

TEACHING MANNERS TO CHILDREN

Pauline Jackson, Ed.S.
Diana L. Makarsky-Hixson, M.S.
School Psychologists
Clay County District School

This article's topic is on teaching manners to children. This article will give suggestions on how to teach specific skills. Learning good manners takes time, and most children will need help occasionally. Focus on one or two particular skills at a time. Developing manners will increase children's happiness and satisfaction in their relationships with others. With all the talk of young people not showing any respect to adults these days, using good manners is way of expressing respect for the feelings and the needs of other people. The following suggestions for teaching manners are offered for consideration:

Listening is a good skill to learn that will help children in every setting. Remind young people to think about what they are hearing. Children can be encouraged to say yes, nod their head to show they are listening, or ask relevant questions that do not change the subject.

It is important to help children learn how to introduce themselves. First, children need to decide when it could be a good time to introduce themselves. It should be discussed with the child to choose a good time for the introduction, such as when the person is not busy doing something, talking to someone else, etc. Then, have the child walk up to the person within an appropriate social distance. Ways to introduce himself or herself could be discussed. For example, "Hello, my name is _____." The child should be instructed to wait to see if the person responds with their own name. If they do not, then ways to ask for the person's name could be offered such as, "What is your name?" It is also important to teach your child how to introduce others, such as family members or friends, to someone they know. When calling a friend on the telephone, the child should remember to introduce himself or herself and say, "May I speak with Johnny?"

Children may need assistance in learning how to start a conversation with someone they do not know. Good openers are they may ask, "What grade are you in?" "Do you like to skate board?" The first thing they need to do is find something to talk about. They need to decide if it is an appropriate time for conversation, so they do not bother others around them who are trying to work, etc. It would be good to choose a time and a place that is appropriate for conversation. Children should be instructed to begin their conversation in a friendly way, such as by smiling and allowing the other person an opportunity to talk back to them. Children should look to see if the person they are talking to appears interested in talking with them. Next, children may need assistance in learning how to end a conversation appropriately. Children need to decide the reason why they are ending the conversation. Perhaps they need to go somewhere or there is something else they need to do at that time. Parents could give their children examples of things to say, such as, "I really need to go now, but I look forward to talking to you tomorrow, etc."

Next, children need to learn to wait until the other person has finished speaking. Parents may want to consider talking with their children about the importance of not interrupting other people who are speaking to someone else and when it is an appropriate time to finish the conversation. Children can be reminded

to end their conversation in a friendly way. Parents may discuss how body language and nonverbal communication, such as smiling and using a typical tone of voice, can help to show their friendliness.

Children should be reminded to be polite by saying “please” when making requests and “thank you” when they want to thank someone who did something for them. Don’t demand that a child say “Please” should they forget their manners. Thanking someone should be sincere. Children should be encouraged to thank people for extra assistance, favors, or compliments, etc. It may be necessary to teach some children how to say thank you and to state why they are thanking the person, such as appreciating their help or compliment, etc.

Remember that children learn from modeling manners their parents’ display. Treat children with respect, and they will learn to respect others. Talk kindly to your children, and they learn how to talk kindly to others. It is also very helpful to talk to children regarding how to respond in certain situations to better prepare them for when these situations arise.

Children should be encouraged to apologize when they are sorry for something they did. Apologies should be sincere. If they are not comfortable apologizing face to face, they could write an apology note. Good judgement should be used by the parent as to when an apology is appropriate.

Parents should teach their children to take an interest in other people. This includes asking people to talk about what they are interested in and commenting on the things that they do well. Teach children how to be considerate of other people in public places, such as doctor’s offices, grocery stores, restaurants, movie theaters, libraries, etc.

Children that show good manners when visiting others tend to get invited back. Children need to be taught that every household has its own set of rules, and they need to abide by the parent’s rules of the friend they are visiting. When in someone else’s home, children should ask permission before opening, taking, or using things. If they are offered foods or beverages that they do not like, they should say “No thank you” rather than making a negative comment. Children should be taught to thank the host or hostess for their hospitality. In stores, teach your child not to grab things off of the shelves.

Some final thoughts on teaching manners to children are:

-) Rehearse appropriate manners with your child well before an anticipated social event.
-) Emphasize the right thing to do and compliment your children when they exhibit good manners than criticizing your children for using poor manners.
-) Be understanding if your child uses poor manners in public and speak with them when you get home. Casually explain what they could do differently if the situation occurs again.
-) Focus on one or two points at a time.
-) Be patient! As with any skill being taught, there will be mistakes along the way. Learning is a trial

and error process. We all learn from our mistakes!

Resources: Skill-Streaming the Elementary School Child A Guide for Teaching Prosocial Skills, by Ellen McGinnis & Arnold P. Goldsten with Robert P. Sprafkin & N. Jane Gershaw, Research Press Company, 1984. "Well, Excuse Me!" by Lilian G. Katz, ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Children's Research Center. "Developing Social Skills," National Network for Child Care - NNCC, Patten, P. (1992).