



First impressions are important. As a parent you need to teach your child how to make a good impression. The key is etiquette for children.

Greetings: A proper greeting shows confidence and maturity. Teach your child to address people they meet by their title and name. Making eye contact is an important etiquette too. You can teach your child how to greet people by giving yourself a name and pretending to meet your child. Have your child practice saying, "Hello, Mr. Hansen," and looking you in the eye. Remind them that they need to use Mr., Mrs., or Ms. and not an adult's first name unless requested to use it.

Handshakes: In our society handshakes are used unlike the kisses that dominate European society. So it is an important etiquette for children to learn how to shake hands. Practice with your child so that they don't grip too hard (it's not a contest) or too soft (there should be some actual gripping) but right in between.

Please and Thank You: These two phrases are still valuable today and their use shows a person has manners more than anything else. In order to teach these words as a parent you must use them yourself (and remind your kids about a million times). Talk to your child about why please and thank you are important. Everyone likes to be appreciated and according to Emily Post saying, "'Please' can turn a demand into a request and indicates an option—it can turn an unpopular request into a more palatable one."

Excuse Me: This is a valuable phrase that is used too little. There are many other times when "excuse me" should be used. Such as when a person walks through a crowded room, bumps into someone, walks in front of someone, needs to leave a group, or needs to ask a question. Practice role-playing situations in which your child could use "excuse me."

Not Interrupting: Nothing shows bad manners more than a child who runs up to his parent in mid conversation and begins speaking. Teach your child that when you or anyone else is talking that they must wait until a break in the conversation before interrupting. Teach your child the right etiquette using a signal, such as raising one finger, to show that you acknowledge them and will listen in a moment. Then be sure to stop and listen to your child. I always remind parents that "the mother/father who invariably stops and says, 'What is it, dear?' when her daughter interrupts is helping her to establish a habit that will do her a disservice all her life."

And Thank You Notes:

Even though the majority of today's correspondence takes place electronically, handwritten thank-you notes are still a wonderful way to acknowledge a gift. Writing thank-you notes is a great activity to do with your child. Regardless of the reason for the note, you have the opportunity to spend some time together encouraging writing, and your child will learn an important etiquette skill that will serve him or her for a lifetime.

Together with your child ...

STEP 1

Spend a few minutes talking about the gift or the visit, and jot down some notes about what made it special. The book is about something you are really interested in. The sweater is the perfect color to go with your favorite pants. Anything that will make the note itself special, just like the gift or the visit.

STEP 2

Be sure you or your child has all the materials you need: notepaper, pen/pencil, envelope, the correct address and stamps. Variation: Have your child make plain thank-you notes more creative by adding his or her name or a fun drawing on the front and a personal message on the other side.

STEP 3

Optional: If you have a camera, take a picture of your child and the gift (Wearing the new sweater, playing ball with the mitt, or holding the book) and include it in the note. If the thank-you note is for a visit and you took pictures during the trip, give them to your child to send along with it. Be sure to write names and dates on the back of the photos.

STEP 4

For 4-6 year olds

Write a short note for your child based on Step 1—no more than two or three sentences. Read the note to your child. Then your child can decorate the note.

EXAMPLE: Dear Grandmother, Thank you for the sweater you sent me. Purple is my favorite color. I can't wait to see you. Love, Jaime

For 6-7 year olds

Write the letters with them; they can dictate what they want you to write. Then have them sign the note with their own handwritten "thank you" and their name.

TIP: Have your child read the note out loud so they can hear their written words—a satisfying experience in itself!

For 8-10 year olds

At this age, your child can write his or her own thank-you notes. If it's for a gift, you can participate by making suggestions of things to write. If the note is for a visit you made as a family, write your own thank-you note at the same time!

TIP: You might say, "You've mentioned several times to me that the sweater is the perfect color—you can tell Aunt Mary that also. It's really hard to pick colors for someone else and she'll be glad to hear it worked!"

STEP 5

Help with addressing the envelope, stamping it and making sure it gets into the mail.

TIP: Visit the Post Office with your child and let her/him pick some fun stamps.