

Simple Wedding Etiquette for Children

By Jill Evans Kryston, Etiquette Consultant

Q: My children are going to be attendants in my sister's wedding. Since they'll be in the limelight, I would like to know what we can do ahead to prepare them for the big day. Can you give me some tips on simple manners?

A: All children should be taught basic life skills in social etiquette. Begin with the handshake. Ask them to stand straight, smile, and make eye contact while reaching out with the right hand to engage in a firm "web to web" handshake. Introductions accompanied by handshakes should always be followed with greetings such as, "It's nice to meet you," or "How do you do," in a strong clear voice.

Reinforce magic words. We've all been taught to say please, thank you, and excuse me, but sometimes we forget to use courteous words. Remind your children to say, "May I please" when asking for something and, "No, thank you" when declining an offer. Also, children should be taught to address adults with whom they are less familiar by their title, Mr., Mrs., Dr., Ms., and so on. As with all manners, this shows respect.

Last but not least, brush up on table manners. The table is where our manners are most on display and where people will judge our behavior. Tell your children to strive to be the guest who gets invited back. You can make it fun by dressing up and organizing a formal meal prior to the big event. Start by asking the children to come up with their own ideas as to what constitutes politeness. Then, break the family into two groups for role-play; hosts and guests. Better still, invite a couple of friends and practice with real guests.

The following tips will guide you through polite behavior at the table:

1. Except at a buffet, do not sit, put your napkin on your lap, or begin to eat before the host or guest(s) of honor. Guests do not leave the table to run around during the meal unless to use the restroom. During this time the napkin should be placed on the chair until you come back.
2. Explain the order of the place setting: BMW = bread, meal, water, and knives and spoons are always "right" and forks are "left" alone. Use the utensils on the outside first and work your way toward the plate as the courses are served. Once used, the utensils should not touch the table again.
3. Use a fork and knife to eat food unless it's meant for fingers. Cut only one piece of meat at a time.
4. When eating a roll, tear off and butter one bite-sized piece. It looks tacky to bite into a whole roll.
5. Sit straight and bend at the waist to bring your head over the plate. No elbows on the table! When not in use, your hands should be in your lap.
6. You look like a Neanderthal when you stuff your mouth or chew with your mouth open - you could also choke.
7. It's gross to hear loud munching and smacking noises coming from your lips.
8. Never say you don't like something or make rude comments about the food - it hurts the feelings of the person who either bought or prepared the food.
9. Don't reach across the table - politely ask that the item be passed to you.
10. Picking food out of your teeth, blowing your nose, and grooming yourself are meant to be done in private. Excuse yourself to go to the restroom to take care of personal hygiene.
11. Napkins are used to gently dab your mouth. At the end of the meal, place the napkin loosely to the left side of the plate where you found it - never on the dirty dishes.
12. Always show consideration and appreciation by using please and thank you. Remember to thank the host and say how much you enjoyed your meal or a particular part of the meal such as dessert.

Do you have an etiquette question you want Jill to answer in her monthly column? Email your question(s) to: information@DefiningManners.com or mail to: P.O. Box 1703, Shavertown, PA 18708.

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