

## AVOIDING THE TOP 10 MOMMY FAUX PAS

As a mother and etiquette consultant, I often find myself lending a sympathetic ear to other mom's as they relay their blunders, their child's indiscretions and mommy faux pas. We can all relate to the shock of our child's faux pas, but how we choose to handle it can make all the difference. Our sweet little girl asks a man with a belly, "when the baby is coming out?" or when our son blurts, "I hate this food" when we are over at our sister-in-law's house for Thanksgiving. You probably do what most of us do, smile politely, apologize and give those around you the I-want-to-crawl-in-a-hole-right-now look. Being on the receiving end of many horror stories from other mothers, I would like to share what I like to call, 'Avoiding the Top 10 Mommy Faux Pas'.

### ***1. PLAYDATE PANDAMONIOM***

**DO** make sure that children have enough space to play. Too many children crammed into too small a space may lead to unnecessary squabbles.

**DON'T** let your child get away with bad behavior because you are engrossed in riveting conversation with another mother.

**DO** have your child take turns. **DON'T** allow your child to horde the toys. Encouraging sharing will be a valuable lesson that they will carry for a lifetime.

### ***2. PLAYGROUND ETIQUETTE***

If you see a child struggling, seek some sort of non-verbal permission to help from the parent, if possible. If you are not sure who the parent/nanny is, by all means help. Just like in school, there are often bullies at the playground. If your child can't handle the situation by themselves, go over and say something to the effect of, "Excuse me, if you want to play with the other kids, you have to be gentle". If the problem persists, take it upon yourself to inform the parent/nanny of the inappropriate behavior.

### ***3. BABYSITTER/NANNY ETIQUETTE***

Things to remember:

- Family information is private and children should not repeat such information to the sitter, i.e., Mommy was angry with Daddy last night.
- Household rules don't change when a babysitter is there.
- When parents aren't present, your child should respect the rules that the babysitter sets. Your child should not say, "My mom/dad doesn't make me do that!"
- Make sure you sit down with your child the day after and ask how things went. If there are any issues that made your child feel uncomfortable, discuss it privately with the babysitter.

### ***4. DINING DISASTERS***

Sometimes your children will encounter food that they dislike or food that is usually not served at home. In this case, it is important to explain to your children that they need not make a fuss, especially if they are a guest in another house. They shouldn't use words such as "Eww, Yuk, Gross, I hate, etc". If the food has already been served to them, it is polite to take one bite and leave the rest. Any remarks about food should always be positive. Enforce these rules at home and your child will naturally carry over the positive behavior when not at home.

### **5. TOO MUCH TO DO, TOO LITTLE TIME...ANOTHER BIRTHDAY PARTY**

If you don't have time for your child to attend a birthday party, do you have to send a gift? When invited, you are usually expected to bring a small toy/gift. You should send a gift even if you are unable to attend. You don't have to break the bank...send a small token, perhaps a \$10 - \$20 item. Remember, it's the thought that counts.

### **6. WHEN YOUR CHILD IS NOT INVITED**

It is important to teach your children that they will not always be invited to everything. Having hurt feelings can cause a chain reaction of emotions that are not necessary. Explain that others can't always invite everyone to their parties. Suggest that you plan something fun for that day which can turn their disappointment into excitement. In addition, have your child invite that person over on a different day to prevent hard feelings from developing.

### **7. PRE-FAB THANK YOU NOTES**

For etiquette sake, don't send them. There is nothing worse than the Dear [fill in the blank] note from the store. If your child is old enough, have them write a short thank you note. If your child cannot yet write, handle the note for them and have your child decorate the card or envelope.

### **8. TEACHER APPRECIATION**

The most common complaint I hear from teachers is the lack of gratitude shown by their pupils and parents. We all like to feel appreciated for hard work done. It is considered customary to give your child's teacher a holiday and/or year-end gift. Be sure to include your child in the selection of this gift. More importantly, have your child include a hand-written thank you note.

### **9. SMALL TALK**

We all love to share funny stories about our kids, but not everyone wants to hear about them ALL the time. Try not to be the one to overwhelm others with your stories, especially to your single or childless friends. If you are at a dinner party where there is a mix of people, be sure to make the effort to bring up conversations to which everyone can relate.

### **10. DEALING WITH DIFFICULT MOTHERS**

There is nothing that will test your patience as much as a difficult mother. This is especially true with your children's close friends, which may require you to have frequent contact with a particular mother. Rather than having a confrontation and making things uncomfortable for you and your child, bite your tongue, be tolerant and set a good example...there is always the chance that they will move away!

No matter what situation you are faced with, a good knowledge of etiquette is a wonderful guide and will ensure that an awkward situation doesn't escalate and snowball.

Melissa has been wowing clients and readers over the past few years with her fun and dynamic approach to the often perceived 'stuffy' world of etiquette. After having two children (well-behaved, of course!), Melissa took her innovative style of teaching business etiquette and tailored

programs for children, parents and yes, even yachting enthusiasts. Her "distinctive style and sense of humor" has helped put manners back into the 'in-crowd'.