

How did this four year old develop such polite social skills? A few days later I ran into her grandmother downtown. We both walked into the same store. As we entered, the first thing grandma did was call out to the shopkeeper, "Hi, How ya doin'?" She had the exact neighborly inflection as Veronica.

Yes, a socially skilled elder had shown the mannerly way by example. This helped Veronica participate more fully in her community. And yes, her good manners were commented upon. Respectful behavior is rarely taken for granted, especially in children.

There are many other ways to nurture kids' manners. When you invite children over to play with your child, provide enough toys to share easily; too few fuels conflict. If tug-of-wars do erupt, be on hand to help children problem solve. That may mean breaking a crayon in half to share or finding a new way to play the same game. Of course, it's normal for children to have spats from time to time. After the tense feelings subside, help children think of ways to make amends. Perhaps that is saying they are sorry, but not always. Actions can speak louder than words. Sometimes amends can be made by drawing a friend a picture, or giving them a flower — or even a hug. And if a toy has been broken, repairing or replacing the toy is a very mannerly, responsible gesture.

Reinforcement and encouragement are valuable teaching tools.

Whenever children are helped by someone, coach them in politeness. Remind them that people feel appreciated when thanked, whether with gestures or gifts. Social graces also take root when children send thank you pictures and cards to those who have been kind to them.

Teach children to respect neighbors' property. If a child wants an apple from the tree next door, require them to ask for permission. Before they cut through a neighbor's yard, have them ask if it's okay.

Home celebrations for relatives or friends provide teachable moments for manners, too. Children can easily learn to be gracious hosts. Explain that people feel welcomed when we make preparations ahead of time for them. What kinds of preparations would the kids like to make? Help children anticipate their guests' needs. For instance, who should greet guests? How will guests know where to put their coats? What kind of food or games might their guests like?

The routine of meals together around a table provides many opportunities for kids to practice social graces. Create a meal-time atmosphere that allows conversation. It strengthens family relationships and develops manners children will put to good use when dining at a restaurant or friend's house.

Of course, teaching basic table manners is an ongoing experience at meals. Calmly remind kids you'll listen when they don't have food in their mouths. If your child points and grunts at food, matter-of-factly say, "Please tell me what you'd like and I'll pass it." If a child demands peas by yelling, candidly reply you're more eager to help when asked to pass food in a courteous voice.

Reinforcement and encouragement are valuable teaching tools. When a child is mannerly, comment on the specific behavior you want to encourage. When your child gives a helping hand, compliment their cooperation: "How courteous of you to hold the door open when I bring in groceries. Thanks, hon."

When children help with household chores, such as fixing supper, acknowledge their contribution. Express your appreciation when your child waits patiently after you've asked them not to interrupt a conversation.

Through these everyday experiences, children will gradually learn respectful manners — and many other wonderful traits will surface as well such as: kindness, helpfulness, patience, cooperation, thoughtfulness, politeness, consideration, honesty, altruism, graciousness, compassion, empathy, and gentleness. Together they'll combine to give your child the skills necessary to participate more easily in family life and the life of the larger community.

For More Information...

about creative parenting ideas, check out the Parenting Exchange Library at www.ChildCareExchange.com.

■ ***Friendship Category*** • *Social Skills Kids Need to Make and Keep Friends*

• *Ways to Nurture Children's Friendships*

• *Empathy Paves the Way to Children's Friendship Skills*

■ ***Diversity Category*** • *Help Kids by Role Modeling Respect for Diversity*

— Additional resources available in Article Archives at www.ChildCareExchange.com —

- *Minding Our Manners ... An Early Childhood Approach* by Jerry Parr
- *From a Parent's Perspective: Do Manners Matter?* by Roslyn Duffy
- *Supportive Social Learning* by Ellen Hall and Jennifer Kofkin Rudkin
- *Respect Is a Verb: Help Children Put It Into Practice* by Karen Stephens

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