

## Manners Make School Better

by Deborah King

Across the country the familiar echo of school bells ringing mark the start of another year. Children are excited to return to the classroom and see their friends and parents are delighted to exchange the carefree days of summer for a regular schedule. The shopping is over, pencils and paper are tucked into backpacks, and the excitement of the first day is here. Students wonder what to wear, will others be nice to them, and will they fit in. School can mean stress!

Children who are in an environment where manners are taught and respected feel safer, have better morale, are healthier, and learn better. Those who are in an environment where there is a lack of manners experience a higher level of anxiety, illness, absenteeism, depression, and poor grades. Surveys indicate that most Americans believe in the value of good manners and they also believe that our society is no longer as civil as it once was. Interestingly, most people do not believe they are rude themselves. Each of us has a social responsibility to do our part to create a more polite society.

Children learn what they live. A parent who yells at the coach on the field, and continues to rip him apart over dinner, teaches their child far more than that the coach may have made a wrong call. Studies show that rudeness often moves to bullying and then to abuse. To many it seems that society no longer has limits. Rude behavior has become rampant today and it is lethal to our emotional, physical, and financial health. It is highly destructive on every level.

Busyness breeds rudeness. Many people claim to be too busy to say please and thank you; to hold the door for the person behind them; to let their host know if they can attend a function; enjoy a meal with a loved one, or even to write a thank you note. Lives that are over extended and over committed do not have the ability to live and move with ease and grace towards others. We all are pressed by traffic, ringing phones, emails, running children from one event to the next, meeting deadlines at work, and the guilt of not enough time for family and friends. The very act of one person being kind to another eases the stress of the moment and improves the quality of both lives.

Today's youth deal with pressures that we as adults never faced. Many children live in single parent households and are entertained countless hours a day by Hollywood through television, movies, and music. They often spend untold hours in front of a computer screen doing homework, chatting with friends, or surfing the web. Thirty-four percent of children from 10 to 17 years old are exposed to unwanted sexual material online. Cyber bullying is said to be up fifty percent. There is often so much focus placed on a child understanding how important they are that we have forgotten to teach them how important others are as well.

Our children need to be equipped to leave our homes and schools as responsible young adults, both socially and professionally. Employers often refer to young workers as

'501ers'. They do just what they have to do on the job and leave promptly at 5:01. Many employers hire etiquette coaches to go back and do remedial training for their staff in the areas of social skills, proper dress, and basic grooming. Businesses realize the cost of not having a civil workplace is far too high.

Every person involved, even briefly, with a child influences them and helps to shape their character. Civility is both taught and caught from birth. Children must see polite, civil, kind behavior demonstrated for them to learn to be polite, civil, and kind. We must constantly review our own behavior and ask is it 'mentor' quality, or do I need a 'manners make-over'? Let's create an environment in our homes, schools, and churches where manners are taught and valued so that every child feels safe and becomes all they were created to be. We all will be better for it.

Here is a general guideline for teaching manners.

#### Preschool Age

1. Basic Grooming
2. Greeting Others
3. Eating Neatly
4. Please, Thank You, You Are Welcome, Excuse Me

#### Elementary Age

1. Good Grooming Habits
2. Appropriate Dress
3. Home Table Manners
4. Introduction of Self & Others
5. Friendship Manners
6. Telephone Manners

#### Jr/Sr High Age

1. Table Manners - Restaurants
2. Party Planning
3. Host & Guest Manners
4. Cell Phone & Email Etiquette
5. Dating Etiquette

#### College Age

1. Roommate Etiquette
2. Interviewing Skills
3. Business Dress