

good manners

Be the Change

Christine Chen, contributing editor
www.gpprotocol.com

Across our country, a return to good manners is on the rise. Wait. Maybe I should say, a desire to see good manners is on the rise.

As the school year begins, parents are not only anxious for their children to be honor roll students, but they are eager to hear those wonderful words that every parent loves to hear: “Little Johnny is so polite and well behaved.”

How fitting that the month of September is National Children’s Good Manners Month. Can you just imagine what it would be like if children treated one another with respect? What if they treated their teachers with respect? The classroom environment sure would be more conducive to learning. Less disruptions. More teaching. Less bullying. More confidence. Less failure. More success.

Parents and teachers complain frequently about the behavior of children. However, I wonder if we, the adults, are modeling the good manners we want to see in children.

Do they see us yelling at the guy who just cut in front of us on the freeway? Are we talking poorly about the neighbor in front of our children? Do we answer them with sarcasm? Frustration? Impatience? Fred Astaire once said, “The hardest job kids face today is learning good manners without seeing any.”

Instead of a long list of things children should do, how about a list of things we, the adults, can do to be the example. How about we take Ghandi’s advise and “Be the change you want to see in others.”

So, in honor of National Children’s Good Manners Month, here’s some mannerly tips for parents and teachers. In fact, these tips are for any adult who has ever complained about poorly behaved children.



1. Be kind. Treat children with kindness. Treat them the way you would like them to treat you.
2. Be attentive. This is a hard one. After all, there's the television, laptop, cell phone, iPad, etc., etc., etc. The distractions are endless. Take some time every day to put everything aside and give your full attention to children. This means making eye contact, asking questions, and letting them know you are interested.
3. Be welcoming. Say hello to children just as you would to an adult. Say their name when saying hello or goodbye. Smile. Smile. Smile. Children see too many unhappy adults with gloomy faces. I'll say it again — smile.
4. Be compassionate. Show children what it means to help others by . . . helping others. Take them to soup kitchens to serve food. Find a humanitarian agency with a cause that is dear to you and allow your children to participate in helping. Visit the elderly in nursing homes or hospitals. Make meals for sick neighbors, church members, friends. Send a card to those who are sad, lonely, or sick. But, most importantly, don't forget to show compassion to the children right beside you. They will learn by your example and follow.
5. Be polite. How can we expect children to say "please, thank you, and you're welcome" when we don't say it to them?
6. Be thankful. Send thank you notes to children. Make sure you let them know how much you appreciated a gift, a kind word or action, or hard work.
7. Be helpful. Look for opportunities to help children, even if they aren't your own. Hold a door if they are carrying a heavy load. Help clean up an accident or mess without complaining. Too many times adults walk past a struggling child without noticing. Or worse, they shake their head or utter some insult about the accident or mess. Be observant and help.
8. Be apologetic. Say you're sorry to children when you make a mistake. We all make mistakes. Children easily forgive and appreciate it when adults acknowledge their own shortcomings or failures.
9. Be a role model. Treat all people with honor and respect. Don't talk about others in a mean or unkind way. Don't use inappropriate words or vulgar language. Think about others first.

Children are watching, listening, and absorbing all that we do and say. Yes, we need and should continue to teach them good manners. However, the best way to teach is to lead by example - at home and at school. Let's help our children (even if you don't have children) and "be the change we want to see in others."

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