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## Experts: Success begins with good manners

By Jennifer Larson

The Desert Sun

April 8th, 2004

Don't talk with your mouth full.

Keep your elbows off the table.

Say thank you.

Any of those sound familiar?

Chances are, if you're a parent, you've repeated at least one of those mantras a few thousand times. Etiquette experts and people who work with children tend to agree that teaching your children good manners is more than worth the effort.

Good manners can definitely begin at home.

Veronica Hernandez tries to teach her 5-year-old son Matthew about the importance of the Golden Rule in words that he can understand.

"You need to treat people the way you want to be treated," she tells Matthew, a kindergarten student at Dr. Reynaldo J. Carreon Jr. Academy in Indio.

According to etiquette expert Sue Fox, teaching by example is the best approach. By using good manners, parents can provide role models for their children, who often learn by imitation.

"At 2 years old, they're watching," she cautioned. "You know, monkey see, monkey do."

Fox also advises parents to begin introducing their toddlers to simple words like "please," "thank you," "excuse me," and "I'm sorry."

"It's never too soon to start teaching them," she said. "When they're sitting up in the high chair, you can start."

By teaching children good manners and then helping them practice, parents are doing their children a great service. It's not just about being polite and well-mannered in the short run, said Fox, the founder of Etiquette Survival in Pleasanton, and the author of "Etiquette for Dummies."

"Ultimately, as they grow and they're better behaved, they'll go on to greater success in their lives and be better liked," she said.

But home is not the only teaching environment when it comes to manners and etiquette. More and more schools are looking for ways to instill good manners in their students.

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#### THE BASICS

#### Which manners are most important?

Etiquette expert Sue Fox weighs in on the most important things that parents should try to teach their children when it comes to good manners:

- Please, thank you, you're welcome, excuse me, I'm sorry and may I?
- Write thank you notes.
- Look people in the eye when speaking to them.
- Clean up after yourself.
- Self-respect and respect for others.
- Don't interrupt others while they're speaking.
- Treat people as you would like to be treated.
- Use good table manners.
- Give a firm handshake.
- Be compassionate toward others.

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Dr. Reynaldo J. Carreon Jr. Academy is one of them. According to Principal Kathy Felci, the school instituted a program called PoliteChild last fall. So far, it's been quite a success, she said.

The program allows students to learn about manners at least twice a week. Older students have a session every day.

"We already see a tremendous difference," Felci said. "Everyone has commented."

For example, students now wish parents and teachers a polite "good morning," and at lunchtime they remember to use napkins and chew food with their mouths closed. The students look others in the eye and offer to shake hands.

Parent Peggy Ventura said she appreciates having the school reinforce what she already tries to teach at home to her 8-year-old daughter, Tatiana, a first-grader at the school.

"She's able to identify appropriate behavior and then self-modulate," Ventura said. "She'll say, 'Oh, excuse me. I have my elbows on the table.' It's been very encouraging to see that."

Carter Elementary School in Palm Desert is looking at incorporating some version of PoliteChild into its kindergarten program. Principal Rita Lamb, who has an eye on her students' futures long after they graduate from Carter, said she wants to give them every opportunity to succeed.

"Down the road, I want all Carter students to be competitive in the job market," she said. "Our kids have a wonderful academic program, but I think those interpersonal skills are (also) critical to their future success."

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**Jennifer Larson** covers the city of Palm Desert for The Desert Sun. She can be reached at 360-6477 or by [e-mail](#).

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