



The Family Place Parent Child Center

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COURTEOUS CHILDREN

How many times have you telephoned a person at their home, only to have their adorable three-year old pick up, mumble unintelligibly, and wander away, leaving you hanging? I have. It's terribly frustrating. I have also called homes and had children answer the phone, "Hello, this is the Smiths. This is Jane speaking." What a pleasant experience! Not even adults answer the phone that way. Being treated with civility actually brightens my day. We all like to be treated in a kind, considerate manner.

I'm all for adorable kids (having three notoriously adorable sons, myself), but not when they interfere with my ability to speak with an adult to conduct my adult business.

One woman I know insists that manners are a thing of the past; there are many more important issues in the world that need to be addressed. According to her, teaching a child to chew with his mouth closed, to properly greet others, and...answer the telephone are not among the priorities parents and caregivers need to address. I agree. There is no comparison between fighting the war on poverty, for example, and teaching a child not to interrupt.

However, courtesy counts. Adults who never learned their manners, or have forgotten due to disuse, are flocking to seminars on "Writing a Thank You" and "Hosting a Business Meeting." There are 1,997 business titles on amazon.com under the search "manners and etiquette." There are another 95 under Parenting, and 331 listed under reference books. Clearly adult readers (the ones who buy the books and drive the market) have an interest in learning how behave. The rules of courtesy have changed, too. The old-fashioned idea of 'when to use a fish fork' have been replaced with 'when to silence your cell phone.' We now need to consider email etiquette, internet café manners, and chat room protocol. Civility, regardless of the content, binds groups, creating and maintaining cohesive social groups that can then function for the greater good.

Children, as members of our social group, need to learn to function in our group, to become socialized. How, then, does a parent or caregiver begin to teach a child manners? The very first, and perhaps most important, step is to model the behavior that should be copied. Modeling is consistently performing the behavior you want your child to emulate. Do you honk or shout at other drivers? Are you rude to others in line at the store? Maybe you aren't outwardly rude, but are you outwardly courteous? Do you wave other drivers on at intersections? Do you politely smile at others at the store? Are you modeling considerate and respectful behavior? Spend some time paying attention to your own behavior to determine what message you are sending your child. Often the behaviors that irritate us the most in our children are behaviors that they have learned from us, whether we meant to teach those behaviors or not.

The second step is to know your child's stage of development well enough to know what to expect and what he is capable of. "Please" and "Thank you" can be expected almost as soon as a child is able to speak, although what they mean won't have meaning yet. Children under three should be encouraged to use utensils at the table, but probably won't be able to eat an entire meal without using fingers. Likewise, three is a good age to begin to encourage chewing with a closed mouth and talking with an empty mouth. Expect to give reminders for another 1-2 years. It may be another year, or until age 4, before a child is ready to wait until everyone is seated before eating.



Curiosity killed the cat, not courtesy!

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What to Expect...(excerpted from [Teaching Your Children Manners](#))

Table Manners from ages 3-5: use a fork and spoon but will still spill, need to be reminded about talking with his mouth full, will need to be prompted to say excuse me, is ready for restaurants.

Appropriate Language from ages 1-2: will say “thank you, but will forget to say “sorry.”

Appropriate Language from ages 3-5: will say “sorry,” “please,” “thank you,” and “excuse me,” but won’t actually mean it, will need to be reminded to use an “indoor voice,” will find bathroom humor hilarious and will need reminders of when it is appropriate to use (for example, in the bathroom).

Meeting and Greeting from ages 1-2: may tolerate being greeted by adults and shaking hands, will gain a sense of self when being introduced to others.

Meeting and Greeting from ages 3-5: will say “hello” on own, will not shake hands until age 8 or 10 but can understand having this modeled, will have inconsistent eye contact during conversations but should be encouraged to do so.

Telephone Manners from ages 1-2: will be curious about the phone and will likely play with a toy phone.

Telephone Manners from ages 3-5: May try to answer phone and use monosyllabic words like “yes” and “no”, has no concept of dialing, will not be able to take messages. At 5 may be able to answer then pass the phone to an adult. - *Marla Ianello works at The Family Place and has three sons who occasionally use good manners.*

Taking it a Step Further, more in depth information may be found...

[Teaching Your Children Good Manners](#), Berkenkamp and Atkins; 2001

[How to Raise a Gentleman \(Lady\)](#), West; 2001

[Social Graces](#), Plutz and Wales; 1999

iTunes has 16 free podcasts on parenting

Podcast.net has 343 mp3 videos on manners

“Civility” a series on NHPR www.nhpr.org/node/9518 for topics and air dates



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