



# Practica Program

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## Teaching Manners Practically

The first practical point to keep in mind, regardless of your child's age, is that there is no better way to raise polite children than by being polite yourself.

That naturally means saying please and thank you when you speak to your child, even when you give an instruction, for example, "Please come inside to wash your hands."

Greet your child(ren) and spouse warmly with a warm hello and good-bye when you enter and leave the house. And remember to say "excuse me" when a family member is standing in front of the refrigerator and thank you" after he or she has made way for you to open the door!

A great way to demonstrate gratitude and respect to a child is to sincerely thank your spouse in front of the kids for doing something, such as preparing a meal or taking the family out to see a movie. Insist that each child also give the deserving parent a big hug and a thank-you.

### 1 and 2 year olds:

#### Start with the basics.

Children typically learn to say please and thank you during the second year of life, as soon as they can say a few words.

When your child gestures or uses a word to indicate that he wants something, respond by saying the word + please.

For instance, if he says "juice", you can respond by saying "juice please".

Then, after handing him the juice, say "thank you". He is likely to soon start repeating what you say.

When he is used to the words, and asks for something without adding 'please', respond with a warm smile and say "juice p....." to encourage him to say 'please' before you get up to get the juice for him.

Then, when you hand him the juice, say "th...." with a look of anticipation on your face and don't let go before he says "thank you". Then smile approvingly and say "you're welcome!"

According to sign language trainer, Kim Taylor-DiLeva, you can use signs with your baby to help him begin implementing good manners when he is not yet physically able to say the words out loud.

To sign 'please' – rub your hand, flat, in circles on your chest. And to sign 'thank you', bring your hand to your chin and then bring it forward, in the direction of the person whom you are thanking. Kim explains that, since thank you is a directional sign, it should be directed toward the person for which it is meant.

Knowing these signs may also come in handy when your child is older, when you may need to remind him to say please and thank to guests behind their backs!

#### Sitting down at the table for dinner.

2 Year olds are rarely hungry on adult timetables and many of them find it very difficult to sit at the table watching other people eat when they want to move around.

If your child isn't able to wait for dinner until the grown-ups sit down at the dinner table, by all means give him a healthy snack at 4 o'clock and encourage him to eat with the family.

However, it is the rare toddler who can wait until 7 pm for dinner, so it may be a good idea to feed him his dinner when he needs it, and then let him sit at the dinner table for 5 minutes with the rest of the family at dinner time with something enjoyable such as yoghurt or cut up fruit to eat.

Make sure to focus on your toddler and talk about specific things that happened with him that day for the 5-10 minutes that he is sitting at the dinner table to demonstrate the social side of having dinner together.

No matter whether he is sitting in his high chair, or at the dinner table at dinner time, encourage him to use his spoon more often, instead of using his hands to eat, as he nears the 21 month mark.

He is also old enough to be reminded that food is for eating and not for throwing, and he can learn to use a napkin to wipe his face when you prompt him.

You can expect your child to make a mess at this age as he is naturally still practising his hand-eye coordination skills. Also, allowing him to touch and handle his food will give him the opportunity to explore different food textures, smells and tastes. Do not, however, allow him to make a huge mess for the sake of making a mess. If he wants to stay at the table after he has finished eating, it will probably be wise to remove his left-over food and offer him a toy instead.

Be as specific as you can when you praise your child, saying things like, "What a good job you did eating with your spoon tonight."

#### Greeting politely.

A 2 year old can learn to say "hello" when arriving for visits or meeting new people and "goodbye" when it's time to go.

As explained in the Practica Parent's Guide, you can help to prepare him for visits by

playing a game where you pretend to visit a series of dolls stuffed animals. They quickly learn to say "hello" and "goodbye" at the beginning and end of each little pretend visit.

Don't be disappointed if your toddler is still too shy to get the words out when he is dealing with real people, but nonetheless go through the social ritual when you arrive at a friend's home and when you leave – even if you have to say the words on your child's behalf, as this prepares him for learning to introduce himself when he is older.

You can try to prepare him for what's coming when you're on your way to a friend by saying: "When we get to Aunt Mary, we're going to say Hi! and give her a hug!"

Also keep in mind that many adults, who don't deal with toddlers every day, may unintentionally practically ignore your child when the two of you arrive and focus all their attention on you. Don't hesitate to say, "Mary, we're learning to say Hello and Goodbye. Will you help us practice?"

#### Learning to play nicely.

Toddlers often have more fun playing with older children that are about 3-4 years old. They generally love to play with "babies" and they usually have more self-control, they can use their words, and they are far better at sharing and taking turns than other toddlers.

However, when you do have other toddlers over, keep in mind that the success of the play date will depend on your willingness to supervise them attentively.

One strategy that may prevent conflict to a certain degree is to invest in a special toy box for play dates, in which you can keep at least 2 of every kind of toy.

Lay down a few simple ground rules:

(1) If there is a favourite one-person toy, everybody takes a turn with it. (2) Nobody gets to decide how somebody else plays with a toy, as long as the toy is not being damaged. (3) No hitting, grabbing or throwing toys or anything else at other people.

Respond decisively by giving clear warnings when needed and follow through. If necessary, remove toys that cause problems and change the scene by going outside or to another room.

Don't forget to praise your child for showing good manners, and remember to be specific, for example, "It was nice of you to let John sit in your tent."

## 3 and 4 year olds:

\*Teach good manners at home and stick to these guidelines when you are not at home. If you back down in public you will be sending mixed signals to your child. However, try not to embarrass him by pointing out mistakes in front of other people. If his behaviour is really offensive in a public place, take him to the rest room and have a quiet but serious talk. If possible, ask for your bill in a restaurant when you place the order, so that you can leave straight away when you need to.

\* Give consequences. When your child acts up in a way that you can't ignore, you may have to threaten consequences and carry them through if necessary. So if he keeps banging on a drum when adults are talking, say you'll take it away if he continues and then do it.

### Don't interrupt.

You can teach your 3 year old to tap your leg or put his hand on your arm when he wants to speak to you while you are mid-sentence with somebody else. Put your free hand over his to re-assure him that you know that he wants to say something and that he is waiting his turn to speak to you.

If he is not in some kind of distress, he can only benefit from learning to wait 5-10 minutes.

### Basic table manners:

You can now expect your child to grasp that there are rules called "manners" that everybody follows.

Help him to practice sitting up straight without squirming on his seat, without kicking against the legs of the table for ten minutes or even longer. Try to be light hearted and positive about the challenge.

Be careful not to be so rigid that your child feels as if you're watching and judging his every move, but do lay out a few basic requirements that apply to anybody who sits down to eat. For instance, hats off at the table, no toys on the table, no grabbing food off other people's plates, making rude comments about food, blowing noses in napkins, and so forth.

He is now also able to use a napkin and eat from a spoon or fork correctly. He can drink from a cup neatly, chew with his mouth closed, refrain from talking with food in his mouth, and ask to be excused from the table. He can also tolerate having some of everything served on his plate, although he may not eat it at all!

He is also old enough to help lay the table before dinner, do his part as you clear the table afterwards and thank whoever has prepared the meal.

### Party manners:

Your child is now capable of understanding and respecting the basic concepts – not to go for the pile of gifts if he isn't the party boy, and so forth.

When it is his party, make sure that he knows how to receive gifts graciously. You could role-play some scenarios he might encounter at a party. Pretend you're the host and ask your child to greet you politely, shaking your hand. Practice giving a gift and saying 'you're welcome', as well as receiving a gift and saying 'thank you'.

If he is a picky eater, let him practice saying "I'm not really fond of eggplant, thank you" or whatever you think would be appropriate in your family and culture when he is offered a food he won't eat.

Make sure that you praise his efforts and don't get too upset about small mistakes.

The time spent on these kinds of interactions between you and your child is just as important for building a relationship as it is for learning manners, so try to keep the experience upbeat and positive.

### Saying I'm sorry.

As parents we instinctively prompt our children to say that they're sorry when they've insulted or hurt somebody in some way, by for instance grabbing a toy, or hitting another child. On the flip-side, we would like to see them extend forgiveness when somebody else begs them for their forgiveness.

Just as children learn about respect by being respectful, they learn about being humble and admitting that they have made a mistake by actually doing it.

Most children aren't able to say "I'm sorry" and mean the words before they're 7 to 8 years old. So while your child is still far from reaching that milestone, you will need to help him to understand WHY he needs to say the words whenever a situation asks for it – or else the words are going to be empty and he isn't going to learn anything from the experience.

You can do this by describing the other child's feelings, for example, "Jason, see how sad Andrew is because you took his toy? I think you should give his toy back and say that you're sorry to help him feel better."

It will help a great deal if you, as a parent, are generally willing to admit your mistakes and say "I'm sorry" to your child when you have, for instance, lost your temper with him or accidentally knocked over a tower of blocks that he has built.

Everyone makes mistakes and it's important for him to learn that even a clever and (to him!) invincible parent can make a mistake and say sorry without the world coming to an end.

### Expressing anger inappropriately:

When your 3 to 4 year old hurls an insult at you like "You're stupid!", you can react by saying "I don't speak to you like that and I will not have you speak to me like that".

Then remove him from the social circle for 3-4 minutes, depending on how old he is and explain that he can't be around people if he doesn't talk to people nicely.

### Nice words:

By age 4, most kids can remember to say please and thank-you appropriately in many situations, though not always. They also often remember to say "excuse me" after burps and "hello" and "goodbye" to parents, friends and teachers, without being prompted – but again – don't be too upset if they forget from time to time. Rome wasn't built in a day.

## 5 and 6 year olds:

### Table manners:

Your child can now place the napkin in his lap and sit politely at the table when company comes to dinner.

He is also old enough to refrain from shovelling food, putting his elbows on the table, waving knives and forks in the air when talking, chewing with his mouth open and complaining about what he is served.

Practice going out to eat by preparing a special dinner every now and then, lighting candles, put flowers on the table and pretend that you are in a restaurant. Make a list beforehand of all the good manners that you would like to see that evening and reward your child in some way for the ones that he remembers.

Also discuss how mealtimes at home are different from dinners in restaurants: they are generally more relaxed, voices can rise and fall, you eat what's being served rather than ordering, and family members clear their own plates from the table.

One thing that mealtimes at home have in common with restaurant dinners is that courtesy and nice conversation is important in both places. In fact, now is the time to teach your child how to have pleasant conversations at the dinner table.

Be careful not to turn your family dinner into a battle zone by seizing the opportunity to lecture to your child about his bad behaviour at school or his messy room.

Rather practise asking each other questions about things that happened during the day and focus on letting each other feel appreciated. Deal with bad behaviour at another time and place.

### Everyday manners:

A child of this age is capable of learning to show any of the manners in your culture and family that you may see as important.

There are so many to choose from, that we've decided to make a list for your convenience and post it as the parents' article for May 2010.