



# Formative Parenting

*Cultivating Character in Children*

*A Ministry of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Immaculata, Pennsylvania*

## A Parent Guide for Table Etiquette – from the First Meal to the Last Supper SCHOOL CAFETERIA TABLE

Etiquette – protocol, customs, and life-connecting skills – can be taught through multiple settings. Each issue of the 2013-14 *Parent Partnership Handbook* emphasizes the etiquette associated with a particular kind of table: (1) the family dinner table, (2) the homework table, (3) the classroom table, (4) the school cafeteria table, (5) the party/social-guest table, and (6) the Eucharistic table. This newsletter focuses on **SCHOOL CAFETERIA ETIQUETTE**.

Etiquette guru Emily Post advised: “Manners are a sensitive awareness of the feelings of others. If you have that awareness, you have good manners, no matter what fork you use.” The school cafeteria is a vital setting for children to practice the etiquette of sensitive awareness (or social intelligence). Bodies are nurtured at the cafeteria table. So are psyches.

### **MEALTIME ETIQUETTE**

**Teach stewardship for the eating space.** Maintain spacial boundary. Use a paper napkin to brush crumbs off the table and/or remove liquid stains. Pick up trash from the floor space regardless of who put it there. Dispose of trash and return food tray. If cloth or sponge is provided, wipe the table. Replace the chair. Leave the eating-space in a respectful condition.

**Cooperate with school routines/procedures.** Wait patiently for food service. Voice “please,” “thank you,” and “Have a good day!”

**Modulate voice volume.** Review with your child the difference between indoor, outdoor, and mealtime voice levels.

**Establish the policy: “Take what you can eat; eat what you take.”** Do not waste food. Repackage left overs and use as an after school snack. If leftovers become a pattern, cut down on lunch supplies.

**Eliminate the attitude of entitlement.** Sensitize your child to upholding the dignity of the human person. Maintenance personnel are hired to maintain the school property – not to clean up lunch remains from students! Ban such expressions as: “I pay tuition” or “I pay his/her salary.”

## ***SOCIAL-TIME ETIQUETTE***

**Teach Friendship Attitudes.** Teach your child to treat his/her friends with respect and compassion, being careful not to hurt feelings by talking about events in front of children who were not included in the event. Stress upon him/her the importance of loyalty to and acceptance of friends. Point out that everyone has personal skills and can make a contribution toward an overall good.

**Practice the skill of respectful assertiveness.** Use “I statements” to express needs, feelings, wants and desires. “*When* ... [state the behavior] *I feel* ... [state the feeling] because ... [state the consequence]. *I need* ... [make a request].” For example, “*When* garbage or trash is left on the table *I feel* taken for granted *because* I am left to clean up the mess that others make. I need each person to clear up the table space before leaving.”

**Teach Respectful Assertiveness.** If your child is having problems at school and feels he/she is being treated unfairly, teach him/her how to present concerns to the classmate, teacher or principal in a respectful, nonviolent, non-tattle tale manner. Encourage him/her to talk with coaches about physical limitations, absences, or practice problems. By junior high, role play scenarios for negotiating with adults but do not assume the responsibility for your child.

**Cultivate the disposition of Gospel love.** Distinguish between love and like. We may not like everyone we meet but gospel love calls us to demonstrate respect, courtesy, helpfulness, inclusion, forgiveness, second chances, fairness, and justice to all people. Guide your child in the ways of discipleship and help him/her to apply Christian principles of socialization at school.

### **Create occasions that increase a child’s affective (emotional) abilities.**

- Empathy – identifying with the pain of another
- Compassion – doing something to relieve the suffering of another
- Sacrifice – denying self for the sake of another
- Appreciation – recognizing with gratitude the efforts of another
- Sharing – giving self, talents, and possessions to another to use, own or borrow
- Sympathy – showing reverence for the grief of another
- Sorrow – expressing remorse with the intention to change

### **Develop relational skills.**

- Role-play was to initiate “small talk” and to show interest in another’s opinion or accomplishment.
- Discuss friendship-making qualities like smiling, a friendly attitude, asking help, inviting another to join in an activity, and being honest,
- Be prudent about what to share, how much, and with whom.
- Avoid gossip.

**Educate your child about cliques.** Explain that a clique is an exclusive group of people who feel a sense of belonging, empowerment and confidence because they are connected. Children who are outside the clique might feel unpreferred, inferior or inadequate. Being on the fringe is lonely and hurtful. Children in both positions benefit from discussion about peer cruelty, resisting peer pressure, coping with rejection, and developing empathy. Strive to be inclusive in school relationships.

Dr. Patricia McCormack, IHM, a former Catholic schoolteacher and catechist, is a formation education consultant, an author of several books as well as the PARENT PARTNERSHIP HANDBOOK feature of *Today’s Catholic Teacher*, and director of **IHM Formative Support for Parents and Teachers**, Arlington, VA. She speaks and writes frequently on topics of child formation. Reach her at [DrPatMcCormack@aol.com](mailto:DrPatMcCormack@aol.com). This article originally appeared in the (January 2014) issue of *Today’s Catholic Teacher*, © Peter Li, Inc. Reproduced with permission. All rights reserved.