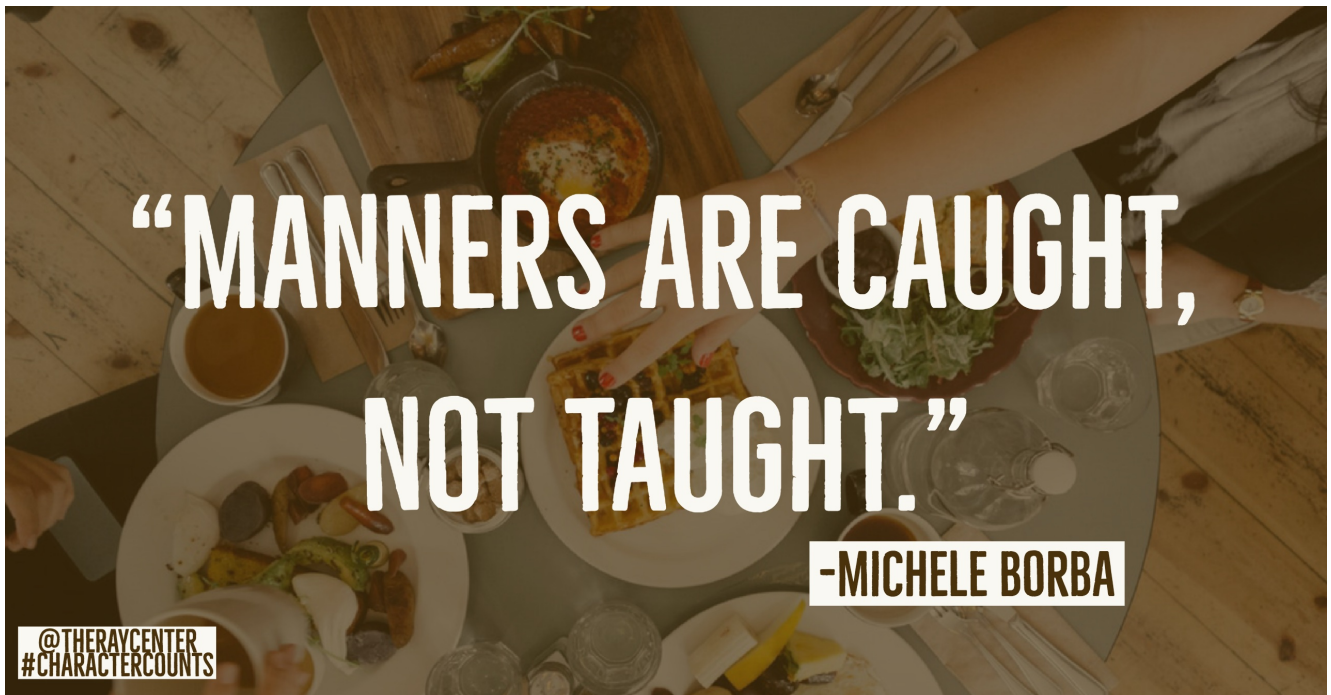


The “manner tune-up” for kids



From our guest contributor, Michele Borba

Parenting advice to boost our children's civility and teach manners in a sometimes ill-mannered world

Make no mistake: courtesy does enhance our kids' chances of success! Using good manners will enhance your child's reputation in all arenas—home, school, and the community. Scores of studies find that well-mannered children are more popular and do better in school. Notice how often they're invited to others' homes? Kids like to be around kids who are nice. Listen to teachers speak about them using such positive accolades. Courteous children also have an edge later in life: the business world clearly tells us their first interview choices are those applicants displaying good social graces. They also get more “second” job interviews, and usually even the job. You just can't help but react positively to people who are polite and courteous. By prioritizing polite behaviors with our children, we can enhance their social competence and give them a big boost towards success.

Parenting Solutions to Enhance Social Graces

All three of my sons attended a wonderful cooperative nursery school led by an incredibly caring teacher, Jeanette Thompson. The very first impression I had of the school was how well-mannered the children were. And, through the years as I put in my “coop” hours, I understood why her students were so polite: Mrs. Thompson never taught manners at a special time, instead she taught students manners all day long through her own example. Every sentence she ever uttered contained the word “please,” “thank you,” or “excuse me.” It was impossible for her students not to be polite. She used to always tell the moms, “Manners are caught, not taught.”

Was Mrs. Thompson ever right! I also learned an important secret from my children’s teacher: The first step to teaching kids good manners is to make sure you model them yourself. Amen!

Disrespect, poor character, and diminishing moral intelligence are increasing. Here are a few solutions to enhance good social graces in your children and give them that edge for a better life based on Mrs. Thompson’s strategies of raising a well-mannered child.

1. Stress Courtesy

Good manners are among the simplest skills to teach children because they are expressed in just a few very specific behaviors. We can instantly point out good or poor manners to our kids: “Wow, nice manners! Did you notice the smile on Grandma’s face when you thanked her for dinner?” or “Eating before waiting for the others to sit down wasn’t polite,” We can modify our children’s manners: “Next time, remember to say ‘Excuse Me’ when you walk in front of someone.” And we can always tune them up: “Before you ask for the dish, say “Please.”

2. Point Out the Value of Manners

Discuss with your children the value of good manners. You might say, *"Using good manners helps you gain the respect of others. It's also a great way to meet new friends. Polite people just make the world a kinder place."* Once kids understand the impact good manners have on others, they're more likely to incorporate courtesy in their own behavior.

3. Teach A Manner A Week

When my children were young I taught them a jingle, "Hearts, like doors, will open with ease, if you learn to use these keys." We'd then print a manner a week on a large paper key and tape it on our kitchen door as a reminder. Every child in the neighborhood could recite not only our jingle, but name the manners that are the "keys to opening hearts." It helped me recognize "catching new manners" doesn't happen overnight: it takes consistent effort to enhance them in our kids. How about teaching a "Manner a Week?" Write the manner on an index card, post it on your refrigerator, and then hold a contest to see how many times family members hear another member use the word. Here's a few to get you started: *"Please., Thank you., May I?, Excuse me, I'm sorry., Pardon me., I'm glad to meet you., You go first., May I introduce...? Please pass...,* "Just remember that the best way for kids to learn a new skill is through seeing the skill and then practicing it. So do the manner with your child – or as a family, and then provide fun ways to practice, practice, practice until the manner becomes a habit!

4. Correct Impoliteness Immediately

Use the 3 Bs of Discipline: When your child uses an impolite comment, immediately correct the behavior by using the three "Bs" of discipline: "Be Brief, Be Private so no one but you and your child is aware you're correcting your child, and Be Specific." "Starting your dinner without waiting first for

Grandma to sit down, was impolite. Being polite means always respecting older people."Waiting for the right time when only your child can hear your correction, preserves dignity but still lets a child know behavior is unacceptable.

5. Acknowledge Politeness ASAP

Please also remember to point out the moment your child uses those manners and let him know you appreciate his efforts. The quickest way to shape behavior is by pointing out the moment a child does the action the right way."Thank you for using your polite voice! Did you notice the big smile on Grandma's face?" "You waited for everyone to sit at the table before you started to eat. So polite! Thank you!"

6. Practice Manners

A friend of mine who really wanted to make sure her children "caught good manners" started a unique family tradition: Once a month, she asks her children to help her plan a party. The children plan the menu, set their table—with only their "company dishes"—arrange a centerpiece of hand-picked flowers, and then sit in their "Sunday best."The party is just for their family, and it's the time my friend helps her children practice table manners such as "please pass," "thank you," "May I be excused?" (as well keeping your napkin on your lap, chewing with your mouth closed, waiting for others to speak, and learning which fork to use with each course).Yes, it takes a lot of work, but she swears it's worth it, especially when so many people comment on how well-behaved her children are.

7. Identify the Underlying Cause of Your Child's Incivility

If your child has a more serious case of rudeness, then it's time to dig deeper and discover the reason. Here are the most common reasons kids backslide in the manners department (and if you notice any of these issues in your home it's time to roll up those sleeves and do some serious manner teaching) Manners not modeled or prioritized at home; Impolite

peers or adults are being imitated; Music, movies, or TV that flaunt rudeness are having a bad influence; You're allowing her to get away with it; Fatigue, stress or illness; Testing the limits; Never taught particular etiquette skills. What's your best guess? Fix it! Good manners do not develop naturally but instead are the result of considerable effort, patience, and diligent training. There's no way around it. So keep encouraging your child's efforts and teaching new manner skills until you get the results you hope for. And don't settle for less. Please! It's our best hope for a civilized, well-mannered world!



Dr. Michele Borba is an educational psychologist, parenting expert, TODAY show contributor and author of 22 books including *The Big Book of Parenting Solutions: 101 Answers to Your Everyday Challenges and Wildest Worries* and *UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World*.

Check out: micheleborba.com or follow her on Twitter @micheleborba.

Learn more about character education.