

Elements of Dignity

Acceptance of Identity- approach people as neither inferior nor superior to you; give others the freedom to express their authentic selves without fear of being negatively judged; interact without prejudice or bias, accepting how race, religion, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, disability, etc. are at the core of their identities. Assume they have integrity

Recognition- Validate others for their talents, hard work, thoughtfulness, and help; be generous with praise; give credit to others for their contributions, ideas, and experience

Acknowledgment- Give people your full attention by listening, hearing, validating and responding to their concerns and what they have been through

Inclusion- Make others feel that they belong at all levels of relationship (family, community, organization, nation)

Safety- Put people at ease at two levels: physically, where they feel free of bodily harm; and psychologically, where they feel free of concern about being shamed or humiliated, that they feel free to speak without fear of retribution

Fairness- Treat people justly, with equality, and in an evenhanded way, according to agreed upon laws and rules

Independence- Empower people to act on their own behalf so that they feel in control of their lives and experience a sense of hope and possibility

Understanding- Believe that what others think matters; give them the chance to explain their perspectives, express their point of view; actively listen in order to understand them

Benefit of the Doubt- Treat people as trustworthy; start with the premise that others have good motives and are acting with integrity

Accountability- Take responsibility for your actions; if you have violated the dignity of another, apologize; make a commitment to change hurtful behaviors

Temptations to Violate Dignity

Don't take the Bait: Don't let the bad behavior of others determine your own-restraint is the better part of dignity. Don't justify returning the harm when someone has harmed you. Do *not* do unto others as they do unto you

Don't get caught in the temptation to save face- don't lie, cover up, deceive yourself. Tell the truth about what you have done.

Don't shirk responsibility-Admit that you made a mistake and apologize for hurting them

Don't be lured by false dignity-Beware the desire for external recognition of your dignity in the form of approval and praise. If we depend on others alone for validation of our worth we are seeking false dignity. Our dignity comes from within

Don't be lured by false security. Don't let you 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

Don't just sit there and take it! 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 relationships needs to change

Don't assume you are the innocent victim in a troubled relationship: open yourself up to the idea that you might be contributing to the problem-You may not be aware of it. We need to be able to look at ourselves from an outside perspective so that we can see ourselves as others see us

Don't resist feedback from others. We often don't know what we don't know-We all have blind spots (ways that we unconsciously behave that lack recognition of dignity) We need to overcome our self-protective instincts to resist constructive criticism and consider feedback as a growth opportunity

Don't blame and shame others to deflect your guilt-Get control of the urge to defend yourself by trying to make others look bad

Don't be lured by false intimacy. Beware the tendency to connect with others by gossiping about someone else- Being critical and judgmental about others when they are not present can feel like a bonding experience and make for engaging conversation but it is harmful. If you want to create intimacy with others, speak the truth about yourself- about what is really happening in your inner world- and invite others to do the same