



Good Manners

A growing problem in schools, both in the classroom and on the playground, is a lack of good manners by children. Too many children fail to treat their teachers, school staff, and classmates with respect. While schools have policies for dealing with disruptive children, teaching and learning good manners should start at home. Here are some tips that may help:

- ◆ The golden rule. Don't simply have your children memorize the familiar "do unto others..." Stress, instead, the importance of treating others the in the same way they would like to be treated.
- ◆ Empathizing with others. Help your children understand the harm they can cause by doing or saying thoughtless and unkind things. Ask them questions like, "How would you feel if someone pointed at you, and started to laugh?" In the beginning, you may simply be doing damage control but eventually you will be helping them to avoid harmful words or actions.
- ◆ Using words, not actions. Many times, young children behave badly because they don't know how else to express themselves. Play out some of the situations that your children are having trouble with, and show them how to respond calmly and firmly with words instead of actions.
- ◆ Taking turns. Children must understand that they have to wait for their turns, just like everyone else. Establish "zero tolerance" for playground behavior like pushing, "crashing" a line, or bullying. The same goes for interrupting!
- ◆ Sharing. Help your children understand the importance of sharing with others, in school and in life. Compliment them when you see them sharing with others. But also let them know that it's the kind of behavior you expect.
- ◆ Good health. Children tend to behave badly when they are tired or hungry. You can help your children by making sure they get enough sleep and nutritious food.
- ◆ Honesty. While "fessing up" to misbehavior is sometimes difficult and painful for children, they must understand that honesty is always the best policy. When they admit doing something wrong, tell them that you would have been more angry or disappointed if they hadn't admitted their mistake.

- ◆ A family politeness policy. Establish a family policy in which, for example, no request is considered unless the person says "please." If one of your children forgets, just give him or her a look that says, "I'm waiting." They'll soon catch on. Use the same approach for saying "thank you."
- ◆ Thank-you notes. Teach your children the importance of thanking people for gifts and other kindnesses. Show them how to write a personal and prompt note on special stationery or note cards.
- ◆ Be a model for good manners. "Do as I say, but not as I do" never works. If you want your child to show good manners and respect, you have to exhibit appropriate behavior: saying please and thank you, admitting your mistakes, apologizing, and treating both friends and strangers with kindness and respect.
- ◆ Praise good behavior. Praise is a wonderful teacher. Let your children know how proud you are when you "catch" them being polite. Before long, good manners will be second nature to them.

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