

NOTHING'S FINER

THAN A FINE YOUNG DINER

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Ask kids for an example of a good manner and most of the time, they will cite a table manner: "Chew with your mouth closed." "No elbows on the table while eating." "Don't play with your food."

I've heard them all. So have your sons and daughters. Then why, oh why, Dear God of All Things Delicious, do they make us repeat ourselves seemingly every night at the dinner table?





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Based on my experience in teaching youth etiquette for the last six years, it seems that dining behavior is the area of etiquette that causes the greatest angst for parents. It is the one that is the focus of most threats and nags. It is often painful; and why wouldn't it be? We eat three meals a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year, plus snacking in between!

You get my point: We eat A LOT in our lifetime, leading to plenty of opportunities to shine or be considered lack-luster when it comes to culinary couch. Have no fear, parents! I am here to report that there is wonderful news when it comes to teaching table manners to the junior members of your household.

Unlike other areas of etiquette that are gray and situational, relying on social graces, good judgment and experience, the majority of table manners are black and white. Everything is easily teachable: Forks to the left, knives and spoons to

the right. You are not making it up as you go along based on the situation. Many of the "rules" have been around since the Middle Ages, some much more recent, such as during the times of French King Louis XIV.

Here are a few tips to prepare your child to be a dashing and delightful diner throughout the ages at a variety of venues:

Start early. Good table manners start when children are old enough to listen and eat independently, around age 3. Previous to this age, you are building a foundation.

Play. Yes, play. It's how little ones learn. Play tea party. Play "Grandma is coming to dinner." Play "Please set the table for me because I just got home from work late and I'm trying to get dinner made." No one ever said that learning manners can't be fun. Having good manners makes you more fun to be around because you are relaxed and comfortable.

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Be realistic. Don't expect more of your child than they are developmentally ready to digest. On the other hand, don't have low expectations for their table manners. This is especially true for the tweens and teens. You should have high expectation of them at the table. What you're seeing at this stage will not magically take care of itself without an intervention.

Start at home. I don't recommend taking your 3-year-old to savor gastronomic grandeur at Paris's Le Meurice Restaurant. You're setting your child and you up for dinner disaster. What may seem like a neat adventure to get dressed up and go out will soon end in frustration and a lot less money in your bank account.

Model. Your job is to model desired behavior at the table. (Not to say that all undesirable behaviors your kids demonstrate come from you. They do pick up a few tricks at school. The cafeteria is the epitome of a feeding frenzy.)

NO tacit approval. When you don't speak up and redirect or correct behaviors, what you are basically saying without words is "It's OK." So they

do it again. As with all matters in the parenting world, consistency is key.

Reminders required. OK. The youth might call this nagging versus reminding, but if there's no redirection, there's no connection. It's our job as parents to be considered nags at some point.

Exposure is critical. If you never go out to eat, don't expect your sons and daughters to know what do to when you do venture out. We are our experiences, so ensure your child has experiences that will allow them to act appropriately according to their age and the life you lead.

Whether your age is 4 or 74, proper behavior at the table makes life more enjoyable. When you have the pleasure of teaching these important life skills to your kids or grandkids starting at a young age, know that you are making their lives better. Just think of the conversations and events that occur around the kitchen table or in a restaurant in one's lifetime! When you know how to act, you become more confident and comfortable, allowing the true you to shine through at mealtime!

TOP TABLE MANNERS KIDS OF ALL AGES MUST KNOW:

- The host rules. If in doubt, follow your host's lead.
- Napkins go on your lap while eating. Place on the chair when you must excuse yourself and to the left side of your plate when everyone at the table is done eating.
- Forks will always be on your left, knives and spoons to the right. If a spoon and/or fork are placed above your place setting, it means dessert will be served. Yippee!
- Unless you are eating a finger food, your fingers should never touch the food. Use your knife to help you get the last few grains of rice onto your fork.
- Never rest your used utensils on the table. They should rest on your plate.
- No licking fingers or utensils. Ever. (Yuck and ouch.)
- "No thank you" is always en vogue. Not "Yuck." Not "Eww." Not "I don't like that." Just a simple, "No thank you."
- Pass, don't reach, and use those magic words often!



Etiquette For Everyday — Kelly Frager is the owner of Etiquette for Everyday and is a Certified Etiquette Instructor through the International School of Protocol. Kelly truly enjoys raising awareness about how we can treat each other with kindness, courtesy and respect. She loves building individual confidence by discussing courteous and civil ways to handle situations that range from the playground to the dinner table to the boardroom. Find her at etiquetteforeverday.com.