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Mind your child's manners

It's never too early to start teaching your children good behaviour and the social skills they will need to be successful in their lives

THE old adage "A child should be seen and not heard" is abhorred by all but the most stringent of parents and grandparents today, but it was commonly cited during the 18th and 19th centuries as a way to keep the naturally boisterous behaviour of children in check.

White children today are generally encouraged to speak their minds, there is a point where "free expression" crosses into rudeness and disrespect.

The trend of bad manners in today's children is not restricted to a single culture or nation. With the prevalence of mainstream pop culture through media such as the Internet, television and movies, almost all children have the same access to poor role models and an ethos of disrespect toward elders.

Who's to blame?

Parents today are more pressed for time than their own parents or grandparents ever were. The double income family is becoming increasingly common, and most parents spend less time with their families than they would prefer. Children are shuffled from one activity to another, and parents struggle to fit everything into a single workday.

One of the first things to be neglected in the non-stop action of the average day is checking children's be-

haviour in public and in private.

There is also the "guilt factor" — after a long day away from home, most parents want to go home and simply enjoy their children.

Enforcing rules and combating bad behaviour seem less important when the amount of time spent with family is reduced to only a few hours each day.

For example, asking a child to clean his room is often more difficult than simply doing it yourself. Dining together, once considered the prime opportunity for teaching basic table manners and polite conversation, is a rare event.

Then, there are parents who don't practise the same type of behaviour they'd like to see in their children — those who do not make an effort to clear their trays at fast food restaurants are not likely to see their children act in an appropriate manner, either.

Bad manners are not just the parents' fault. Kids today have a number of role models apart from their parents — and not all of those are good.

The independence exhibited by many young pop stars is often accompanied by bad behaviour.

Independence, without a strong foundation of good values and etiquette, gives children the wrong impression that adults are more accessories in a world full of enjoyable possibilities.

Long-term damage

Children who don't develop good social graces are at a much higher risk of encountering difficulties with authority figures, teachers and even the law. A lack of respect, combined with an inability to talk to adults in a way that is socially acceptable, can do your child a disservice for years.

Children are naturally curious creatures, and it is important to allow them to discover the world around them. At the same time, however, they must learn that there are boundaries that dictate proper behaviour.

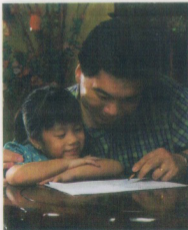
Build confidence

Many parents don't realise that basic etiquette is the foundation for the development of social skills. Knowing how to interact with other children and adults in a positive manner will not only help kids to receive positive feedback, but it will make them more comfortable with who they are.

Entering the adult world with the knowledge of how to act and how to treat each person with respect will foster years of self-worth and confidence.

Being respectful of others through good manners and etiquette fosters appreciation for humanity for the rest of a child's life.

Contrary to what some parents believe, a child's poor behaviour is not something that can be blamed on personality. Every child can be



Spend time with your child to instill good values and etiquette.

Such courses emphasize the importance of basic social skills — eye contact, making introductions, using the phone and speaking with confidence and respect — while utilizing methods to get results in today's world.

Parents should check if the training is tailored specifically for children.

A series of lectures on proper behaviour is not likely to make an impact on today's youngsters. What they need is hands-on, interactive learning that is both fun and effective.

Parents today are not any less hardworking or concerned about their children than their own parents were. But they are raising children in an arguably more challenging environment.

Do your children (and yourself) a favour by giving them the social tools they need now and for their future success.

Article by Eunice Lim, founder and principal consultant of Image Plan. To find out more about the social graces and etiquette programs for children, contact her at 9431-1895 or e-mail eunice@imageplan.com.sg

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taught to behave with respect and consideration — it just takes time and effort. Children must be instructed, policed and occasionally coaxed to get desired results.

Good manners and etiquette can be best achieved through a joint effort on the part of parents and an outside party that conducts etiquette training for children.

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