

**TEACHING
MEAL-TIME
MANNERS**

(1 TRAINING HOUR)

**Lifetech Instructional Services
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TEACHING MEAL-TIME MANNERS

During the child's preschool years, you can build their repository of table etiquette incrementally. Behaviors such as hand washing and sitting still in a chair are essential from the outset. Others--learning to eat with mouth closed and how to use utensils, for example, will be acquired and improved on as they gain physical skills and becomes accustomed to the mealtime expectations.

Although you will be teaching the basics, don't underestimate the continued importance of modeling. It's much easier to teach table etiquette to a preschooler if everyone else at the table is minding their dining P's and Q's. Older children may even be more mannerly when they know they are setting an example for little ones.

MEALTIME BASICS

The family table is still the best place to teach and model table manners. Formality isn't necessary; routine exposure, clear expectations, and consistent, guidance from caregivers will enable a child to learn politeness in various lunch time situations. Even if you are picnicking in the park or grabbing a quick lunch at a local school function, it's important for the child to learn and practice these basics:

- **Wash hands and face.** Washing hands is a must before the child eats anything. Face washing is more a matter of aesthetics, but important if the child's face is very grimy. At three, the child will still need help with hand and face washing. By five, they will probably be able to accomplish the job on their own. Still, they will need frequent reminders, and you'll want to inspect hands before every meal and snack time. If they do a poor job, insist that they wash again.
- **Stay seated and no wiggling.** The child will progress from high chair to booster seat around age three and perhaps to a chair by age five. When they can get down from their seat with ease, it's time to set limits.

The minute the child has had enough to eat, they will become bored and wiggly. Teach the preschooler to remain seated while eating, keeping all four chair legs on the floor at all times and then ask to be excused when their finished.

- **Use a napkin.** Even if they continue to wear a bib, all preschool children can learn to use a napkin. Show the child how to put their napkin in their lap, use it to wipe their mouth and hands, and place it on the table as part of your “being excused” ritual. You can work on the niceties (seeing that the dirtiest parts of the napkin aren’t on display and placing it to the left of the plate) as their skills improve.
- **Everyone begins eating at the same time.** It’s best not to seat a preschooler until you are ready to serve the meal or snack. You can, however, teach them to ask, “May I begin please,” if a meal is delayed.
- **Say “please” when asking for items on the table.** Teach the child to ask for what they want and always to include a “please.” Demonstrate the correct form “Will you please pass the salt, Joshua?” and be sure to say “thank you.” Include the child in passing dishes and items that aren’t too heavy or awkward to handle. Reaching or stretching over other children is not allowed.
- **Eat with utensils, not fingers.** Most children are beginning to master a spoon by age three and will add a fork within the next two years. By five or six, they will usually be able to hold these utensils correctly and may be using a knife as a spreader. Don’t worry too much about hand position. The important lessons at this stage are to use utensils and not fingers and to bring the food to the mouth, not the mouth to the plate.

Fingers or Utensils

In addition, the child will discover that it’s correct to use fingers to eat certain food, for example, sandwiches, fried chicken, corn on the cob, pizza, rolls, crackers, cookies, raw veggies, cheese, pretzels, and

so on. And that the other foods require utensils. Serving child-friendly foods will help the preschooler learn to use their spoon or fork. (Green beans and broccoli can be scooped or speared. Thicker soups are easier to eat with a spoon than broths.) Give them a plate with a high rim so that food doesn't slide off. Serve small portions so that there's room on the plate to maneuver a spoon or fork. When they begin using an open-topped cup or tumbler, fill it only a third to half full to aid drinking without spills.

At the End of a Meal

Once a child has eaten their fill, they can be off their chair and out of the room in a blink. But they need to learn to end a meal politely by asking to be excused. For a three year old, "Excuse me, Ms. Jones" is adequate. When they learn to ask permission, teach them to say, "May I be excused, please?" If they forget, you can call them back to the table to make them request. Do this in a lighthearted manner. They just need reminding.

It's very nice to include a thank you to the person who prepared the meal. Explain that people like to be complimented on their work, just as the child likes being told when they do something thoughtful. Practice thank you routinely at school or even at home, and the preschooler will become a welcome guest at everybody's table.

Learning to Help

A young child will gain a better understanding of the importance of mealtime and snack times if they are actively involved. A three year old can lay out place mats and napkins. Depending on agility and interest, four and five year olds may be able to set the cafeteria table or even their table at home and help with serving.

Cleaning up is usually easy to include in the mealtime routine. A preschooler can take his cup and plate to the kitchen or if disposable they can take it to the trash can. If the school recycles, they can put unbreakable items in the correct bins--a good sorting exercise. If the child gets bored or grumbles, ask the child to finish

just what they are doing, then thank the child and let them go on to more interesting activities.

Engaging a preschooler in table setting and clearing encourages their sense of responsibility to and identification with others in the class. Even if you are fortunate enough to have other paid staff help, it's wise to include the preschooler in some aspect of the process in order to build their respect for the people who care for them and for the nature of work itself.

RESPECTING FOOD PREFERENCES

You want the child to become an adventurous eater when they grow up so that they can enjoy diverse mealtime experiences. In the preschool years, the best you can do is to encourage them to give everything a try. Preschoolers are usually big eaters but are not experimental. They may go through eccentric phases--demanding rice at every meal or green vegetables only. Continue to offer a healthy variety of foods, and they will accept the food when they're ready. If they hate a particular food or foods, discuss it with the parents in case the child's reaction signals an allergy.

Preschoolers are quick to speak up when they perceive a food as "yucky" or "gross." Explain to the child that the food is delicious to other people. Tell the child that the person who cooks works hard to prepare foods for everyone to enjoy. Let the child know that you respect their preferences and don't expect them to eat something they do not like. But also help them to understand that disparaging comments are hurtful and not acceptable. Give them a polite way out by teaching them to say "No, thank you" when offered a food they don't like.

MEALTIME TIPS

Preschoolers learn mealtime or snack time etiquette over the course of thousands of meals, so concentrate on adding and teaching new skills gradually. By the time the child turns six, they should have all these fundamentals under control most of the time:

Starting the Meal

- Arrive at the table with clean hands and face
- Place napkin on lap
- Start eating when everyone else does or when given permission.

Sitting

- Stay seated; use good posture
- Keep elbow off the table while eating

Eating

- Chew with mouth closed
- Don't talk with food in the mouth
- Don't make bad comments about the food
- Ask for food and say "please"--no reaching
- Use utensils as able

Talking and Noise

- Make some pleasant mealtime conversation
- Don't interrupt when others are talking
- Don't make rude or disturbing noises

Ending the Meal

- Ask to be excused when finished
- Thank the person who prepared the meal
- Offer to help clear the tables

IN CONCLUSION

Mealtime can be viewed as a microcosm of all group social interaction. People of different ages and personalities gather for a common purpose, and beyond eating, each participant probably has something to discuss. There are expectations for polite behavior. The activity requires organizational and social skills if it is to be successfully completed. It may be a simple family meal, but look at it as preparation for life outside the home or even at school. If everyone does their part, the experience can be pleasant and fun as well as productive.

When the child makes mistakes, quietly remind them of what to do. Be sensitive to their feelings, and whatever you do, don't show your amusement at deliberate displays of bad table manners. They may take your smiles as approval.

TEACHING MEALTIME MANNERS (1 Training Hour)

TEST

Student Name: _____ **Date:** _____

INSTRUCTIONS: Read each of the following questions carefully and **CIRCLE** your best answer.

1. Formality is necessary to teach and model table manners?

True or False

2. What can a caregiver do to enable a child to learn politeness in various meal time situations?

- A. practice routine exposure
- B. set clear expectations
- C. give consistent guidance
- D. all of the above

3. The stages a child progresses from seats at the table are?

- A. high chair to booster at age four
- B. regular chair at age five
- C. both A and B

4. At what age can a child learn to use a napkin?

- A. preschool
- B. 1 years of age
- C. 2 years of age
- D. 3 years of age

5. At what age will a child be able to independently be able to wash their hands and face?

- A. 3
- B. 4
- C. 5
- D. none of the above

6. How can a preschooler help with meal time routines?

- A. lay out place mats and napkins
- B. take their cup and plate to the kitchen when finished
- C. take disposable cups and plates to the trash
- D. all of the above

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7. At age 3 a child has began to master using a?

- A. fork
- B. spoon
- C. knife

8. Possible mealtime tips could be?

- A. wash hands before eating
- B. make some pleasant mealtime conversation
- C. thank the person who prepared the meal
- D. all of the above

9. When children are picky about food, continue to offer a healthy variety of foods and they will accept the food when they are ready?

True or False

10. By the time the child is five, they should have all these fundamentals under control most of the time?

True or False

11. It is important to teach children mealtime basics which include all the following EXCEPT?

- A. washing hands and face
- B. use a napkin to wipe hands and mouth
- C. everyone begins eating at different times
- D. eat with utensils, not fingers

FILL OUT YOUR INFORMATION BELOW AND SEND YOUR COMPLETED TEST TO THE ADDRESS BELOW.

INCLUDE YOUR CHECK or MONEY ORDER for \$ 5.00 (PER TEST)

Once received we will send you a printed certificate of completion.

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