

## Respecting Talmidim

The concept of respecting your talmidim may sound odd. Aren't talmidim supposed to respect their teacher? Yes, of course, talmidim must respect their teachers; but teachers must also respect their talmidim. This idea is stated explicitly in the Rambam (Hilchos Talmud Torah 5:12). The Rambam writes that just like a talmid is obligated to honor his teacher, so too a teacher must honor his talmidim. This powerful idea is the crux of effective education. Honor your talmidim. Give them respect and treat them with dignity. By treating your talmidim with respect, you fill them with a profound sense of self-worth. Practically, this is achieved in the following ways:

### Respect Your Talmid's Opinion

The most significant form of validation that you can give your talmidim is to show them that you value their opinion. As a teacher, it is your job to train your talmidim's minds and to expose them to new sources of information, but you will gain much if you also relate to them as intelligent and creative people. If they are making a point, even if it is mistaken, hear them out. If they are making a mistake, point out their error with respect and humility, and encourage them to reformulate their position correctly. Do not interrupt them and tell them that they are wrong. Take a moment or two to contemplate their opinion before answering. This shows them that you consider their opinion valuable and worthy of your attention.

### The Chazon Ish

A family in Yerushalayim has letters that the Chazon Ish wrote to his talmid, discussing various Torah thoughts. Reading the letters, it is remarkable to see the respect and dignity the Chazon Ish displayed when voicing his disagreement. When engaged in an argument, no matter where the other person's level of scholarship stands relative to your own, it is always wise to talk respectfully and with humility.

### Minimize Rules

As much as possible, allow your talmidim the freedom to

make their own choices. When a teacher fills his talmid's life with rules, they send the message that the talmid is powerless and isn't capable of controlling his own life. The more autonomy you give your talmidim, the more confident and capable they will become. Minimizing rules in the school or classroom can be difficult for teachers: giving talmidim independence can lead to problems, and it is easier to impose strict and unbending rules. But this authoritarian approach must be tempered. It is wise to walk a delicate balance between respect and caution. Obviously, a well-established structure is important to the success of any classroom, and a rebbe must lay down a few firm rules and expectations. These rules must then be enforced in a consistent manner with consequences that are made clear from the start and that are educationally appropriate. Yet rules should be enacted sparingly, and even when you are administering consequences, be genuine and sympathetic. This sends your talmidim the message that you respect them and consider them capable of proper behavior even without external consequences.

### Respect Your Talmid's Individuality

As schools grow and begin bursting at the seams with talmidim, educators can begin treating their talmidim as a collective block, creating 'molds' and expecting their talmidim to all conform to a single set of written and unwritten modes of thought and conduct. The reality is that every child is different, and it is deeply painful for a child to feel shoehorned into a mold that does not allow him to express his individuality. We are a very academically oriented society, and we want our talmidim to succeed in school and yeshiva. But every talmid has their unique strengths and weaknesses, and what comes naturally for one talmid may be very difficult for another. Children are hurt if they feel that they are being forced into a metaphorical box, and it is important that your talmidim do not feel forced to conform to a standard that does not fit their personality or temperament. Part of an educator's job is to find each of his talmidim's unique talents and abilities and to find a way to allow each talmid to express and nurture them.