

LAURA ON LIFE

Parenting & The Thank You Paradox

In the battle for truth, justice and the American way, also known as parenthood, no subject is more complicated than the teaching of manners.

Parents have to choose very early which of the plethora of manners is most important to them and which will be least tolerated when a transgression occurs.

Let's face it; there are a lot of manners-related issues out there. We're not going to be able to enforce them all unless you hire full-time manners police that will follow your children around all day.

Dining is a large slice of the manners pie; one that most parents will have ample opportunity to monitor because many meals are taken as a family.

However, I think some parents still let a few things slide because otherwise they will be so busy correcting manners that they won't get anything to eat. After all, it is not polite to lecture your children with your mouth full.

Most parents compromise on manners. If they could just get

their kids to stop making disgusting noises at the table, they could probably get used to elbows on the table. Some think that the worse transgression is wiping one's mouth with one's sleeve. Some simply wish their kids would wipe their mouths with something, anything. If they could correct that by the time they go to college, it would be considered a real accomplishment.

Some lucky parents have been able to correct the more offensive behavior and can move on to the placing of the napkin on one's lap and the many reasons why one shouldn't stand in one's chair.

I applaud those intrepid parents that have successfully taught their children to say "no, sir" and "yes, ma'am." My children not only forget to which gender they are talking, but they have developed a series of grunts that I have had to learn to interpret.

One thing on which I do insist is "please" and "thank you." To me, these two words are the hallmark of civility.

If my kids do not say these words at the appropriate times, they will see daggers spitting from my eyes.

These words will never go out of style. They were as essential in the past: "Please help me fasten my corset" as they will be in the future: "Thank you for the flux capacitor."

However, I have recently been informed by my fourteen-year old, who notices things like this, that there is a Thank You Paradox. The Thank You Paradox is not an uncommon occurrence, so it is surprising that my son was the first I've ever heard to coin this phrase. Because my son tends to quote characters in sitcoms made for kids with very little to do, he may very well have stolen the credit for this from some Disney witch or a couple of twins that live on a cruise ship. Of course if



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you have the power to smote your teachers or you live on a floating amusement park, you don't really need credit for anything.

In the back seat of my minivan, I heard this conversation after a discussion about being polite:

Son: "Do you want a piece of gum?"

Daughter: "Oh, thank you. That's very kind of you."

(I want to say right here that, no, this is not how they normally sound. Only when they are way overstating a point I was trying to

make.)

Son: "Thank you. That's nice of you to say."

Daughter: "Thank you..."

Son: "Wait. Shouldn't somebody be saying 'you're welcome,' here, Mom? I think I've found a Thank You Paradox."

Mom: "And it was going so well there for a moment."

Son: "Yes, but nobody said 'you're welcome.' Where do all the thank you's end?"

Mom: "In this case, either of you could have ended it at anytime with a simple you're welcome."

Son: "But it seems like the person who ends it is less polite."

Mom: "Would it be

more polite to let a meaningless conversation drag on into eternity?"

Son: "True. Thank you for clarifying that. You're pretty smart."

Mom: "Thank you. You're pretty smart yourself."

Son: "Thank you..."

Mom: "My pleasure."

Son: "Oh, you're good!"

Mom: "Thank you..."

Son: "You're welcome, already!!"

Laura Snyder is a nationally syndicated columnist, author & speaker. You can reach Laura at lsnyder@lauraonlife.com Or visit her website www.lauraonlife.com for more info.

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