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Family Focus

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tend to lead to the development of strong social skills. People respond more favorably to those who treat them respectfully. So, practicing good manners is not only important for others in your child's life, but for his own sake as well.

Here are some pointers:

1) Practice "please," "thank-you," and "excuse me" with your child, starting when he is pre-verbal. Say the words at appropriate times so your child will begin to learn the concepts. As soon as he can, have him say the words himself. Praise him for using polite words. And, of course, be sure to use these words yourself. Continue prompting him until he is 30 (just kidding - sort of).

2) As your child becomes older, train him to respect adults by using Mrs. and Mr. in front of their names, unless asked to be called by first names. Encourage him to make eye contact with an adult who is speaking to him.

3) Don't let your child succeed in addressing you disrespectfully. Avoid inadvertently reinforcing this behavior; respond each and every time. It's best to have your child apologize, and then offer you a corrected version of his comment. In other words, do not just reprimand him by saying, "Don't speak to me like that." Make him perform the necessary repair.

4) Don't accept the correction if it is said in a flat, unconvincing tone. Have him adjust his attitude or invoke a consequence. Also, if your child refuses to comply when you request a correction, be prepared with a consequence and implement it quickly and calmly. Younger children can receive a time-out for several minutes. Older children can have a privilege removed, such as a cell phone or other screen time, for the rest of the day or the next day - or longer if the disrespectful behavior persists.

5) Along these lines, do not respond when your child whines at you. Ask him to restate his comment or request in a different tone before you respond.

"Being considerate of others will take your children further in life than any college degree." -Marian Wright Edelman

Traveling to different countries can broaden our horizons in so many ways. On a recent trip I noticed how polite children and teens are to all adults in certain cultures. Then I thought how some of our children could use an upgrade in this area. For example, there were several incidents last month in our community where students on their way home from high school shouted "F... you" and other choice words as they drove by people walking their dogs or gardening in their front yards.

Of course, there are etiquette classes offered for children to teach them proper table manners and social conduct. But learning begins at home, and classes can only help so much. It's crucial for parents to instill good manners in their children as they are growing up. The hope is not only that your child will extend proper courtesy to you, but that he will treat other adults, as well as his peers, with respect and consideration.

Research suggests that practicing good manners and being kind to others increases personal happiness. In addition, good manners

6) Do not respond to your child when he interrupts you. Train him to say, "excuse me," and then wait his turn. I see many parents, mid-conversation with others, automatically turning to their child when he speaks. This sends the message that he is more important than you or other adults, and that he should have priority at all times.

7) Insist that your child write a thank-you note after receiving a gift or special treat. Children actively practice gratitude when they go to the effort of writing a note (after possible initial resistance, that is). And experiencing gratitude contributes to being a happier person.

8) Have family dinners as often as possible. These are perfect opportunities for training your child to use good manners. To make family meals enjoyable, the emphasis needs to be on relaxing and enjoying each other's company. Meals are not the time to bring up disciplinary matters or subjects that your child doesn't want to discuss. Intermittently encourage proper etiquette in a positive, calm, and light-hearted manner. If a child is being rude, he needs to be excused from the table until he apologizes. If he doesn't apologize, he needs to receive a consequence after the family finishes their meal. The family dinner experience should not be undermined by one disrespectful child. Of course, it is never this simple to instill and regulate good manners in a child, but parental efforts will eventually pay off.

As a parent, you know it's important to pick your battles in handling situations with your child. Hopefully, training your child by requiring him to practice good manners will be one of the battles you choose.

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