A FREE RESOURCE FOR PARENTS OF MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLERS

The Dignity Project

It starts at home.

A parent's guide to raising better thinkers, building stronger connections, and creating a world where everyone feels like they matter.

7 short sections | **7 things to try tonight** | **10 questions worth getting lost in**

> **Dignity isn't a standard of perfect parenting. It's a way of understanding ourselves and the people around us.**

WILD FEELINGS

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Contents

First things first: This is not another parenting assignment. 3

01 **Your kid doesn't need another lecture about being nice** 4

02 **Your adolescent's brain is practically begging for this** 7

03 **Dignity is the foundation, not the reward** 9

04 **Three thinking skills worth practicing** 11

05 **First, make sure they know they matter** 13

06 **Make belonging an open-book test** 17

07 **The world we're building starts at home** 19

Philosopher Mode: Questions worth getting lost in 19

Keep exploring 22

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

First things first: This is not another parenting assignment.

You don't need to turn every disagreement into a lesson, every difficult feeling into a conversation, or every car ride into a philosophical symposium.

You're allowed to just be a parent.

You can be tired. You can get things wrong. You can disagree with your kid. You can occasionally decide that nobody in the family needs another discussion about why the dishwasher wasn't emptied.

This guide isn't about becoming a perfect parent or adding another set of things you're supposed to do.

It's about noticing the opportunities already hiding in the ordinary, occasionally ridiculous moments of raising an adolescent.

Sometimes that means listening instead of fixing. Sometimes it means getting curious about an opinion you don't share. Sometimes it means asking an interesting question and seeing where the conversation goes.

And sometimes it means doing absolutely nothing.

Dignity isn't a standard of perfect parenting. It's a way of understanding ourselves and the people around us.

You don't need to do everything in this guide. Each section includes one small idea you can try whenever the opportunity presents itself.

The goal isn't to get it right every time.

It's to help your kid know they matter, and to help them become someone who knows everyone else matters, too.

SECTION 01

Your kid doesn't need another lecture about being nice.

Imagine your middle schooler comes home furious because a teacher is being unfair, a friend is being a jerk, or somebody in their group chat has done something spectacularly stupid.

You can practically feel the parenting instincts kicking in.

You want to explain what happened. Offer some perspective. Maybe point out that there's probably another side to the story. And, depending on how the conversation is going, you might be tempted to deliver a particularly inspired speech about kindness, respect, or personal responsibility.

Here's a different idea.

What if you helped them think instead?

We spend a lot of time teaching young people what to do. Be kind. Make good choices. Treat people with respect. Stand up for what's right.

Those are worthwhile aspirations, but they don't necessarily teach someone how to navigate a situation where the right choice isn't obvious.

What happens when being loyal to a friend means keeping a secret that could hurt someone else? When following a rule feels unfair? When somebody does something harmful for reasons your kid can actually understand?

Those situations require more than knowing the right thing to say. They require the ability to consider different perspectives, recognize complexity, examine consequences, and make a judgment without having all the answers.

And dignity gives us a powerful framework for developing those abilities.

Why dignity?

Dr. Donna Hicks, a leading scholar of dignity and human conflict, defines dignity as the inherent worth and value of every human being.

It's not something we earn through good behavior, impressive accomplishments, or other people's approval. It's something we all possess simply because we're human.

That includes your kid. It includes you. And it includes the people your kid doesn't particularly like.

This is what makes dignity different from simply teaching kindness or respect.

Kindness is something we do. Respect is shaped by our experiences and relationships. But dignity is the underlying principle that says **every person matters, even when we disagree with them, dislike their behavior, or need to hold them accountable.**

And that's where things get interesting for parents.

Because adolescence is a period when young people are especially motivated to figure out who they are, where they belong, whether they matter, and what kind of influence they can have on the world around them.

Their growing independence, sensitivity to social relationships, and interest in fairness aren't developmental inconveniences we need to overcome. They're opportunities to help them develop a deeper understanding of themselves and other people.

Dignity works with those developmental motivations instead of treating them as problems to fix.

It gives us a way to take our kids' emerging identities and perspectives seriously while helping them recognize that everyone else is navigating their own complicated human experience, too.

Two things can be true at once

Here's what dignity allows us to hold together:

Your kid matters.

Their feelings, opinions, questions, experiences, and developing identity deserve to be taken seriously. They don't have to agree with you, perform well, or make good choices to earn their worth.

Other people matter, too.

Your kid's experiences aren't the only ones that count. Their choices have consequences, their assumptions can be challenged, and their understanding of a situation can change when they consider another perspective.

Neither truth cancels out the other.

You can listen to your child's frustration without agreeing that their teacher is wrong. You can acknowledge that they felt excluded without deciding their friends are terrible people. You can hold them accountable for hurting someone without making them feel that they're fundamentally bad.

This is the foundation for both a stronger relationship and better thinking.

When we treat our kids as people whose experiences matter, we give them opportunities to feel heard, valued, and secure in their worth. And when we invite them to extend that same recognition to other people, we create opportunities to practice cognitive empathy, critical thinking, and understanding complexity.

We're not asking them to abandon their own perspective. We're helping them develop the capacity to hold their perspective alongside someone else's.

The bigger picture

The world doesn't need more people who can recite the rules of kindness while dismissing anyone who disagrees with them.

It needs people who can think critically without dehumanizing others. People who can recognize unfairness without assuming every disagreement is an injustice. People who can take responsibility for harm without collapsing into shame or responding with blame.

And people who understand that someone else's worth doesn't depend on whether they share the same beliefs, experiences, or opinions.

These aren't skills we suddenly develop when we become adults. We can begin practicing them in the ordinary, occasionally ridiculous, frequently complicated moments of adolescence.

Dignity isn't about teaching adolescents to be agreeable. It's about helping them become people who can disagree without losing sight of anyone's humanity.

And it starts at home.

TRY THIS TONIGHT

Get curious instead of correcting

The next time your kid expresses an opinion you disagree with, resist the urge to immediately explain why they're wrong.

Try:

> "That's interesting. How did you come to that conclusion?"

Then listen to the answer.

You don't have to agree, and you don't have to abandon your own perspective. You're showing your kid that disagreement doesn't have to mean dismissal.

SECTION 02

Your adolescent's brain is practically begging for this.

2

Middle and high schoolers are doing some pretty important developmental work, even when it looks suspiciously like arguing with you about why they should be allowed to stay out later.

Three powerful motivations help explain a lot of what we're seeing.

AUTONOMY

"I want to decide for myself."

Your kid is developing an independent identity, which means they're going to question your decisions, challenge your reasoning, and experiment with ideas that aren't yours.

This can be deeply inconvenient when you're trying to get everyone out the door.

But learning to think independently requires opportunities to practice making judgments, explaining opinions, and sometimes discovering that an idea doesn't hold up as well as they thought.

Your opportunity: Take their reasoning seriously, even when the answer is still no.

BELONGING

"I want to matter to other people."

Friendships, group dynamics, social status, and being included take on enormous importance during adolescence.

That doesn't mean young people are shallow or hopelessly obsessed with what everyone thinks. Feeling recognized, valued, and connected is a fundamental human need, and social experiences become particularly meaningful during this stage of development.

Your opportunity: Help them understand the social world they're navigating without dismissing how much it matters to them.

PURPOSE

“I want to understand the world and have an impact on it.”

Adolescents increasingly ask big questions about fairness, identity, injustice, hypocrisy, and why people behave the way they do.

Sometimes these questions arrive as thoughtful philosophical observations. Other times they arrive as an extremely passionate argument about why your household rules make absolutely no sense.

Either way, they’re practicing the ability to examine ideas, recognize contradictions, and develop their own understanding of the world.

Your opportunity: Give them interesting questions to think about instead of supplying every answer.

The reframe

The goal isn’t to eliminate the questioning, intensity, or independence that comes with adolescence.

It’s to help young people use those emerging capacities to think more carefully about themselves, other people, and the impact they want to have.

TRY THIS TONIGHT

Ask for their expertise

Find something your kid cares about that you don’t fully understand.

Maybe it’s a musician, a game, a social trend, a sport, or an extremely elaborate explanation of why a particular fictional character is misunderstood.

Ask:

> “Can you explain why this is such a big deal?”

And let them be the expert.

You don’t have to make it educational. You’re giving them the experience of being someone whose interests, knowledge, and perspective are worth your attention.

SECTION 03

Dignity is the foundation, not the reward.

3

Here's the big idea behind The Dignity Project:

Every human being has inherent worth and value. No exceptions.

That's dignity.

And it's different from respect.

Respect, trust, admiration, and approval can change based on someone's choices and behavior. Dignity doesn't.

Your child can make a terrible decision and still matter. Someone can treat your child badly and still have dignity. You can disagree with your kid, set a boundary, or hold them accountable without making them feel that their worth is up for negotiation.

This distinction matters because it changes how we approach mistakes and conflict.

When children believe their worth depends on getting things right, being liked, or earning approval, mistakes can feel like threats to who they are.

When worth is understood as inherent, we have a different starting point for accountability. A child can examine a harmful choice without needing to conclude that they're a bad person.

And recognizing another person's dignity doesn't mean accepting their behavior.

You can lose trust in someone. You can end a friendship. You can insist on consequences and protect yourself from harm.

You don't have to like someone, agree with them, or forgive them to recognize that they matter.

What this sounds like at home

When your kid makes a mistake:

> "What you did hurt someone. Let's figure out what needs to happen next."

When someone treats your kid badly:

> "You don't have to keep being friends with them. And we can talk about what might have been going on without excusing what they did."

When you get something wrong:

> "I didn't handle that well. I was frustrated, but that's not an excuse for how I spoke to you."

When your kid challenges your decision:

> "I want to understand why you disagree. I'm willing to hear your reasoning, even if we don't end up changing the decision."

Dignity doesn't mean everybody gets their way.

It means everybody matters, including when things are difficult.

TRY THIS TONIGHT

Separate the person from the behavior

The next time something goes wrong, pay attention to how you talk about the mistake.

Instead of making the conversation about what kind of person your child is, focus on what happened and what needs to happen next.

Try:

> "I'm not okay with what happened, but we're going to figure out what to do next."

You can be firm about behavior without making someone's worth part of the conversation.

SECTION 04

Three thinking skills worth practicing

4

Dignity gives us a foundation of shared worth. But recognizing that everyone matters is only the beginning.

Young people also need opportunities to practice thinking about what that means when people disagree, make mistakes, hurt one another, or face complicated choices.

Here are three capacities worth developing.

1 · COGNITIVE EMPATHY

Can I understand why someone sees this differently?

Cognitive empathy is the ability to consider another person's perspective, even when their experience or interpretation differs from your own.

It doesn't require agreement, and it certainly doesn't require excusing harmful behavior.

It's about being curious enough to recognize that your version of events might not be the only one.

Try asking:

> "What do you think this situation looks like from their side?"

2 · PROSOCIAL CRITICAL THINKING

How do my choices affect other people?

This is the ability to examine our decisions in relation to the people around us.

What was I trying to accomplish? What actually happened? Who was affected? What responsibility do I have for the impact of my choices?

It's particularly important when our intentions were good but our actions caused harm.

Try asking:

> "What do you think the impact was, even if that wasn't what you meant?"

3 · TRANSCENDENT THINKING

What's the bigger picture?

Transcendent thinking invites us to look beyond the immediate details of an event and consider the broader forces shaping it.

Why might this keep happening? What experiences, social expectations, or systems influence people's choices? What could change?

It's the difference between simply deciding that someone is wrong and becoming curious about the conditions that contributed to the situation.

Try asking:

> "What do you think is making this problem bigger than just the people involved?"

Here's something else worth considering

When adolescents begin recognizing complexity in other people, they also have an opportunity to extend that understanding toward themselves.

Maybe being uncertain doesn't mean they're failing. Maybe having contradictory feelings doesn't make them weird. Maybe making a mistake doesn't mean they're fundamentally flawed.

Understanding that human beings are complicated can create room for a little more compassion, including toward ourselves.

Better thinking isn't about having better opinions. It's about learning to ask better questions.

TRY THIS TONIGHT

Go into Philosopher Mode

Bring up a question that doesn't have one obvious answer.

For example:

> "Is it ever okay to lie? What makes some lies more acceptable than others?"

Don't turn it into a quiz about honesty. Share your thinking, invite theirs, and see where the conversation goes.

The point isn't to agree. It's to enjoy thinking together.

SECTION 05

First, make sure they know they matter.

5

Before we help our kids become better thinkers, we have to make sure they know their thoughts, feelings, and experiences matter to us.

And sometimes that means resisting the nearly irresistible parental urge to DO SOMETHING.

Your middle schooler comes home furious about a teacher. Your high schooler is devastated about a friendship. Someone has done something unfair, ridiculous, or genuinely hurtful.

Within approximately four seconds, your brain has developed a plan. You've identified the problem, considered three possible solutions, and prepared a thoughtful explanation of what your child might be missing.

But your kid hasn't asked for any of that.

They're telling you about their world. And before they need your wisdom, they need to know you're interested in understanding it.

> **Listening isn't the thing we do before the real parenting begins. Listening is the parenting.**

When young people experience us as genuinely interested in what they have to say, we communicate something powerful: *Your experiences matter. Your perspective matters. You matter.*

And once they feel heard, there's often more room to get curious together.

Five small ways to start with dignity

1 Listen without building your response

When your kid starts talking, resist the urge to interrupt, correct the details, offer advice, or introduce another perspective.

Give them your attention. Let them finish. Ask questions because you're genuinely interested, not because you're steering them toward a conclusion.

Start with:

> "Tell me what happened."

Later, if they're ready:

> "Do you think there's anything about the situation we might not know yet?"

What you're practicing: *Acknowledgment first, then cognitive empathy.*

2 Take their experience seriously, even when you see it differently

Your kid might be furious about something that seems relatively minor to you. Or they might interpret an interaction in a way you think is completely wrong.

You don't have to agree with their interpretation to recognize that the experience matters to them.

Start with:

> "I can see why that really bothered you."

Later, if they're ready:

> "What do you think was going on for the other person?"

What you're practicing: *Understanding first, then perspective-taking.*

3 Resist the urge to fix it

When your child describes a problem, your brain may immediately start generating solutions. But sometimes they aren't asking you to solve anything. They just want someone who cares enough to listen.

And sometimes the most powerful thing you can do is let them discover that they're capable of figuring something out.

Start with:

> "That sounds really frustrating. Do you want me to just listen, or do you want help thinking it through?"

Later, if they want to work on it:

> "What do you think your options are?"

What you're practicing: *Recognition and independence first, then critical thinking.*

4 Make room for disagreement

When your kid challenges a rule or questions one of your decisions, it's easy to hear disrespect and respond by asserting authority.

But disagreement isn't automatically disrespect. Your child is developing their own perspective, and being willing to hear it doesn't mean surrendering your responsibility as the parent.

Start with:

> "I want to understand why you see it differently."

Later, if they're ready:

> "What do you think I'm considering that you might not be?"

What you're practicing: *Independence and understanding first, then reasoning about competing perspectives.*

5 Let their big feelings be big feelings

When your kid is angry, embarrassed, disappointed, or overwhelmed, you don't need to turn the moment into a lesson about emotional regulation, gratitude, or the bigger picture.

Sometimes things just suck.

And having a parent who can tolerate that without rushing to make it better is a pretty powerful experience.

Start with:

> "Ugh. That really sucks. I'm here."

Later, when the intensity has passed:

> "Do you want to talk about why you think this happened?"

What you're practicing: *Safety and acknowledgment first, then curiosity about the bigger picture.*

The part that matters most

You don't need to move into the second question every time.

Sometimes listening is enough. Sometimes your child needs a hug, a snack, a little space, or someone who can agree that the situation is objectively ridiculous.

And sometimes, after you've listened, they'll surprise you by beginning to consider another perspective all on their own.

The goal isn't to turn every conversation into a thinking exercise. It's to build a relationship where your kid knows their voice matters, and where thinking together becomes something you both enjoy.

That's how dignity becomes part of everyday life at home.

TRY THIS TONIGHT

Don't do anything

The next time your kid tells you about something frustrating, resist the urge to fix, reframe, correct, or introduce another perspective.

Just listen.

You can say:

> "Ugh. That really sucks. Tell me more."

And then stop talking.

You don't need to make the moment productive. Feeling understood is valuable all by itself.

SECTION 06

Make belonging an open-book test

6

Here's something I learned during my years as a middle school dean: When a kid is upset, asking them to explain exactly why they're upset can be surprisingly difficult.

Sometimes they don't know. Sometimes they're embarrassed. Sometimes they know something felt terrible but can't quite explain what happened.

So I started handing students a list.

Dr. Donna Hicks developed the ten Elements of Dignity to describe the ways we honor one another's inherent worth. They include things like Acknowledgment, Inclusion, Fairness, Independence, Recognition, and Understanding.

When students came to my office after a conflict, I'd give them the list and ask:

> "Which of these got hit the hardest?"

And suddenly, we had somewhere to start.

Instead of asking a kid to find the perfect words to explain why something hurt, I was giving them language for an experience they already understood.

The kid who felt awful after being left out at lunch could identify Inclusion. The student who felt humiliated after being corrected in front of everyone might recognize Safety or Acknowledgment.

We could stop arguing about whether someone was overreacting and start talking about what happened, what mattered, and what needed to change.

That's what I mean by making belonging an open-book test.

Nobody should have to guess what makes them feel like they matter, and nobody should have to invent the vocabulary for explaining when they don't.

A shared language changes the conversation

The Elements can be just as useful at home.

Think about the last time you got disproportionately irritated with your kid. Maybe you'd spent the entire afternoon doing things for your family, only to have someone complain that there was nothing to eat. Maybe your kid challenged a decision, and you felt your authority slipping away.

What made that moment so frustrating?

Sometimes our strongest reactions happen when something important to us feels threatened. Maybe you weren't feeling recognized. Maybe your independence felt challenged. Maybe you felt misunderstood.

And your kid has their own sensitive spots.

One adolescent might feel particularly hurt when a parent steps in before they've had a chance to try something independently. Another might feel dismissed when a parent offers advice before hearing the whole story.

Neither person needs to prove their reaction is justified before it deserves to be understood.

Having a shared vocabulary makes it easier to recognize what's happening without turning every disagreement into a judgment about someone's character.

And once everyone feels heard, the Elements offer another opportunity: **thinking about what matters to the other people involved.**

You can start with,

> "Which Element felt threatened for you?"

and, when your kid is ready, wonder together,

> "Do you think anyone else in this situation had an Element affected, too?"

That's how a tool for understanding ourselves can also become a tool for cognitive empathy, accountability, and better thinking.

TRY THIS TONIGHT

Find your Element

Grab the accompanying *Elements of Dignity and How to Practice* reference sheet.

First, identify the Element that tends to feel most threatened when you're upset. Notice how it might influence your reactions.

Then, at a relaxed moment, invite your kid to look at the list and ask:

> "Which of these makes the biggest difference in whether you feel like I really understand you?"

Follow up with:

> "What would honoring that look like to you?"

No need to fix anything or turn their answer into a lesson.

Just listen. You might learn something that changes your next disagreement.

elements of DIGNITY

WILD FEELINGS

ACCEPTANCE of IDENTITY

Treat people like they matter exactly as they are. That means accepting that things like someone's name, culture, race, gender, religion, class, disability, or the way they express themselves are a deep and important part of who they are, even if you don't fully understand them. You don't have to "get it" to understand it's important to them.

"You don't have to be just like me to treat me like I belong."

SAFETY

Create space where people feel safe to speak up and be themselves. People need to feel safe both physically and emotionally. That means no threats, no humiliation, no judgement, and no shaming, whether it's loud or quiet, direct or sneaky.

"I shouldn't have to shrink or pretend just to stay safe."

UNDER-STANDING

Ask questions instead of assuming. Take time to learn where someone's coming from before making judgments. Be curious, not just reactive.

"Don't decide what I meant. Ask me. Try to see where I'm coming from before deciding I'm wrong.

RECOGNITION

See and name what people bring to the table: their effort, talents, creativity, kindness, and ideas. Give credit where it's due, and don't act like someone's contributions are invisible.

"If I'm trying, growing, or showing up I need you to notice."

FAIRNESS

Use the same rules and expectations with everyone. Don't twist things to hold power over people, protect favorites, or get out of being accountable.

"Be fair, even when it's uncomfortable."

BENEFIT of the DOUBT

Start by assuming people have good intentions. If something feels off, slow down and ask before jumping to blame. Dignity means giving people a chance to explain, not putting the worst spin on everything they do.

"Assume I'm not out to ruin things. I probably have a reason, even if I can't say it perfectly."

INCLUSION

Make sure people feel like they belong, not just when it's convenient. Let them in, invite their voice, and show them they matter to the group.

"Let me in. Don't wait until it's easy or too late."

ACKNOW-LEDGEMENT

Listen when someone tells you how they feel or what they've been through. You don't have to fix it or agree, but honor their experience as real.

"Hear me. Don't brush it off or say it's not a big deal."

INDEPENDENCE

Let people make their own decisions and try things their own way, even if it's different from how you'd do it. Trust that others can think for themselves and learn through experience.

"Trust me to try. You don't have to control everything for it to go okay."

ACCOUNT-ABILITY

If you mess up, own it. Say what happened, apologize without making excuses, and do something to repair the harm. Dignity isn't about being perfect, it's about what you do next.

"If you hurt me, fix it. If I hurt someone, I'll try to fix it too."

Donna Hicks, 2008

How to Practice leading with DIGNITY

WILD FEELINGS

Avoid TAKING the BAIT

Don't let the bad behavior of others determine your own—Yes, it hurts when we are treated poorly. However, we don't get our real needs met by hurting others in return. We also give them more power if we lash out in response.

Stay OPEN to FEEDBACK

We often don't know what we don't know. We all have blind spots and make mistakes. We need to overcome our self-protective instincts to resist constructive criticism and consider feedback as a growth opportunity. We need to be able to look at ourselves from an outside perspective so that we can see ourselves as others see us.

Learn to SIT in DISCOMFORT

Don't let shame control your choices. Don't lie, cover up, deceive yourself. Tell the truth about what you have done, even when it's hard. Your worth doesn't change when you have made a mistake.

Practice BELONGING to YOURSELF

Don't let other's control your worth. Beware the desire for external recognition of your dignity in the form of approval and praise from others. You do not depend on others alone for validation of our worth, you are worthy no matter what.

Remember INTENT and IMPACT are different

Intent means the purpose or the goal. Impact means the effect on someone. What you intend to communicate is not always how something is received. We can acknowledge the impact without internalizing it as something we have to feel immense guilt about or something we have to defend. When we refuse to be open to impact we are telling others our comfort is more important than their reality, which often creates the seeds of conflict.

Take RESPONSI-BILITY

Embrace the discomfort. Admit that you made a mistake and apologize for hurting them. You can make a mistake without being a mistake. Learning to sit in discomfort is super important.

Try not to BLAME and SHAME

Get control of the urge to defend yourself by trying to make others look bad. Blaming and shaming may feel good in the moment, but it doesn't actually fix anything for you or others.

Stand FIRM in your WORTH

Don't allow someone to violate your dignity without saying something—stand up for yourself. Don't avoid confrontation. A violation is a signal something in the relationship needs to change.

Avoid INSECURE connection through GOSSIP

Don't connect with others through gossip. It's tempting, I know. Being critical and judgmental of others can feel like a bonding experience. However, it is not true connection. Share your experiences and feelings to create genuine intimacy.

Beware of FALSE SECURITY

Don't let your need for connection compromise your dignity—if we remain in a relationship where our dignity is routinely violated, our need for connection has outweighed our need to maintain our dignity.I know it feels scary, but leaving relationships where you are not treated well or don't feel secure is essential for your longterm wellbeing.

Donna Hicks, 2008

SECTION 07

The world we're building starts at home

7

We can't tell our kids what kind of world they'll inherit, and we certainly can't prepare them for every complicated situation they'll encounter.

But we can give them something incredibly valuable: the experience of knowing they matter and the opportunity to develop the thinking skills they'll need to recognize that other people matter, too.

Every time we take their ideas seriously, we reinforce that their voice has value. When we help them consider another perspective, we give them practice recognizing someone else's humanity. When we hold them accountable without humiliating them, we show them that mistakes and inherent worth can coexist.

These are small moments, but they're also opportunities to practice the skills that shape how people participate in friendships, families, communities, and the larger world.

And some of the most valuable moments happen when nobody is upset, nobody has made a mistake, and there's absolutely nothing that needs fixing.

Sometimes we can just enjoy thinking together.

Philosopher Mode: Questions worth getting lost in



These questions are inspired by *Transcendent Thinking Questions*.

You can bring one up on a drive, over dinner, or while you're doing something together. Pick the ones that interest you, and answer them yourself, too.

There's no need to get through the whole list. And please don't turn this into a surprise oral exam.

1. **What does it mean to be successful?**

   Who gets to decide what success looks like? Can someone be successful even if other people don't think so?

2. **Is it ever okay to lie?**

   What makes some lies more acceptable than others? Does the reason someone lies change how we judge it?

3 **If you were in charge of the education system, what would you change and why?**

Who benefits from the way schools work now? Whose needs might be getting overlooked?

4 **What do you think the opposite of loneliness is?**

Is it simply being around people, or is it something more? Can someone feel lonely even when they're surrounded by friends?

5 **If you could understand one person's perspective perfectly for a day, whose would you choose?**

What would you hope to learn? Could understanding someone better change how you feel about them?

6 **What do you think makes life meaningful?**

Is it the same for everyone? Can your answer change as you get older?

7 **If you could be remembered for one thing after you're gone, what would you want it to be?**

Why does that particular thing matter to you?

8 **Is it possible to do the right thing and still hurt someone?**

What should happen when our good intentions have consequences we didn't expect?

9 **Can you strongly disagree with someone and still recognize their humanity?**

What does that actually look like when the disagreement is about something important?

10 **What animal do you think you could realistically beat in a fight, one-on-one, combat style?**

Please defend your answer with evidence.

> *Because sometimes the best way to get your kid thinking about the human condition is to start with an absolutely ridiculous argument about whether they could defeat a goose.*

The bigger possibility

The goal isn't to raise children who always agree with us or always make the right decision.

It's to help them become people who can think independently, challenge ideas, recognize complexity, take responsibility for their choices, and disagree without losing sight of anyone's humanity.

That begins with the experience of knowing their own humanity is never in question.

A kid who feels heard at home has an opportunity to learn what it means to truly hear someone else. A kid whose mistakes are met with accountability rather than humiliation gets to experience how responsibility and inherent worth can coexist. A kid who is allowed to disagree with a parent without losing their connection gets to practice something the world desperately needs: holding a different perspective without treating another person as less worthy.

We won’t get every interaction right. Neither will our kids.

But we can keep practicing.

Because a world where everyone feels like they matter begins with people who know they matter, and who are willing to recognize that everyone else does, too.

WHAT'S NEXT

Keep exploring

REFERENCE SHEETS

The Elements of Dignity and How to Practice

Use the accompanying reference sheets, based on Dr. Donna Hicks's dignity model, as a shared vocabulary for understanding what helps people feel valued, safe, recognized, and included.

You don't need to memorize every Element or introduce them all at once. Choose one that resonates with your family and experiment with what it looks like in everyday interactions.

ABOUT

About The Dignity Project

The Dignity Project is a collection of free educational resources created to help young people develop a deeper understanding of themselves, other people, and the world through the lens of dignity.

The project includes a ten-session high school curriculum for educators and this parent field guide for families.

Created by Megan Saxelby, M.Ed., founder of Wild Feelings and U.S. Country Chair for Global Dignity, drawing on the work of Dr. Donna Hicks and research on adolescent development, cognitive empathy, prosocial motivation, and transcendent thinking.



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Building a better world starts at the kitchen table.

WILD FEELINGS

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