

Chapter 1

Simple Manners of Life

Taking care of our children is far more complicated than we can ever imagine. Instilled virtues in a child are like drops of water in an ocean—the ocean is made up of countless drops of water, just as a child is made up of many distinct characteristics that are embodied within them. Using your skills in order to have better relationships with your children and helping them to discover the “ocean of life” is a precious gift.

To start, many get this first part right but not the second: if you want your feelings to be respected by your children, respect your children’s feelings. And if you want your children to express themselves appropriately and accurately, you must do the same.

And that’s what we’ll talk about throughout this book. Our responsibility as parents. In a time where every child is given a trophy for participating, we have to let them understand what it feels like to lose. To understand that you can’t win them all is more than a saying.

Still, children have to be nurtured, cherished, and encouraged with positive discipline techniques at home. Parents must teach their children skills and impart knowledge to them to help them live, function and cooperate with others. In the pages ahead, we’ll look at techniques geared towards doing just that.

Parents have a difficult task today. You used to be able to just bark orders but we know now that this just isn't good enough. It was a product of the times but it just wasn't productive. How do we find that balance between showing them the coldness of the real world—just enough to prepare them—without them looking at us as cold for the rest of their lives?

I want you to promise yourself to read these pages with an open mind. What works, keep. What doesn't, lose. I want you to think of me as a friend who's been there trying to help you do better. Sometimes I will be stern, but sometimes friends have to be. But let's agree on one thing right now: we can't settle for being our child's friend. They will likely have many friends in this life—but only two parents, if that. Let's stay their parents, even if it means they'll sometimes dislike us for it.

Especially in today's world, this parenting theory works: When children are having a good time, they tend to get along with others and interact pleasantly with their families. When children love their home, they don't usually forget to show their family love. They find peace within their own family and are able to express those sentiments. You'll often hear the parent say, "I'm not here to entertain you." Not every second, but, yes, in many ways, you are. But not by juggling knives, but by applying momentum to their lives.

I'm about to hit you, rapid fire, with some key examples. When the day starts, you should only have to call your children once. They are capable of jumping out of bed, washing, and brushing, all with happy faces. No fussing! At the table, children should talk about pleasant or unpleasant things they've done throughout their day—they are capable of and should be able to communicate to you. They should not talk with their

mouth full or drink when they still have food in their mouth. They should wait until their parents finish talking or if they want something then say “please” or “thank you.” Their voice should not rise above their parents. If the children want to leave the table, they should ask to be excused. When playing with their siblings or friends, they should take turns; follow the rules of the games instead of changing it just to win. They should learn to share. They should not whine or cry just to get everything their own way. Children are always claiming things to be their own. If they don’t get what they want, they whine, shout, scream, yell, and grab and push things everywhere. They smash, rip, and ruin to comfort themselves and become happy. They want to destroy everything to get their own way!

They always feel that they’re right. But who teaches them to be this way?! None other than the parents. Are you setting the tone or are you a victim of theirs? Though children are not the indentured servants to parents that they once were, one thing is clear. We lead and they should follow.

If we’re going to help our kids, the first thing we need to do is use the M-word. That’s right, I’m talking about manners. As so often happens, society overcompensates to right a wrong. Children were once to be seen but not heard—now all they are sometimes is heard. They walk to their parent’s room when doors are closed without knocking. They turn on the TV without supervision of the parents. They turn the volume loud while ignoring the other people around them. They burp, cough, sneeze, and yawn without saying “excuse me.” This is not their fault—it’s ours. We have to mandate these manners early, have consequences when they’re not used and show them the benefits that come with it.

But it's not as easy as this thanks to a little thing called technology. While the Internet and cell phones have been some of the greatest inventions of the last 20 years, they've also been a huge threat to manners. It's not even as easy as telling them not to use either, because one is used for schoolwork and the other may save them if a stranger comes near them or if they find themselves somehow lost. But it's often not the answer to take something away, anyway. Like any new piece to the puzzle, it's up to us to embrace how something helps and avoid how it holds us back. We start with the Internet—there needs to be ground rules on how much time can be spent on it. They may have work but I doubt it involves all the video games they're playing. Though they may hate you for limiting this invention, children learn more from other people than screens. For the phone, you must teach them to put it away when someone is talking to them, that it can't be a part of the dinner table, that it's not a substitute for family time. But this must be done by example. You must choose which calls are important and which can wait until after you finish helping your child with their homework. Maybe that Facebook picture update really can wait until after the weekend. We'd love to blame kids for the lack of manners but adults are running a close second, if not out in front. We may tell ourselves that what we're doing is important but don't children think the same thing?

Maybe the most important sign of manners is having empathy. Children are incredibly honest and that's why you'll hear so many say, "I don't care." The problem isn't that they've said it—the problem is they feel that way. Really assess your child and see if they can feel other's pain and want to make it better. If they can sense sadness and want to listen. The worst manners come from the inability to ever see the world from

another's perspective or empathize with what they're going through. Teach a child to show true caring and they're less likely to find themselves alone.

We tend to surround ourselves with those who make us feel better—why wouldn't we?

Chapter 2

Communications

Communication has nothing to do with talking--It is the ability to act strongly in response to a child's behavior. Children should listen to you without wasting your energy and time. You must create a fun, happy, and healthy environment but you have to let them know that you're their parent first—their authority—and their friend second. If they can't decipher between parent and friend then choose to just be their parent.

It is not necessary to talk; you can communicate in the way you look, smile, or sit. Absolutely no need to raise your voice! Be a great receptor to your child so they can feel close to you. Yes, it's true. You do communicate with your body language; you exercise this to show that I am clear!

But words have their place, too.

When your child talks, try not to interrupt them unless it's necessary. Let them finish completely what they have to say to give them a feeling of trust towards you but also to help them develop their thinking skills. We should treat our children like they're children, but respect them as if they're their own person—because, guess what, they are! Even when calling out their names, call them out appreciatively. We can unfortunately turn our children's names into four-letter words, using them only when angry, making

them jump at the sound of our voice instead of being open. While they talk, present a smile and look into their eyes, showing that you understand them. It shows that you respect what they have to express. In this way, you also show that you are supportive and respectful during your communication.

It's key to encourage children to try to communicate better. The saying goes that "children say the darnedest things," sometimes that's because they're honest but sometimes it's because they still don't know how to put something the right way. Know the difference between a lack of tact and them just figuring it out—and don't discourage them when it's the latter. Communication comes from making mistakes along the way, from practicing, and that can't happen if they end up feeling subconscious. When they make a mistake in their communication, take the time to explain the better way to say it and do it in a complimentary way. You can say something like, "What you said was very close but what you probably meant to say was this..." Also, know when to let a correction go. If you correct all the time, they'll start to shut out what you're trying to teach them or even just be quiet because they don't want a constant lecturer. Like everything in life, you need to choose your battles.

Another aspect to teaching communication is for them to understand what children aren't allowed to say. They tend to mimic adults, especially their parents, but the problem is that what may be appropriate for an adult to say may not be for a kid.

Communication, on average, becomes easier for girls than boys so don't be disappointed if the latter isn't able to always give you the level of conversation you'd like. Be patient and remember to think of them on their level. Many times we expect them to talk like us but communication can be among the hardest skills to master growing

up. Just think about the varying in ages when children begin to talk—some just after they've turned one, others not until three!

More than anything, don't ignore communication as an important skill. How many people have we helped simply because they were able to communicate their feelings well. Or how someone can command an audience just with this ability, even if the actual content of what they're saying, if you really think about it, isn't even all that incredible. In the age of the Internet, cell phones and email, the ability to communicate has that much more effect on our relationships, how well we'll do professionally, practically everything we do.