

THE CHILD HEALTH CONNECTION, INC.

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MINDING YOUR MANNERS

Teaching your child manners is one of the most basic yet most important gifts you can give to your child. Good manners are a foundation for your child's success in navigating their world. Parents can and should begin teaching manners by example as early as birth. While our children might do as we say, they are much more likely to do as we do! Manners, like bedtime and brushing teeth, should be consistently reinforced until they become routine. Manners must be taught. They do not come naturally, and it takes time to form a habit, so repeat and encourage, over and over and over again!

How to give your child the gift of manners:

Birth to One Year:

- Speak softly and in a friendly tone of voice with babies. Talk with them often and allow them a chance to talk (babble) back. Your example of give and take will guide them as they learn to speak.
- Gently direct babies on nice touches with parents, siblings, and pets. Demonstrate stroking hair softly or gently patting a sibling or friend.
- Practice respect in front of your baby. You may be surprised at how much your baby is listening, watching and processing your actions!

Toddlers (2-3 years):

This is the stage of "play nice and share." These concepts are difficult for toddlers so parents and teachers need to be present and stay close by in order to guide them.

- If they are fighting over a toy, tell them "be gentle, we need to share," then remove the toy so they know that not sharing results in no one being able to play with the toy.
- Encourage please and thank you. Expect to practice it over and over before they "get it."
- Help with clean up. Toddlers are great at saying NO to anything, especially something they don't want to do. Expect them to help put away what they have been playing with before moving to another activity. Make it fun: sing or march the toys away. It may seem easier to put things away yourself, but if your child learns that when they protest, you do it for them, expect to be doing it for them for years to come.
- Teach patience. Introduce the concept of waiting . . . in line to wash hands, while sitting at the table for a meal, or for you to finish a conversation with another. Keep their hands busy. Spray soap and water and have them rub hands together while waiting at the sink, give them a cup of water or milk to drink while waiting at the table, hold their hand while they are waiting for you to finish speaking.

- Teach table manners. Wash hands before and after eating, stay in your chair at the table until you are finished eating, and remember please and thank you's.

Pre-K to Early Elementary:

In addition to mastering earlier skills, a major focus should be on teaching them how to interact politely with others.

- Greeting: say hello and goodbye kindly.
- Make eye contact and smile.
- Learn to shake hands when meeting a new adult.
- Say excuse me if interruption is necessary.
- Learn to use indoor/outdoor voice appropriately.
- No name calling—show respect for others.
- Open doors for others, and allow others to go first.
- Reinforce good table manners: using silverware correctly, napkin in your lap, not talking with food in their mouth, saying please and thank you, remaining seated for full meal and excusing themselves when done, clearing their own dishes.
- Teach respect for differences in others' cultures, traditions or rituals. It's okay if others do things differently.
- Teach good sportsmanship: congratulate others when they win, be humble when you win. It's still fun to play even if you lose. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose.

A Note About Swearing

If your child is using foul language, it is likely that you are part of the problem. Remember that your child watches and copies your words and behavior. Please make every effort not to use bad language in front of your child, and if you slip up, apologize immediately. Tell them you are sorry and that it is not okay for them to use those words. If you are using bad language, your child will use it too. Confusion results when they are told that they should not talk that way. Children learn how to respond by watching and imitating those around them. The best way to get a child to act respectfully is to treat them with respect and let them see you treating others with respect. Actions always speak louder than words! Be aware that children are deeply influenced by what they see and hear on TV, computers, Facebook, negative attitudes and violence on video games, and even lyrics in music. As the old saying goes: Garbage in, garbage out. Monitor what your child is seeing and hearing. Supervise and limit screen time.

Praise your child openly and often for the efforts they are making to use their manners. This is always better than scolding them for their mistakes. Look around your world and you decide who is more fun to be around—a child with good manners, or a child without.

Children Learn What They Live

By Dorothy Law Nolte, Ph.D.

If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.
If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.
If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive.
If children live with pity, they learn to feel sorry for themselves.
If children live with ridicule, they learn to feel shy.
If children live with jealousy, they learn to feel envy.
If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty.
If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.
If children live with tolerance, they learn patience.
If children live with praise, they learn appreciation.
If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.
If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves.
If children live with recognition, they learn it is good to have a goal.
If children live with sharing, they learn generosity.
If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness.
If children live with fairness, they learn justice.
If children live with kindness and consideration, they learn respect.
If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves and in those about them.
If children live with friendliness, they learn the world is a nice place in which it live.

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Resources:

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