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Talking about manners and etiquette with your child

By Amy Wang, The Oregonian

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Recently I asked my kindergartner how he liked riding the school bus. His response was unexpected: "The other kids don't say anything when I say 'Good morning.' "

I tried to encourage him, saying that if he just kept saying "good morning," someone was bound to respond sooner or later. "But it's really rude!" he exclaimed in exasperation.

Wow. Who taught him about manners and how'd they do it?

I jest, of course. Manners are important to my husband and me; as soon as our children could talk, we were on them about saying "please," "thank you" and "excuse me." But now he's out in a wider world where other kids might not have had the same nagging -- uh, upbringing. How do we handle that?

Melanie Perko, who teaches etiquette to children and adults in role-playing sessions through her Portland company, **RSVP Melanie**, said she'd tell my son, "Keep it up, it's the correct thing to do."

She'd explain that people learn manners and etiquette at different speeds. And it's possible the other kids were just too sleepy or shy to reply. So she'd tell my son not to take the non-responses personally. The important thing, she said, is to make clear to my son that he's on the right track.

Rebecca Magby, a Beaverton-based parent coach (**Everything Baby**) and longtime nanny, echoed Perko in saying that it's important to reinforce manners in your child even when they don't get the right response. "Encourage your child to be the leader, be the trendsetter with manners," Magby said.

Like Perko, she uses role-playing to help a child think about why another child would behave in a certain manner and to figure out ways to respond. That has the added benefit of teaching problem-solving skills, Magby said.

What if your child witnesses outright rudeness? Should you let it pass or seize the teachable moment?

Perko suggested using lines such as these, especially if the rudeness is coming from an adult: "They might have had a bad day." "They might have forgotten their manners -- everybody has a day where they forget." "That isn't the way we do it. Just because you saw it doesn't mean it's the right way."

Magby said she wouldn't hesitate to speak to another child who is displaying poor manners. The trick, she said, is to teach rather than scold. "In my experience, children want to do good ... so instead of reprimanding them for the bad behavior, provide them with education" by showing them proper manners.

She added: "What you put forward, you're going to get back."

Here are some more resources:

Online: The Child Development Institute's Web site has a section titled "**Helping children with manners**" that includes a list of suggested books.

New book: Jodi Stoner, a clinical psychologist, and Lori Weiner, a life coach, have just published "**Good Manners are Contagious: Real Solutions for Raising Responsible, Resilient and Respectful Children.**" If you read it, we'd like to know whether it was helpful to you.

Board game: Blunders, which has won multiple awards, teaches table etiquette, telephone manners, host and guest skills and more. It's targeted at ages 5 and older. If your family has played it, we'd love to hear whether it's worthwhile.

- Amy Wang

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