

## ***Easy Tips for Raising a More Polite Child***

Have you ever wished your little one hadn't blurted out that naughty word to their oh-so proper grandparents, which they evidently learned when you accidentally slammed your finger in the door last week? Have you ever watched your child eat and in horror, had to ask yourself, "Did they just watch animal planet before this meal?" Has your child ever done something so embarrassing that the only thing you can do is smile politely, apologize and glance around you with the I-want-to-crawl-in-a-hole-right-now look? Welcome to the club!

Two sisters of 4 year old girls recently described such an incident that left one red in the face and one gleaming with pride. While at their weekly mall walking excursion, the moms decided to treat the girls to an ice cream cone. One of the girls decided she didn't want a cone and flung it onto the floor in a fit of toddler angst, while the other took her cone, said "thank you" and began quietly licking away. If we could only press rewind and start again. Unfortunately, we can't, but fortunately, there are some easy tactics you can use to help raise a more polite child. After all, a more polite child makes mommy and daddy less stressed. And who can't use a little less stress in their day?

Our children live in a very busy world, where play-dates, soccer practice and television shows come before some of the more crucial life lessons...manners.

Our children will be the future politicians, businessmen and women, entrepreneurs, parents and key figures in society. Their success in life is directly related to what we instill in them now. It may be something as simple as knowing how to shake hands, how to introduce themselves to grownups or as complicated as how to discreetly answer a question or accept a compliment. Giving a child this knowledge and confidence is one of greatest gifts you can give.

### ***TIP #1 – Practice What You Preach***

Our children are like parrots, they repeat what they hear. And let's not forget that they are smarter than we often give them credit for. Although this is a wonderful thing (the parroting, that is), sometimes it can wildly backfire. It's as if their minds are little tape recorders, saving our indiscretions for that oh-so-perfect-time to press play and embarrass you. And typically, it is usually in front of someone with whom we want to make a good impression.

Parents must follow the standard we expect for our children...and this means all the time, not just when it is convenient. Reminding children to say please and thank you is great in theory, but if you yourself are not using the words at home, they will pick up on this.

On the other hand, if they hear you use foul language when you feel frustrated, don't be surprised if that word slips from their mouth when they too are aggravated. How can we really get angry at a child when they have learned certain behavior from our own wrong actions? By keeping the standards up at home and instilling proper speech, you won't have to worry about them in public or when they are not with you.

***Tip #2 – Helping Your Child to Write Thank You Notes.***

Children are always receiving gifts...for birthdays, holidays, from grandparents and relatives, etc. Whatever the gift may be, whether it is an item, a kindness shown or an unexpected favor, an acknowledgement is in order. There are no if's or but's about it...gratitude for a gift is imperative. Showing thanks is done immediately (if possible), not many, many weeks or months later. The sooner the better. When someone has taken the time and energy to do something for you, it seems only natural that a show of gratitude is in order. This may be common sense, but it is far from common practice. And this means writing a thank you note (and not a pre-fab, fill in the blank thank you!)

Helping your children to structure a thank you note is priceless. If they cannot yet write, you do the writing, while they draw a picture on it or decorate the card with stickers. Once they can write their names, they can sign their John Hancock on the card. Soon enough, they will be writing notes by themselves, in a timely fashion.

Raising a gracious child is worth every bit of time and energy of teaching them. Then, hopefully, in 15 or so years (when your hard work of raising a child is over), you won't get a call asking how to write a thank you for a job interview.

***Tip #3 – No Means No***

Most parents can relate to the five acts of Hamlet that they must go through after telling their toddler 'No!' Many parents tell their toddler that he/she can't do or have something by saying "No". They then ask them to stop, then they plead, then they deal with the ensuing tantrum or cry-fest and give up altogether and give in! Why did they bother saying 'No' in the first place?

Teaching your child to understand that 'No' means no, is not as hard as it may seem. As soon as your child can sit up and crawl, you can begin to teach him. If they go near an electrical cord or touch something they should not, firmly tell them, "No!" Next, physically remove them from the object or situation. Of course, no one expects a 6 month old to understand and obey, but eventually he will learn that when Mommy says no, it is best to do as he is told. As your child

begins to walk, it is helpful to get down to their level, have them look you in the eyes and firmly tell them ‘No’ when they are misbehaving.

Toddlers are much smarter than we often give them credit for being. If you say no and then give in, you are teaching them that crying and whining is the way to get what they want. Be consistent and in the long run, your hard work and effort will pay off. You will have a child that listens the first time. Children who listen are often more polite and will be looked upon favorably by other adults.

***Tip #4 – Extend that Paw!***

A child who shakes hands is a rare sight these days, but it shouldn’t be this way. Learning to shake hands not only gives your child more confidence to interact with adults, but shows respect. You can start teaching your child to shake hands as early as one year of age. Cheerfully tell them to ‘shake hands and say hello’ and put their hand in the other person’s hand. This will instill the principle and make it second nature.

As they approach the age of two, you should begin teaching them some basic handshaking rules. First, extend the right hand. Of course, you will have many, many times where you will have to say “wrong hand”. Second, have them make eye contact with the person. Making eye contact is something children struggle with, so lift their chin if necessary.

How many times have you said hello to a child and they stare down at their feet? Third, teach them to squeeze the hand and lastly, say “Hi, nice to see you”. By age three, they will have it down pat and you can have your child add the name of the person they are shaking hands with. Have your child shake hands when they arrive and when they leave. Teaching your children to shake hands is a lesson that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives. There is nothing worse than a fishy or pathetic handshake from a grown adult...it shows a lack of confidence and authority...so teach them while they are young!

***Tip #5 – One for You, One for Me!***

When children don’t share, we tend to solve the problem by taking the toy or item away and giving it to the other child, without explanation. A simple, “SHARE” is usually uttered in a loud decibel and we go about our business of tending to our house or chores.

Taking the time to explain why it is important to share will ingrain the principle in their little noggins. We will not always be in the next room to break up the argument between children when sharing is an issue and we must teach our

children to stand on their own. By instilling the sharing principle over and over, we won't have to worry about them when we aren't around. People remember a kind and generous child, while a rude and snatchy one isn't usually invited back that often.

***Tip #6 – Don't Just 'Let It Go'***

How many times over a course of a day are we too busy or hassled to take care of something we deem impolite or inappropriate? It seems, in my case, that my children are apt to misbehave when I am chatting on a much-needed call with a friend. Rather than apologizing to the caller and getting off the phone to take care of the situation, we tend to wave the kids away, yell a quick "YOU BETTER STOP THAT" (sometimes we press mute, sometimes we help to add to the deafness of the friend) and return to our call...only to forget to deal with it after we are done.

Don't just let things go! Rather, you will find instant results if you take care of the situation then and there. Quick enforcement of rules will make more of an impact than waiting to handle it when it happens again. Putting our children first will help instill those positive behaviors we so desperately want them to have when in public, at play-dates or at school.

***Tip #7 – Respecting Others Differences***

People come in all shapes, sizes, colors and personalities. Polite children are respectful children...they respect and accept that everyone is not just like them.

Helping a child to understand that it is not nice to make fun or judge others for these differences will be a lesson they will remember forever. Kids can be mean, especially when they are feeling out their independence and voice. Yes, we cannot always be with our children to filter what comes out of the mouths, but we can give them the tools to know the difference between talking and being indiscrete and cruel.

When your child tells you something mean he heard, take the time to explain why it is not nice to say things such as this. Getting them to think further on this is a wonderful way for them to truly understand the principle of thinking before they speak.

***Tip #8 – Eating like Little Ladies & Gentlemen***

If there is one lesson you have probably learned as a parent, it is to expect the most embarrassing moments to occur at the most inappropriate times! Many of these

mishaps seem to happen at the table. So, when your toddler says or does something that makes you and your husband appear that you have absolutely no idea what table manners are...say to yourself, "Don't worry, it's my rite of passage as a parent" (and of course, it makes for great dinner party conversation).

With that in mind, I am a firm believer that your child is never too young to begin teaching the basics. The dining table will be the setting for many important happenings in your child's life. It may, one day, be the setting for meeting his girlfriend's parents for the first time, a lunch with a potential employer or a dinner with upper management at the office holiday party. No matter what the occasion, knowing how to navigate their way through a meal will tremendously benefit your child. Most children will master these dining skills by age five, but you should start teaching them around the age of two. Of course, there will be some exceptions to this, but as your toddler grows and matures, the more difficult dining skills can be taught and mastered.

Thus, these are only a few ways to help raise a more polite, thoughtful and generous child.

If we want to give them the gift of politeness, we must truly ask ourselves if we are taking the time and making the effort to help them acquire these skills.

So, the next time we see a little angel at the supermarket, while our child is flailing away, knocking down items as we cart them up and down the aisles and giving dirty looks to other shoppers, we must ask ourselves, "Am I doing everything I can to help teach my child to do what is right and be polite?"

And remember, being polite is something that will make them stand out and stand apart...in a good way!