

## **CHILD'S PLAY!**

by Carolann Philips

At a recent gathering an eager parent requested that I write a few tips on teaching children etiquette and good manners. We all know that parents and teachers are constantly bombarded with rudeness; but all too often, children and students aren't even aware that they are being rude. Children learn by example and pay more attention than we give them credit for. It is therefore absolutely important for us as adults to be a good example for our children.

The first step is to explain to children what exactly practicing etiquette means. We show who we are by how we behave and etiquette is about showing respect for oneself as well as others. Good manners and etiquette is something that must be practiced on a constant basis and used at all times. The easiest and fastest way to show good manners is to say 'please', 'thank you', 'excuse me' and 'I'm sorry'. Children could be taught these simple words from the age of three! And the best way to teach it to them is to constantly use it ourselves!

An ideal place to teach older children the basic values of consideration, kindness and courtesy is at the dining table! Family dining time is an ideal situation for the practice of many life skills: communication skills, body language, consideration and courtesy. Begin positive conversations at the table such as enquiring about your child's day at school or future career plans. Explain that small mouthfuls of food must be taken so it can be

chewed and swallowed quickly in order to respond to questions. In this way children learn early about how to hold proper table conversations as adults thereby avoiding awkward situations with colleagues or associates. Teach a child to sit upright in a chair, never leaning backward or forward. Elbows should not be allowed to touch the table. The reason for this is that it could cause spillage and inconvenience others. Proper posture at the table also creates a good impression. When eating, teach the child to bring the spoon to her mouth rather than bringing her face close to the plate. This way, valuable lessons in body language are learnt. Respect may be taught during the meal by encouraging children to practice good manners such as not taking the last morsel without asking others first, by not interrupting others and by not leaving the table while others are still eating. Chewing with the mouth open or making loud noises can be uncomfortable for others to see or hear. This teaches children to be considerate towards others. Waiting for everyone before beginning to eat and waiting for the food to come around are table manners that teach patience and self restraint.

Children should be taught how to take care of themselves on a daily basis. There is no use for good manners if we have dirty fingernails, bad breath or stinky socks. Older children should be taught that clothes reflect who they are and what they think of themselves. Clean clothing says "I'm neat"; weird, outlandish clothing says "I want attention" and an untidy, disheveled look says, "I don't care about myself." Because people make impressions within the first few minutes, what they wear can either help or hurt them. They could win or lose friends, respect and even opportunities to grow and shine.

The reason for teaching children etiquette is to build their self esteem and confidence. Teaching children good manners and enjoying our time with them should not be mutually exclusively activities. When correcting a child, do so without accusing, berating or talking down. Reinforce good behavior by showing appreciation and if mistakes happen say that life isn't perfect and neither are we! Teaching children etiquette helps them grow up to be well mannered and socially savvy adults – typically making them successful in life!

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