in their learning and influence their engagement in society. With a commitment to 'enroll, educate, and empower our partners' the Respect Project works to ensure that educators, parents, and the broader community engage in positive ways to encourage future generations to be productive, respectful and contributing members of society¹.

1. <https://www.respectcommittoit.com.au/>

The mission of the Respect Project is to have a society “where respect is given and shown to all” and encourages respect through three simple messages:



Listening ears



Kind words



Gentle hands

This core message is promoted by encouraging engagement with school and community-based initiatives and activities, and several key resources which communicate the message of ‘respect in action’ at all levels of the community.

The development of the Respect – Commit to it! Project

The Respect Project was developed by a group of community members from various backgrounds, businesses, and industries, including Shona McKinlay, Principal of Remarkable Redcliffe State High School, a key contributor, and leader of this work.

With the support of the Parents and Citizens President, Shona and her team took initiative and contacted the 13 schools in Bays Cluster to discuss opportunities to collaborate and work together to develop a meaningful solution.

In recognition of shared experiences and a collective desire to make a positive change within their own school communities, a committee was established between the Bays Cluster of 13 schools, who then worked together to develop a set of expectations regarding their school community relationships. Designed to promote respectful relationships among the community living on and around the Redcliffe Peninsula, the Respect project continues to be led by the Bays Cluster schools and associated parents and citizens associations as well as community, business, and government representatives across the Redcliffe Peninsula area.



We needed to do something positive to change our workforce and how people see education, as well as how people were treating our school.

Principal



Building a culture of respect for future generations

Through collaboration with various local stakeholders through a series of awareness building, educational and training initiatives, the Respect Project is committed to building a culture of respect for future generations. A core belief of the Respect Project is that 'for children to show respect, they must first be shown what it looks like'.

A central understanding of the Respect Project is that education is the foundation of respect and instilling the value of respect from an early age is essential. Partnerships with childcare centres have ensured that the core message of 'listening ears, kind words, gentle hands' is consistently communicated from the early school years, through primary school into high school, and then out into the community.

School based initiatives

To encourage student participation in the Respect Project, weekly learning goals are created and sent out to schools, which, beyond exploring the key messages of 'listening ears, kind words and gentle hands', focus on topics such as self-care, gratitude, anger-management and avoiding self-destructive behaviours. Schools are also encouraged to take part in various activities, such as the creation of videos featuring students speaking about the meaning of respect. 'Listening ears, kind words and gentle hands' posters are featured in every classroom and are regularly referred to to consistently embed the message of respect.

Other initiatives involve establishing 'Respect Week' an expansion of 'National Respect Day' on the 18th of September. During this week, students are encouraged to write postcards to teachers and classmates communicating the reasons why they respect each other. The Respect Project has also positively reframed the 'National Day of Action against Bullying and Violence' as the 'Day of Respect' with the intention to focus on teaching and modelling respect as the desired behaviour rather than placing emphasis on the negative (bullying and violence).

The impact of the Respect Project is evident throughout the school community. Students have heard and internalised the messaging around the importance of respect, though engagement with the educational resources. This is observable through many students citing respect as an essential quality of a workplace following the projects' conception and presence in schools, demonstrating the impact of the project and its core messaging on students, schools and community relationships.

Community based initiatives

In 2017 the Respect Project was launched to the community. In recognition of the value and importance of the work, and their own shared experiences, numerous businesses and government sectors including health care, law enforcement and childcare expressed interest in involvement following the initial launch.

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The project is about ensuring educators, parents and the broader community engage in positive ways to allow our future generation to be productive, respectful and contributing members of society.

Principal

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Community Commitments

Respect is an essential aspect of community relationships. The Respect Project has established three agreed 'community commitments' in partnership with the community aimed at building a respectful society:

- Be respectful in all my interactions.
- Be a positive role model for the young people in our community.
- Be a productive, contributing member of the community.

To ensure ongoing community engagement with the project, the Respect Project holds community focused 'Respect Events' 5-6 times a year, as well as picnics, fundraising dinners, and breakfasts for businesses in the area with guest speakers focused on the theme of respect.

The Respect Project also encourages ongoing community support and engagement with the project through the following actions:

- Being a good role model.
- Promoting respect by using the 3 simple messages – listening ears, kind words, and gentle hands.
- Displaying the Respect Project signs and posters.
- Educating young people in schools through the education resources available.
- Becoming a sponsor.
- Hosting or sponsoring an event that promotes respect.

Providing support beyond the classroom

Schools are increasingly complex environments, where the role of teachers and school leaders may include providing support for students that extends well beyond the classroom. Often, to meet the educational needs of students, it is also necessary to be cognisant of the needs of the family. However, when schools do not have the time or resources to do this, relationships with parents and community members can break down, leading to an increase in challenging and disrespectful behaviour.

Following its launch in 2017, the Respect Project applied for and received funding from Schools Plus, a national charity that encourages strategic giving to high potential projects run by schools. This has enabled the

employment of a parent liaison to act as the conduit between school staff and parents across all 13 of the state schools involved in the project.

The team members' background as a social worker with expertise in disability has made a significant impact in supporting staff to manage challenging interactions with parents. As well as being able to put parents and families of children with disabilities in contact with a range of supports and resources, the parent liaison can assist parents with administrative and enrollment requirements, helping to embed parents and carers in their role in education, and establish enduring relationships with families. The presence of a staff member with the dedicated 'time to listen' and provide support has demonstrably improved the quality of interactions with parents, as well as leading to more positive outcomes from both parties.

Future work

The Respect Project acknowledges that it may take a generation to see meaningful change but asserts that the key to success is continuing to model respect in action at all levels of the community. The project plans to continue to focus on building awareness of the project itself and its brand base, further training and education, identifying fundraising opportunities and establishing a sustainable path of evolution.

Moving forward, the Respect Project hopes to continue to demonstrate that encouraging respectful behaviour is a community responsibility, not just a school responsibility, and that there is always more space to be involved, advocate for the project and develop a common language and understanding of respect at all levels of community.