

**Thanksgiving Etiquette Primer for Kids**  
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**Q: Thanksgiving's around the corner and I anticipate a couple of problems: Our families will arrive from out of town and because they haven't seen our children in a while, their manners will be under the magnifying glass, and our kids think that manners prohibit them from having fun. What advice can you offer that might help us from being embarrassed?**

A: Let's begin with the problem of your children's attitude. It is not unusual for parents to encounter resistance when they insist their children demonstrate good manners. After all, we are not born with manners; they have to be taught, modeled, and reinforced.

Training begins when you liken manners to a game; in order to play the game, you must first know the rules. Ask your children how they felt when they played a game and didn't know the rules. Associate manners with traffic signals; they help us to know how to behave and how to expect others to behave in any situation. We judge people by their behavior so if your children want to be the guest who's invited back they must first make a good impression.

Table manners, for instance, are designed to do two things: they keep us from grossing other people out and they help us from embarrassing ourselves. If friends come to the table with dirty hands, chew with their mouths open, eat with their elbows on the table, and make loud smacking noises with their lips, others will want to gag with disgust. On the other hand, if friends don't know the rules for napkins, when to start to eat, which bread plate and water glass is theirs, and how to properly eat with a knife and fork, they will feel embarrassed and won't have any fun at all.

Manners aren't old and stuffy rules. They are universal life skills that have been around since the early days of self-preservation. They help us to have positive relationships with other people such as when we meet and greet one another. Even the youngest child can learn to shake hands and say, "Hello, Aunt Sue," or "Hello, Mr. Smith."

Eye contact is a sign of respect in America yet many children have difficulty looking an adult in the eye when they speak. You can teach them an old trick; focus their attention on the secret spot on the forehead between the eyes - the adult will think that their social skills are brilliant.

In addition to talking about the importance of good manners, you can prepare your children in practical ways. Brief them on the "house rules" by describing what is expected when your guests arrive. Run through the details of the meal whether it's a sit-down or buffet affair. Explain important behaviors: say "Yes, please," and "No, thank you," when offers are made and pass food to the right instead of across the table. Assign age-appropriate duties before and after the meal.

Although our society has become increasingly casual and parents have less time to teach manners, possessing good social skills is still important because it allows everyone to relax and have fun without worrying that their behavior will offend others. With manners, practice makes perfect and persistence pays off!

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