

How can I help my child to develop manners?

The best way to encourage a toddler to behave nicely is to model good manners.

Starting early with please and thank you and offering praise for your child's good manners when he demonstrates them will go a lot further than punishment for his failures.

Saying thank you

To expect a toddler to incorporate manners flawlessly into her daily routine is asking too much. Saying please and thank you is still a new skill for your child and one that will take time to learn. **TIP: Set the example.** Thank her when she does things for you, and say please when asking for assistance. Your child is listening to your words when you least expect it. **TIP: Provide praise.** Rather than scolding her for a lack of manners, pour on the praise when she gets it right. **TIP: Don't over-react.** Try not to make a fuss when she forgets. Blowing up about it could cause her to resist your efforts to teach her considerate behavior.

Olds will eat when they are hungry. They need an endless supply to fuel their growing bodies and minds. **TIP: Eat what you are serving.** Operate on the assumption that everyone is eating what's on the menu, and your child will soon learn to eat what you make.

TIP: Set an example. When you sit down for a meal, concentrate on and enjoy your food, and assume he will too. If he doesn't, remember that he won't starve. Active two-year-olds will eat when they are hungry. They need an endless supply to fuel their growing bodies and minds.

Playing with food

At one time or another, your child will play with his food, throw his cup and silverware on the floor and refuse to eat what you serve him. Here are some ideas for teaching table manners:

TIP: Don't create a mealtime battleground. Be clear and consistent, but avoid arguing over what he's doing. If he starts to build forts with his potatoes, remove his plate saying that you can see he's finished eating. Remind him that food is for eating, not playing. **TIP: Set an example.** When you sit down for a meal, concentrate on and enjoy your food, and assume he will too. If he doesn't, remember that he won't starve. Active two-year-olds will eat when they are hungry. They need an endless supply to fuel their growing bodies and minds.

Sitting still

Toddlers have a limit to how long they can sit still. It's unrealistic to think that a young child will remain in her seat for an entire church service or while you are at a meeting, for example. **TIP: Keep her busy.** Bring along a bag of books, crayons and paper. Let her work quietly while you listen to the service or meeting.

TIP: Have an escape plan. Sit near the end of a row so that you are away from the center of activity. Be prepared to take her outside if she gets antsy.

Nose picking

He's probably only doing it because it's there, and may not even realize what he's doing. If he has allergies, he may sense there is something inside his nose that's hard to leave alone.

TIP: Try not to react. If it's you she's heard, admit that you should not have said the word and distract her with a song or a story. In any case, the first time she swears resist the urge to laugh out loud; this will encourage her to do it again. **TIP: Set guidelines and be consistent.** If your child continues to repeat a serious profanity, don't get angry. In a disinterested voice, say, "That's not a word you may use in this house or around other people." If he persists, stay calm but respond with a swift consequence such as a time-out.

TIP: Avoid punishing. Punishing won't help. Since he may not know he's doing it, gentle reminders when you notice it are better. **TIP: Keep his hands busy.** While watching TV or in the car, give him a rubber ball to squeeze or finger puppets to play with.

TIP: Set an example. Be careful with your own language, and remember that your child is a sponge—he soaks up what he hears and is eager to share what he learns.

Masturbation is a lot like nose-picking. Children do it because it's there. For toddlers it's not sexual and is a completely normal thing to do. **TIP: React carefully.** If you tell your child that what she's doing is dirty or naughty, she may grow up associating sexual feelings with shame and guilt.

Interrupting

Your 2-year-old thinks the world and everything in it, including you, exists for his benefit. Also his short-term memory is not developed, and this means that he wants to say things right now, before he forgets. Therefore, the concept of interrupting makes no sense to him. And, whatever directs your attention away from him (a phone call, for example) is by nature threatening.

TIP: Schedule calls. Try to make and return calls or plan conversations when your child is napping. You might also redirect her attention by keeping a drawer with special toys and art materials that are used only during these times. Try giving him a toy phone so he can talk to an imaginary friend. **TIP: Choose the right location.** Minimize your frustration by going to a quieter room for your conversation or by making plans to meet friends in places, such as a park with a sandbox, where your child can play and you can chat.

TIP: Set a good example. Children copy what they see and hear, so take advantage of this. If you and your partner tend to cut each other off in conversation, end that habit. And do not interrupt your child while she is talking to you. (If you do, stop and say, "Sorry, I interrupted you. Go on.")

REMEMBER Show her how to be polite to others. **Basic social graces don't appear overnight.**



Bad language

Your child's first swear word is usually the result of direct mimicry.

TIP: Try not to react. If it's you she's heard, admit that you should not have said the word and distract her with a song or a story. In any case, the first time she swears resist the urge to laugh out loud; this will encourage her to do it again. **TIP: Set guidelines and be consistent.** If your child continues to repeat a serious profanity, don't get angry. In a disinterested voice, say, "That's not a word you may use in this house or around other people." If he persists, stay calm but respond with a swift consequence such as a time-out.

TIP: Set an example. Be careful with your own language, and remember that your child is a sponge—he soaks up what he hears and is eager to share what he learns.

Masturbation is a lot like nose-picking. Children do it because it's there. For toddlers it's not sexual and is a completely normal thing to do. **TIP: React carefully.** If you tell your child that what she's doing is dirty or naughty, she may grow up associating sexual feelings with shame and guilt.

ACTION ITEMS

Tips for teaching manners

- 1 Set an example.** Children are always watching what their parents and other adults do. Model good manners and your child will start to pick them up. For example: You are cleaning up the kitchen and your child brings her glass from the table. Respond by saying, "Thank you so much for helping me."
- 2 Don't over-react.** By blowing up, you are showing your child that he can get your attention whenever he wants by performing an act that embarrasses or angers you. Remember to be patient while he is learning what does and does not please you.
- 3 Read your child books.** Stories that offer lessons on how to have good manners are excellent teaching tools. Examples:
Just Say Please
Gina and Mercer Mayer
The Berenstain Bears Forget Their Manners
Stan and Jan Berenstain
Elmo's Good Manners Game (Sesame Street)
Catherine Samuel, et al
Mind Your Manners
Peggy Parish and Marilyn Hafner

- 4 Give praise.** When your child exhibits good manners, let her know that you are glad she did by saying, "I am so happy that you let your sister play with your toys."
- 5 Be patient and consistent.** Remember that very young children aren't yet capable of controlling much of their behavior. But, they do watch and listen to you very closely. Don't get discouraged when your child continues to throw her sippy cup on the floor or grabs toys from other children. Keep reinforcing positive manner behaviors and, over time, you'll see that the lessons you've taught your child have actually been applied.
- 6 Be your child's coach.** Be proactive about using real-life opportunities to teach your child what you expect in terms of manners. For example, when someone offers your child something he wants, remind him "What do you say to Aunt Ashley?" Reinforce the message by also thanking that person yourself.
- 7 Use your child's favorite characters to help make the point.** Children love to be like the characters and people they love most. If your child is in a Barney stage, for example, ask her "What would Barney say if he wanted me to get him a glass of water?" Reinforce good manners by reminding her, "I'm happy to get you what you want when you say please."