



# Practica Program

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## Manners PLEASE!

### Parents may wonder:

• If good manners are essentially an expression of respect towards other people, and most children don't really understand what the concept of "respect" is before they are 7-8 years old, why start teaching a baby to treat other people with respect from around his first birthday?

• With 2-year olds being as difficult as they are, why add oil to the proverbial fire by introducing table manners and encouraging a child of that age to greet people and parrot "please" and "thank-you" at appropriate times? Why can't parents just focus on setting a good example and wait for their child to discover the value of being considerate in his own good time? What's the value of a "thank you" and "excuse me" from the mouth of a toddler if he is too young to understand WHY he says the words?

### Here are some answers:

#### 1. Acting respectfully leads to being respectful.

Parents, who put manners on hold until a child is old enough to develop his own convictions about the matter, usually quickly discover that this parenting philosophy has its own challenges. It is very difficult for the parents themselves, as well as for friends and family, to act as if a child is a joy and a blessing if he is allowed to behave like a self centred little dictator – no matter how understanding they try to be.

The development of a child's personality cannot be put on hold. No matter how young he is, the way in which people react to him continually shapes the way in which he perceives himself and the world. If people are constantly irritated and annoyed in your child's company, he will come to view himself as "irritating" and learn that the world is cold and unwelcoming.

On the other hand, approving smiles, appreciative looks and positive comments from parents and other people have an almost miraculously positive impact on a child's developing self concept.

It therefore makes good sense to teach a child to be pleasant and courteous to people – even before he understands the abstract concept of "respect" that should ideally underlie these actions.

Then, by the time he is old enough to truly understand what respect means, he will have 3 good reasons to develop his own positive convictions about it and embrace: (1) he has been treated with respect within his own family and social circle many times before and knows that it feels good, (2) he has treated other people with respect many times before and knows that it makes them feel good as well, and (3) he is used to think of himself as a "nice boy" anyway and being "respectful" is just a more grown-up way of looking at it!

#### 2. Good manners help to pave the way for a higher EQ.

Just like a child can be born with a remarkable musical aptitude, which may never be realized due to a lack of opportunities, one can also be born with the potential to develop a high emotional intelligence (EQ) and never reach this potential due to a lack of guidance.

One of the most important components of EQ is a person's ability to effectively "read" what other people are feeling and respond accordingly.

Since having good manners is in essence about being sensitive to the needs and feelings of other people, teaching manners is a wonderfully practical way to help your child develop his emotional intelligence.

So, when your child wipes his mouth on the tablecloth, you can remind him to use his napkin and make sure to add, "The reason why we wipe our mouths on napkins is because we want to keep the table looking nice and clean for all the other people that are also eating."

Another example would be when your child interrupts you while you're on the phone. Say, "You're interrupting. It's Granny on the phone. Mommy loves Granny. I need to speak to her. You'll have to wait for a while." Then continue talking for 5-10 minutes unless your child is not in some kind of danger or physical distress.

No child can develop exceptional social skills without learning somewhere along the way that his own feelings and needs are very important, but not more important than the feelings and needs of the other people in his world.

#### 3. Manners teaches self-control, which leads to success.

Dr Walter Mischel studied hundreds of 4 year olds. Each child got a turn to be left alone in a room with a one-way mirror for 15-20 minutes with a marshmallow on a plate in front of him or her.

He explained to the child that he needed to run an errand. The child could eat the one marshmallow, or wait for Dr Mischel to return, after which he would be rewarded with an extra marshmallow.

Only 1/3 of the children were able to wait.

Follow-up studies revealed that, by the time these kids graduated from high school, they scored far higher on achievement tests. They also dealt with stress better and were more popular with their peers.

Researches now know that there is an area in the brain called the "dorsal fronto-medial cortex" that is situated just above and between the eyes, which is responsible for a person's ability to exercise self-control. And although this is one of the last regions in the brain to mature, its wiring starts at a very young age.

The more your child uses this region in his brain, even when he is only a toddler, the more densely it will be wired. In other words, the more your child gets the opportunity to practice his ability to exert self-control, the easier it becomes!

Luckily, we don't need to start boot camps for toddlers! Dr Daniel Goleman, who developed the concept of *Emotional Intelligence*, says that parents can help a child develop self-control by doing nothing more than being good parents.

Instead of leaving it up to the kids to figure out for themselves how they should behave, parents should be present to direct and influence their children's behaviour.

According to Dr Goleman, examples of how this can be done is to consistently say "no" to your little one when he lunges for the dog's food or a paring knife; encourage him to try again when he is being frustrated by a challenging task, and remind him to mind his manners in various situations.

The reason why a parent's reminders eventually become internalized is that it is literally wired into the child's brain over time. "Habits shape character and character determines destiny." That's one reason why spending time with a child is such a great investment!