



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 SOCIAL-GUEST 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 **SOCIAL-GUEST ETIQUETTE**.

True or false? Social behavior can make or break a relationship! The ability to demonstrate social grace in a public setting is key to receiving an invitation to be a guest in the home of another. Fine-tune the following details of social etiquette to represent your family values. Be creative in passing on the attitudes to your child.

Ready your child to develop friendships. In order to have a friend one must be a friend. Teach your child to take time to learn what interests others, to express support, ask questions, read about the topic, and share interests. Encourage him/her to care more about giving than getting, to become a good listener and an encourager. Have him/her invite another to participate in an activity of mutual interest. Friendship grows with time, mutual appreciation, joy, and shared interests.

Teach inclusivity, sensitivity and discretion. Abide by the school/class policy regarding offsite birthday parties, Christmas gifts, Valentine cards, etc. If no policy exists, go by the code: “How would I feel if I was excluded from social activities?” Safeguard the feelings of others. If not all classmates are invited, mail invitations. *** There is no obligation to invite an entire class to a party but if you are inviting *nearly* all, then charity demands that you invite each member of the class. Some families use the “age plus one” guide as a guest list limit. Consider an “open” party sponsored by several families.

Teach your child how to assume the role of HOST/HOSTESS even when he/she is the GUEST.

- Approach children who are standing alone.
- Introduce children to each other.
- Focus on making people comfortable.
- Be positive and pleasant even if you are not in the mood. Adopt the goal: “Fake it till I make it.” Avoid being a complainer, whiner, or nay-sayer.
- Walk into a new situation prepared with conversation-starters like: favorite vacation, upcoming trip, a book or film recently enjoyed, pets, hobbies, non-controversial current news topics, sports . . .
- Use conversation-endings like: “I enjoyed talking with you” or “You’ve given me something to think about.”

- Listen more than talk. Maintain eye contact. Use facial expressions to indicate understanding and interest.

- Live the advice of Ephesians 4:29 – “Say only the good things that people need to hear, things that will really help them.” Do not make negative comments about any part of the social environment or planning.

Teach children to receive a gift with an attitude of equanimity. Express equal appreciation and enthusiasm for a gift that you like, a gift you don’t like, or a duplicate gift. Cultivate the attitude, “It’s the thought that counts.”

Prepare your child to be an ideal invited guest. Teach, role-play and model the following social skills:

- Arrive within ten minutes of the starting-time.
- Bring a gift: garden flowers, an appetizer, a plate of cookies . . .
- Greet your hosts by name.
- Introduce yourself to new people.
- Keep conversation light and positive. Come prepared with conversation-starters but do not monopolize the conversation.
- Do not touch nor ask to use the TV remote, stereo, or Internet.

- Volunteer to help, i.e., serving, clearing dishes, cleaning-up . . .
- Wait until everyone is served before eating.
- Eat what is offered or learn how to politely decline.
- Express appreciation before leaving.
- Send a “thank you” note afterward. Mention something specific about the event that you enjoyed.

• Demonstrate six conversational skills:

1. Be patient; do not interrupt.
2. Be a good listener. Restate what the person said, or remark about the content, or ask a question related to the topic.
3. Think about what is asked of you and respond appropriately.
4. Think before you speak and express yourself clearly.
5. Use questions directed to a specific person to invite him/her to speak.
6. Express interest. Ask thoughtful questions about the other person.

Engage your child in preparing affordable guest-gifts. (Ideas suggested by Lynn McBride, www.thedailybasics.com):

- Collect inexpensive vases from flea markets. Fill with garden flowers or greens or fall leaves.
- Collect attractive plates from flea markets. Gift the plate with some edible.
- Prepare a homemade recipe that can be frozen for use on another day.
- Keep something homemade and handy in your freezer.

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