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# Manners Matter!

## Teach Your Child To Be a Gracious Host and Guest

By Kristen Finello

Invitations are starting to arrive in the mailbox for birthday parties, and perhaps your child's own birthday celebration is even happening soon. Now is the perfect time to brush up on your child's basic social skills.

"A birthday party is the first big social test for a child," says Corinne A. Gregory, founder and president of The Polite Child, a company in Woodinville, Washington that offers classes for children on developing social skills. "While knowing what to do at a party is a no-brainer for adults, parents need to prepare their children for the many potential pitfalls."

Here's how to prep your child for party success:

### When Your Child Is the Birthday Boy or Girl

Being the guest of honor comes with some social obligations for your little one. Sure, the main objective is to have fun, but a few tips can help the day go smoothly for everyone.

**Teach your child these birthday etiquette lessons: Be a thoughtful host.** "Remind your child that even though it's his birthday, it's still his job to make sure that his guests are comfortable," says Gregory. Does anyone need a drink? Your school-age host can show them to the beverages. Is there someone who doesn't know everyone else? Your child should make introductions.

**React graciously to all gifts.** Kids can be honest to a fault, so it's not uncommon for their reactions to show what they really think about that scratchy turtleneck sweater they received! In advance of the party, practice different gift-opening scenarios so your child knows what to say when she opens her gifts. Remind her that it's not the present itself that matters most, but the thought the giver put into selecting it.

**Thank gift-givers properly.** How to do it: Look the giver in the eye, say thank you and also say something nice about the gift. For example, "Thank you so much. I love Barbie dolls!"

**Say goodbye to guests at the end of the party.** It can be hard for a child to pull himself away from a stack of new toys and games, but it's important for the guest of honor to say an individual "Goodbye and thanks for coming" to each partygoer. He should also make sure that each guest has received his goodie bag.

**Always write thank-you notes.** Even toddlers can help with thank-you notes. "If a child can scribble with a crayon or put stickers on a piece of paper, then she is old enough to help with a thank-you note," says Gregory. "Explain to her what she is going to do. For example, say, 'I want you to color a picture for Grandma to thank her for bringing you that new book.'" Once kids can write their own names, they can sign the card. Older kids can write the thank-you note themselves.

### When Your Child Is a Guest

Don't just tell your child, "Be on your best behavior." Instead, be specific about how you would like her to act. Here are five tips for guest success:

- **Explain that the focus of the party will be the birthday boy or girl.** "Make sure your child understands that this party is about showing the other child a good time," says Gregory. The birthday child will probably get to go first at games, get the first piece of cake and so on.

- **Help your child choose a gift the birthday child will like.** Kids are likely to pick out a game or a toy that *they* would like. Remind your child to think about what his friend would like. Also, let your child know that it's not polite to "help" the birthday child open his gifts -- as tempting as that might be for little ones.
- **When arriving at the party, greet the birthday child.** It's also appropriate for older children -- those who are school-age -- to greet the child's parents.
- **Say goodbye before leaving.** At the end of the party, guests should say goodbye to the birthday child and thank him for inviting them to the party. Kids should also say, "Thank you. I had a nice time," to the parents.
- **Be flexible.** Let your child know to expect that some things will be different from what he or she is used to. When you're a guest in someone's home, it's polite to go with the flow.



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