

Quotes

Good manners will open more doors than the best education cannot.

– Judge Clarence Thomas

Manners are a sensitive awareness of the feelings of others.

If you have that awareness, you have good manners, no matter what fork you use.

– Emily Post

Notes

Teaching children good manners can be a very long-term, frustrating task. No matter how many times we remind them of proper rules of etiquette, they have a way of embarrassing us at our favorite local restaurant. Parents have been fighting these “good manners” battles for years. The great philosopher Socrates (469-399 B.C.) gave us a glimpse of the manners issue centuries ago when he wrote, “The children now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority, they show disrespect to their elders. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and are tyrants over their teachers.”

As we develop the whole child, we have to focus our attention on their academics, their health, nutrition, spirituality, and moral development. The moral development part deals with helping the children develop positive character traits such as having good manners. Let’s explore a few strategies that will get children headed in the right direction!

Recommended Resources

- 180 Days of Manners
- How Rude!



Strategies

1. As you begin to “teach” good manners, keep the child’s age in mind. He may not be developmentally ready to do certain tasks. Always remember this clever poem written by R. L. Stevenson:

*A child should always say what's true
And speak when he is spoken to,
And behave mannerly at the table;
At least as far as he is able.*

2. As adults we must model good manners when around children. They are watching us!
3. Families should schedule at least one meal a day together where children can learn basic rules such as taking turns talking, not interrupting, saying please and thank you, and helping clean up after everyone is finished eating.
4. Be consistent! Don’t laugh at Billy’s burping one day and then reprimand him the next.
5. When a child is not using proper manners, ask, “What are you doing?” This places responsibility back on the child to examine and evaluate his actions.
6. Let children know that when they use bad manners, others may not think they are very intelligent.
7. Role playing can be a very effective tool. Have children pretend that they are at a restaurant and practice their skills.
8. Before taking children to the movies, bowling, church, or other public places, review proper use of manners. For instance, if going to the movies, they need to be reminded to not talk during the show.
9. Have the children watch a television show and point out the poor manners of the actors.
10. Teachers can schedule circle meetings where students openly discuss the proper use of manners.
11. Try using the “Snap & Strike” tactic. When a child is not using proper manners, look at the child and snap your fingers to get his attention. Once he looks at you, put up one finger. That means, “Strike one!” If he does it again, snap your fingers and put up two fingers, “Strike two!” If you get to strike three, there needs to be a consequence.
12. If a child is misbehaving at a restaurant or grocery store, call a timeout and take her outside or to the car to review rules, and then return to let her try again.
13. Let children know that good manners and good sportsmanship go hand-in-hand. They should follow rules, respect the umpire, and shake hands with their opponents after the game.
14. After teachers have completed a unit on manners and politeness, they can try this follow-up activity. The teachers can tell their students that every time they get compliments on how polite their classes are, the classes get a point. So many points earn special privileges/ rewards. Parents can use a version of this as well. For example, Mrs. Smith tells her children, “Anytime someone comments positively about your manners, I’ll put a sticker on the chart. Ten stickers will earn you a special privilege.”
15. Let children know that the more they prove to you that they have acquired good manners, the more places you’ll take them.
16. Adolescents need to be taught “cell phone use” manners.
17. Also, with adolescents we need to remind them of a term called, “code switching.” Code switching involves changing one’s behavior as they move from one arena or setting to another. Holly needs to understand that how she talks and interacts with her friends at the mall will be different than how she talks and interacts with her friends at church.
18. If you are focusing much time and energy teaching manners to your children and you are having guests for dinner, let the guests know that the children are in “training” and you need their cooperation. You may have to tell Uncle Buck not to burp at the table.
19. Be specific at times. Don’t get in the habit of saying, “Mind your manners!” Tell the child exactly what you mean. “Cory, don’t forget to sit up straight and tell Mrs. Hankins ‘thank you’ when we leave.”
20. Tell your children you expect them to use good manners no matter where they are.