

Four Tricks for Teaching Manners to Young Children

Most parents would agree that teaching their children to have good manners is an essential part of a good upbringing. As Princess Marie-Chantal of Greece writes in her new book [*Manners Begin at Breakfast: Modern Etiquette for Families*](#), “We all want our children to go out into the world being thoughtful toward others – to grow up into respectful individuals.”

Parents may differ in their standards. Some parents focus primarily on teaching their children to say “please” and “thank you.” Others emphasize politely greeting strangers. Some parents make table manners their top priority. But no matter how parents define “good manners,” they are likely to make teaching manners to their children a top priority.

But how do you get young children to act politely? In my experience, simply correcting my children when they mess up isn’t very helpful. Here are four tips that have yielded good results in my family:

1. Prepare Children in Advance

Children are far more likely to practice good manners if you clearly explain in advance what you expect from them. For example, if we are going to see Mrs. Smith, I will sit down with my kids ahead of time and tell them, “We are going to Mrs. Smith’s house. When we arrive, you should shake her hand and say ‘Hello Mrs. Smith. My name is David.’” I might even act this out with them. Otherwise, when we arrive, they are likely to get shy and refuse to introduce themselves.

2. Set a Good Example at All Times

Every parent already knows they need to be a role model for their child, but it bears repeating in the context of manners. If I have told my children to act a certain way, I had better be sure I act that way myself. Family life can be very casual. I could ask my husband for something without saying “please” and he won’t find that rude. But I still do my best to be polite and use my manners around the house. Children are always watching.

3. Give Positive Feedback

Positive reinforcement is nearly always a great childrearing tactic and particularly so when it comes to teaching manners. I do my best stay alert to when my kids are being polite and then I praise them for it. This incentivizes them to keep up the good work. When they mess up, I will usually either briefly point it out to them or just let it slide depending on the context.

4. Appeal to Their Role Models

Outside authorities are also a good way to teach manners, as their influence can often make more of an impression than mom’s and dad’s continual reminders. My daughter is five years old and loves princesses. If my daughter says “yuck” about the food on the table I could talk about a beautiful princess who lives in a palace. The princess would never say “yuck” about her dinner.

Teaching manners is a marathon rather than a sprint and it continues throughout childhood. Parents shouldn’t get upset if they fail to see progress for a while. Keep teaching consistently and eventually kids will get the hang of it. What are some techniques you have successfully employed to teach good manners to your children?

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