



Teaching Manners

Manners Matter

Of all the social skills, politeness may reap the greatest rewards in *effort vs payoff*. Learning and using manners are easy, and well-behaved children receive lots of positive recognition and praise from adults. Teaching manners involves four basic techniques: modeling, prompting, repetition, and consistency.

The Basics

Instruct in stages

Begin with the fundamental “please” and “thank-you” as soon as your children begin to talk. As soon as one task is mastered, move on to the more complex.

Example: Telephone etiquette:

- ✓ Start with teaching them to say “hello” and “good-bye.”
- ✓ When they are old enough, teach them to ask the caller to, “Please wait, while I get my dad.”
- ✓ Lastly, train older children to take messages.

Try a variety of techniques

1. Instruct your child in how to put the napkin in his lap by doing it for him. 2. Try giving one-word reminder cues, such as “napkin.” 3. Attempt non-verbal cues by just pointing to the napkin.

Be positive

Children react negatively to the word *don't*, but are challenged by the word *do*. Instead of saying, “Don’t chew with your mouth open,” try “Do keep your lips together while chewing.”

Be consistent

Set “household standards” and keep them consistent. *Example:* Family members must remove ball caps at the table or wash hands before being seated. Use polite reminders. “Wash your hands before being seated, please.” Escort disruptive children from the table graciously. “I can’t allow you to eat with your hands, but you may return to the table when you’re ready to use your fork.”



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Model the manners you insist on

Point out occasions when you're modeling appropriate behavior. "Carol sent me some roses when Grandpa died. It's polite for me to write this 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

Plan ahead for upcoming events and discuss your expectations ahead of time. If you'll be dining at someone's house and they are serving food your child doesn't like, instruct him in how to respond. *Example:* "I expect you to graciously pass the plate and say, No thank-you I don't care for brussel sprouts."

Compliment your children

Praise children when they spontaneously use words that express consideration. *Example:* "I heard you thank Mrs. Ellis for taking you to the movie. That was thoughtful and polite."

Don't expect perfection

If your children are tired after a long day, lighten up on the manners. There is always tomorrow.

Repetition is key

Only through repetition can 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.

If courtesy is something children live with through daily, consistent modeling and gentle reminders, it will more easily become their routine. Research shows that high parental expectations (expressed in positive ways) result in children living up to those expectations. Raise the bar and you'll find children will rise to it; lower it and they'll achieve that standard too.

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