

Parenting Pointers

Parenting Tips on: Teaching Children Good Manners!

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Of all the social skills we teach our children, politeness may reap the greatest rewards! Learning and using manners is easy and results in lots of positive recognition and praise from adults. Parents can begin teaching children manners at a very young age by using the simple techniques of modeling, prompting, repetition and consistency.

Children can learn to say "please" and "thank you" as soon as they begin to talk. Teach more complex tasks as skills are mastered. For instance, a young child can learn to say "hello" and "goodbye" on the phone. As they get older, children can learn to ask the caller to, "Please wait, while I get my dad." Older children can be asked and expected to take written messages.

Try a variety of techniques when teaching manners. For example, show your young child how to put the napkin in his lap by doing it for him. Model behavior by putting your own napkin in your lap. Try giving one-word reminders, such as "napkin", and attempt non-verbal cues by simply pointing to the napkin.

Children respond to positive instruction. Instead of saying "Don't chew with your mouth open", try, "Please close your mouth while chewing." Sometimes the simple exchange of a positive word for a negative command can make the biggest difference.

Parents should set household standards and keep them consistent. For example: Everyone is expected to remove hats at the table. Use polite and positive reminders: "Wash you hands before coming to the table, please." Escort disruptive children from the table firmly but graciously. "I can't allow you to eat with your hands, but you may return to the table when you are ready to use your fork."

Model the manners you insist on and point out to children opportunities for appropriate behavior. "Carol sent me some roses when Grandpa died. It's polite for me to write Carol a thank-you note." Conversely, if you talk when your mouth is full of food, your children are likely to do the same. Voice your expectations ahead of time, especially for upcoming events. If you will be dining at a friend's home and they are serving food your child does not like, instruct her how to respond. Example: "I expect you to graciously pass the plate and say, No thank you, I don't

care for brussel sprouts." Likewise, praise children when you witness them using words that express consideration. Example: "I was proud of the way you thanked Mrs. Jones for taking you to the movie. That was thoughtful and polite."

Only through repetition can your children develop the habits and confidence to interact effectively with people. Provide opportunities for them to practice their skills. Let them answer the phone, order their own food at restaurants, and write their own thank-you notes. Don't expect perfection. If your child is tired after a long day, lighten up on the manners. If courtesy is something children experience through daily, consistent modeling and gentle reminders, it will more easily become their routine. Research shows that children live up to parental expectations. Raise the bar and you will find children will rise to it; lower it and they will achieve that standard too.

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