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Teaching Children Good Manners

By Rexanne Mancini

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by: **Rexanne Mancini**

Last week in my newsletter, I mentioned that my children knew how to behave in nice restaurants because they had been exposed to the atmosphere at an early age. My idea of well behaved might be different from yours, however, I think there are certain basics that are important and universal.

When my daughters were babies, we would take them wherever we went. If they began to fuss or cry, one of us would promptly remove them from the room/restaurant/market/wherever. Not because we felt their crying or fussing was a bad thing. No, it's a perfectly normal occurrence for infants and toddlers. We removed them as a courtesy to others who we felt did not need to be as tolerant as we were with our children's noise. In consequence, my daughters know that other people are not as wildly in love with their racket or with them as we are. Nor should they be expected to be.

As our children grew older, they were always told the rules of our outings, how to behave and to always speak softly if other adults were present. Sometimes, it's fine to let them get a little crazy ... just know your audience! If we are at a five star restaurant where many other diners have come to enjoy a gracious and expensive meal, would we expect everyone there to be enthralled with junior's vocal or behavioral outbursts? Would we really expect them to care if our child is having a bout with walking pneumonia and coughing uncontrollably? Nope. It's rude. And rudeness is basically nothing more than bad manners. If there is an emergency with your child, by all means don't give a flying flamingo about what others think. But this is the exception. Besides, children who are that sick belong at home, not in public.

Last night, my girls and I were in a department store. There was a toddler carrying on and screaming for more than 15 minutes when my younger daughter said: "Now his mommy is going to tell him to stop because there are other people in here that don't want to hear it!"

Unfortunately, his mommy did not tell him any such thing. She let him wail and scream and cry, much to the chagrin and annoyance of everyone else in the store. You know what? As much as I love kids

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and cannot bear to see or hear them suffering, I disliked this kid immensely!

My reasoning is this: if our kids learn that they are free to trample on the peace, space or rose gardens of others, they will develop into spoiled and inconsiderate brats. And then who will like them? Who will want to spend time with them? Who, besides their forgiving parents, will be able to tolerate their lack of social graces and good manners? No one ... except maybe another ill-mannered person who feels at home with a similarly clueless individual. Do we really want our children reduced to such horrible options? I think not.

We teach our children not to steal, lie or punch their brother in the nose. Shouldn't we teach them respect for others at the same time? That their whining and out-of-control behavior is something no one really wants to hear or witness, especially strangers who have no vested interest in their developing minds or self-esteem? A simple reminder of the rules, consistently, works wonders ... eventually. ;-)

Good luck. Kids need to learn manners and social graces. They will go farther in life if we teach them well.

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Rexanne Mancini is the mother of two daughters, Justice and Liberty. She is a novelist, freelance writer and maintains an extensive yet informal parenting and family web site,

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some humor to help you cope. Subscribe to her free newsletter, Rexanne's Web Review, for a monthly dose of Rexanne:

Must Manners be Taught?

By Jacquie McTaggart

PLEASE answer the following questions honestly. (Go ahead - you won't be graded.)

Does your child... Greet you with something other than a grunt in the morning? Use the word "PLEASE" when he asks you to purchase a \$90 pair of designer jeans? Say "THANKS" when you take his forgotten homework assignment to school? Utter "EXCUSE ME" after he accidentally knocks you down on his way to the phone? Write Grandma a thank-you letter for the DVD she sent in the mail?

Chances are pretty good that a few of you answered, "yes" to some of these questions. Chances are even better that many of you answered, "no" to most of them.

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During my lengthy career (forty–two years) in the classroom I observed a drastic decline in what we call "Good Manners." I have no answers (or theories) as to why this has occurred, but it has. I believe that we must make an attempt to correct the situation.

Good manners are the cornerstone of courteous behavior. They provide the impetus to say the words and exhibit the behaviors that distinguish us humans from the rest of the animal kingdom. Good manners show consideration for others.

Good manners demand that intentional sounds of physical relief such as belching and "fluffing" are saved for non–public areas. (You male readers may call "fluffing" by another name, but I'm sure you get the idea.) Good manners encompass all the things that make the people around us feel good. They compel us to eliminate words, sounds, and actions that cause others in our presence to feel uncomfortable. In essence, they enable us to be an accepted member of a civilized society.

Good manners are not automatically caught, they must be taught. A child or adolescent does not magically discover on his own the fact that common decency and politeness help to make him a more socially acceptable person. Neither does he understand that those attributes will ultimately contribute to his success, and help to make him a happier individual. It's up to us to teach our children these concepts.

How do we do that? Good manners, like most values, must be demonstrated and lived in the home if they are to become a permanent part of the child's character. The school should not be expected to bear the primary responsibility for teaching good manners. Seven hours a day for nine months of the year is not an adequate amount of time to instill a lasting principle or a moral value. (In one year, the average kid spends 1,253 hours in school and 7,507 hours out of school.) Teachers can force compliance ("Tell Jimmy you're sorry"), but they can't make good manners and common decency an automatic, knee–jerk response. Parents can.

How? Parents need to demonstrate good manners in the home - day in and day out. Kids hear messages that are delivered by lecture - "You should..." They internalize that which they observe. Parents must "practice what they preach," if they want the value of good manners to become a part of

the child's moral fiber. And they should begin this process when the child is very young.

Politeness and good manners open the door to a successful and happy adult life. We need to give our kids the legs that will enable them to walk through that door.

"Life is not so short but that there is always time enough for courtesy."

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Jacquie McTaggart is a recently retired 42–year career teacher and author of, "From the Teacher's Desk." She currently travels throughout the country speaking at teacher conferences and symposiums for parents. You can find more of her teaching and parenting tips at

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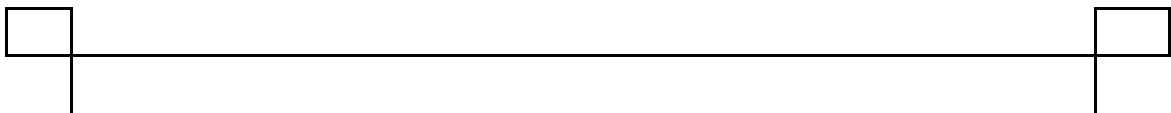
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