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Home

About Us

This Month

Calendar

Advertising

Contact Us

Archive

This Month

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Full Plate

Mrs. DeGroot's Wallingford Charm School 'Putting Manners Back in Their Place'

by Riki Mafune

We live in world in which parenting experts are encouraging us to try to have at least *one* sit-down family meal per week with our kids. Opportunities for social interaction around the family dinner table have been eroded by our busy schedules and technological forms of communication. As our priorities shift, it's no wonder that proper etiquette and the good graces that were once taken for granted feel like a thing of the past.

While it's true that many kids may rarely sit at a formal place setting, good manners and proper etiquette offer more than just selecting the correct soup spoon or salad fork. Etiquette is about being prepared for any situation. It is about courtesy, respect and confidence – qualities we should all hope to instill in our children as they navigate the sometimes rough waters of childhood into adulthood.

Mrs. Dawn De Groot, owner and teacher of Wallingford Charm School and parent of 13-year-old Sophie, agrees. "When my daughter started kindergarten, I was surprised to see that many of her classmates lacked basic manners," says DeGroot. "I saw an opportunity to teach children to have respect for themselves and others, and to learn that this positive behavior really pays off."

DeGroot's etiquette classes offer kids a place to learn what she describes as "the magic of good manners." The lessons begin the moment the student reaches the threshold of the Wallingford Charm School, held in her own home. DeGroot warmly greets each child at her door, shakes his or her hand, and asks, "What color are your eyes?" to encourage the children to make eye contact. Every moment they are in her company, their good graces and confidence start to bloom.

The students are encouraged to interact and ask questions, and a sense of humor and fun is interlaced with each lesson. "I take the students into the bathroom to wash their hands before we sit down for tea. I encourage them to use the guest hand towels and give them tips for guest bathroom etiquette," explains DeGroot.

Part of her lesson includes the possible consequences of taking a peek inside the host's medicine cabinet. "I put a container with marbles in the cabinet that fall out into the sink when the cabinet is opened," DeGroot says with a twinkle in her eyes. "It makes quite an impact when I ask a student to open the cabinet." DeGroot then tells the students about the time she forgot to remove the marbles after a class: "The next day, a repairman was working at the house and asked to use the bathroom. He was snooping in the bathroom and, much to his surprise and embarrassment, the marbles came crashing out of the cabinet." Lesson learned!

DeGroot offers classes for children ages 8 and older, explaining that "8 years old is the 'age of reason' when children are ready to absorb more of the concepts of manners and etiquette." For younger children, she emphasizes the importance of reinforcing basic manners by parental instruction and the modeling of expected behavior. "I always treat my husband and daughter with respect – the way that I would like to be treated. Little things like 'please' and 'thank you' are important and necessary for everyone."

DeGroot instructs her students in dining etiquette for both casual and formal situations, and high tea is included with each group session. And at the end of her classes, each student leaves with a place mat diagramed with a formal place setting, an easy craft idea students can create for hostess gifts or party favors, and a writing guide and packet of stationary for "Thank You" notes.

Thirteen year-old Stacia Cammarano was enchanted by her experience at Wallingford Charm School. "Almost every night, my mom asks me to set the table. Before Mrs. DeGroot taught me how to set the table properly, I would just throw the spoons here, throw the knives there ... now my mom can ask me to set the table when guest are coming over, and she can trust me to set the table properly," Stacia says. "Mrs. DeGroot's Charm School was so much fun. I always looked forward to my weekend classes with her. The atmosphere she created for her students was always warm and friendly ... as you were walking out the door it almost felt like you were leaving a magical place."

This is exactly what DeGroot hopes to achieve. "I feel so privileged to have touched these children's lives and to teach them skills that translate to everyday life." Indeed, the Golden Rule is alive and well in Wallingford.

For class schedule and information, go to www.wallingfordcharm.com or call 206-354-9933.

Riki Mafune is a Seattle area writer and mother of two and a public health educator specializing in nutrition.

Suggested Reading List	Other Etiquette Schools in the Area
<p><i>The Well Mannered Monster</i>, by Marcy Brown and Dennis Haley, (Treasure Bay, 2006).</p> <p><i>Time to Say "Please"!</i> by Mo Willems, (Hyperion, 2005).</p> <p><i>Whoopi's Big Book of Manners</i>, by Whoopi Goldberg, (Jump at the Sun, 2006).</p> <p><i>365 Manners Kids Should Know: Games, Activities, and Other Fun Ways to Help Children Learn Etiquette</i>, by Sheryl Eberly, (Three Rivers Press, 2001).</p> <p><i>The How Rude! The Teenagers' Guide to Good Manners, Proper Behavior and Not Grossing People Out</i>, by Alex J. Packer, Ph.D., (Free Spirit Publishing, 1997), <i>The How Rude! Handbook of School Manners for Teens</i> (2004) and <i>The How Rude! Handbook of Friendship & Dating Manners for Teens</i> (2004) by the same author and publisher</p>	<p>Final Touch Finishing School (Seattle and surrounding areas): 206-510-5357 or 877-808-2078; www.finaltouchschool.com. Go to the Final Touch Web site to purchase place-setting mats, flashcards, books and more.</p> <p>Polite Child (Bellevue): 425-485-4089; www.politechild.com.</p> <p>Etiquette West, Inc, (Edmonds): 425-772-7573; www.etiquettewest.com.</p>

Morsels

It's Better from McDonald's, Preschoolers Say

If you want your child to eat baby carrots or other healthy foods, try putting them in a McDonald's wrapper.

A recent Stanford University study found that 63 children, ages 3-5, preferred the taste of five items in McDonald's packaging to identical items in plain wrappers. This applied to French fries, chicken nuggets, milk and, to a lesser extent, hamburgers – and even to baby carrots, which McDonald's does not offer. Fifty-four percent preferred the carrots in McDonald's wrappers, compared to 23 percent who liked the plainly-wrapped sample. The discrepancy was clearest for French fries: Although both samples were McDonald's fries, 77 percent of the children preferred the ones in the McDonald's wrapper, while only 13 percent preferred the others.

The study was published in the August issue of the *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*. The children were drawn from several Head Start preschools in San Mateo, Calif. The researchers found that preferences for food identified as McDonald's was more pronounced in children who had more televisions in their homes and in those who ate at McDonald's more frequently.

They concluded that "branding of foods and beverages influences young children's taste preferences," and came up with two opposing recommendations. Either we should step up regulation of marketing to young children and/or we should use the power of branding to improve young children's eating behaviors.

Soda Bottles for Worm Poop; Drink Pouches for Handbags

More than 30 million soda bottles are discarded every day and end up in landfills across America. This is a shame, when they could be filled with worm poop.

The eco-friendly company TerraCycle is dedicated to being a "zero waste" operation, and so packages its worm poop fertilizer in used soda bottles. A year and a half ago, the company created its National Bottle Brigade to collect the bottles, to give kids an opportunity to make a difference through recycling, and to help schools and nonprofit organizations raise money.

For each 20-oz. soda bottle a student collects, TerraCycle donates 5 cents back to their school or organization. Local collection sites are: Grace Lutheran Church, Everett; West Mercer Elementary School, Mercer Island; Whitman Middle School, Seattle; HDR Engineering, Bellevue; Lake Forest Park Montessori School, Shoreline; Clarkmoor PTA, Fort Lewis; and the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, Bellevue.

This fall, the company, in cooperation with Honest Tea, has created the Drink Pouch Brigade to collect all brands of drink pouch containers. Participants earn 2 cents for every Honest Kids® drink pouch, and 1 cent for other brands, to be given to the charity of their choice. Schools or other organizations who sign up for the program will receive collection bags, which hold 100 pouches each, and have prepaid shipping labels attached. There is no cost to sign up.

The companies hope to collect one million pouches in the next 12 months and to have them made into handbags to be sold at retail stores next year.

For more information on the bottle or drink pouch brigades, call TerraCycle at 609-393-4252 or visit www.terracycle.net.

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