

TRAINING YOUR KIDS RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION

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My husband is an assistant principal at a middle school in central Nashville, TN. Every day he opens the school doors at 8.30 a.m. and stands at the entrance greeting students as they come in. Every morning he stops one or two who ignore his greeting. He says to them,

“This is what I need you to do. When I say good morning, I want you to look me in the eye, smile, and say, ‘Good morning Mr. Burgess.’” When he asks them if they have ever been taught how to greet an adult, without fail the answer is, “No”. Brian used to get very annoyed when my sisters’ children completely ignored him when they came to our house. They would just walk straight past him as if he was invisible. He said he wanted to pinch himself to make sure he was actually in the room.

Greeting people with a smile and a friendly word is an act of respect. Why is it that so few children are being taught the simple courtesy of acknowledging another person? I can only assume that when they are not deliberately taught to greet people, they don’t know they need to, or know how to. Perhaps parents feel that the schools teach courtesy, or think that their kids will learn by osmosis, and that they will automatically and when they reach adulthood, the skill will magically materialize on its own. NOT!

You can teach a 3 year old to say, “Good morning, Mr. Brown”. A courteous greeting should not be reserved for formal occasions or just between adults or children to adults either. Adults should also acknowledge children when they see them and children should also be courteous to one another. To have a child walk up to you, hold out his hand and say, “My name is John. I am pleased to meet you Mrs. Burgess”, is something I would never forget. First impressions count and politeness is always remembered.

Another important aspect of child/adult interaction is training kids not to interrupt adult conversations. I have been in many conversations with friends when a child has come into the room, walked straight up to the parent and start talking. In almost all of these situations, the parent immediately stopped speaking to me and paid full attention to their child. The impression I was left with was that a visitor is less important than the child. It is easy to train a child how to get adult attention when the parent is talking to someone else by asking them to wait where you can see them, and that you will give them permission to speak when you are ready. If the matter is urgent, they can say, “Excuse me, please,” and wait.

Allowing a child to whisper in a parent’s ear is extremely rude. Thinking that whispering will not interrupt an adult conversation is, of course, ridiculous.

Here is a suggestion. Remind your children of your expectations before the visitor comes. Tell them how to greet the visitor and that you want them to play until the visitor has gone. Remind them of how to get your attention if they really need to. Make sure you give the kids plenty of things to do while you are entertaining your guest.. Be fair. Kids will get annoyed if you completely ignore them. Hopefully your guest will give your child some attention. Your children will be respected by adults when they display good manners.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.