

Manners in the 21st Century

The phrase “Children should be seen and not heard” dates back to 15th century England. Originally, it only applied to girls. In Victorian times, every facet of a child’s life was governed by the parents. Children were not allowed to speak in company, unless spoken to, they were expected to listen quietly and learn. Thankfully, these archaic rules no longer apply. We raise our children to be critical thinkers, to analyze, evaluate and question everything. In fact, children today have a voice.

In current times, certain rules of etiquette are still valid and unless children learn these behaviors, they will appear to be ill mannered and rude. Good manners are simple actions that help both children and adults to strengthen and build relationships. A well-mannered child is a confident child. They are generally liked by adults and their peers. They also become better leaders. Most children learn the basic fundamentals by age 5. They know to say “thank you” and “please.” They cover their mouths when coughing or sneezing, don’t talk with their mouths full, learn to wait for their turn and to share. They also know not to interrupt an adult when they are speaking, unless it’s important, and to say “excuse me” when they do interrupt. In elementary school there are lots of other behaviors that also need to be followed. For example, in the playground or waiting in line, shoving or cutting in front of someone is not acceptable; taking turns when playing sports; including everyone in a game and no teasing or being mean. Teachers always instill these rules but parents need to do the same. At restaurants, it can be very disturbing when a child is running around making noise, banging on the chair or leaning over to the other booth. When a parent ignores this behavior rather than letting the child know they are being impolite, they will continue to be a nuisance. Parents should tell their children that their behavior is not appropriate. If a parent has a child that ignores their request to behave, the alternative is to give choices. They can sit nicely at the table and eat their food or take the food to go and leave. Parents should be consistent and always praise a child for good behavior.

Children learn good manners by the example parents set. When parents are kind, caring and polite to others, generally their children are too. Parents are the first role models for their children and so should be aware of their behavior and the things that are said in front of a child. When a parent is a courteous driver, their child will grow up to be the same. If they spend all their time texting or talking on the phone when they are with their children, their children will do the same on their tablets. Respect for other, as well as oneself, is the core to good manners. Learning manners at an early age helps to prepare a child for school and beyond.

At Woodcrest School we teach our students good manners and respect for others. We discuss feelings and conflict resolution and also encourage our students to have positive attitudes.

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