



Parenting Tips

LEARNING GOOD MANNERS BY EXAMPLE

It's a familiar scene. A friend or relative gives a present to a small child. The parent says "Say thank you." "Thank you," the child repeats. But is the child really learning to express sincere gratitude? Children learn more from example and encouragement than from being told what to do.

Good manners should be a part of life, not something we put on for company, or something we expect from children but not ourselves. Decide the courtesies you wish your children to display and then teach by demonstrating them.

Remember to reinforce children's good behavior with compliments. At least once a day, when the child has said 'please' or shown some other polite consideration, hug the child and show how pleased you are. This kind of recognition makes a strong impression on children and will make them feel more positive about themselves and the behaviors they are learning.

Parents should be careful about correcting bad manners and negative behavior. Children should be corrected without being ridiculed or suppressed. When a child does something upsetting, discuss how you feel about such behavior. A parent might say, "That noise hurts my head. Please keep your dish on the table so I can hear what everyone is saying." Children, by their very youth and inexperience, may not be aware that making excessive noise at the table bothers other people. They may need to have such behavior pointed out to them before they can change it.

Children should also be held responsible for their behavior. A child who has tipped over a glass of milk should be handed a rag and told, "Please wipe up the milk. I'll help over here and you do the puddle near you." Learning such responsibility is an important foundation for later good manners and concern for other people's time and feelings.

Children have upsets and problems just like adults. Parents can expect even the best-behaved children to relapse occasionally. Then it is important for parents to deal with the real issue at hand, which may be a problem in school or with a friend, or an illness coming on, rather than the issue of good manners.

Learning acceptable and polite behavior is a long process for children; it is part of the longer process of growing up.

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