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TEACHING MANNERS TO YOUR CHILDREN

by **Michelle Arnold**

PLEASE AND THANK YOU are still the magic words. Unfortunately, in today's society, many children are not taught even this simple thing. Turn on the average TV show and you will see children behaving rudely and getting big laughs in response. It has even become an issue in schools. The National Association of School Principals reports that poor manners are a growing problem.

As parents, our responsibility is to raise our children to do what is right. But it's not enough just to correct them when we catch them using bad manners—we must teach by example. Children are always watching and listening. They're like human sponges. It's unfair to think that they will not mimic what they see.

What should we be teaching our children?**Please and thank you**

If you want your children to say "please" and "thank you" to others, say "please" and "thank you" to your children. Children deserve to be treated with respect, and respect can be contagious.

Shaking hands

Show your children how to give a good handshake and to look people in the eye. This is a skill that will take your child far in life; never underestimate this trait. My mother always says my husband was the first boy I dated that looked her in the eye when he spoke to her. He won her over!

Not Interrupting

This is a hard one because everyone likes to be heard. There are some simple ways to teach this to your children though. For example, if you're talking on the phone, teach your child to gently touch your arm if he needs something, rather than yell, "Mom! Mom! Mom!" until you are forced to hang up the phone. Signal to him that you know he needs something by placing your hand on top of his hand. Let him know you'll be just a moment, or politely excuse yourself from your phone call to attend to his need. This tip is especially helpful for work-at-home parents. Utilize resources that will reinforce what you're teaching your child at home.

Cotillion

A cotillion is a dance and etiquette class for young boys and girls, and it can give your child another opportunity to practice good manners and be in an environment where others are expected to behave the same way. As Jon D. Williams III, President of the Jon D. Williams Cotillions, states: "The days of the stuffy, cloistered dance classes are over. By educating our students in a [social] atmosphere, learning becomes a positive, enjoyable experience; an experience that our students can put to practical use the next time they are introducing themselves, or the next time an adult stops by the family table in a restaurant. And of course, they will also be dance stars at the next family wedding. These are practical skills that our students will use their entire lives; skills that will make them feel comfortable anywhere, from a school social to the White House." For more information on cotillion classes, visit www.cotillion.com/children.shtml.

Educational Curriculum for Home or School

The Polite Child is a program designed to help parents, educators, and others develop young people who have strong self-esteem and confidence, and are socially comfortable and proficient in handling a myriad of social interactions and situations. Corinne Gregory, Founder and President of The Polite Child states, "Social skills are the great equalizer; good social skills transcend social class, economic status, academic achievement, gender, and race." For more information on this curriculum, visit www.politechild.com.

Martial Arts

Many parents have found that the structure of most martial arts classes can really help children with showing respect, improving attention span, and demonstrating self-control. The key is to find a good instructor who highlights these character traits as part of the actual class. Ask for references and talk to families who already have their children in a program in your area. Verify that these schools teach self defense and not meditation. In the midst of your hectic life, don't neglect some of the most important lessons you can teach your children. Your efforts will not be wasted; they will reap benefits for years to come.

MICHELLE ARNOLD lives in Colorado with her husband and their four children. She's a freelance writer and photographer.

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