

Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl

The Lost Art of Greeting Grown-ups

YOU CAN CONVINCe YOUR CHILD that she has good manners and teach her how to demonstrate them self-confidently in social situations. Maria Montessori believed in the inherent dignity of even the youngest children and made learning social graces and courtesies a central part of her curriculum. For example, many Montessori teachers taught preschoolers the art of approaching adult visitors to their rooms, shaking hands, and introducing themselves.

It's hard to imagine a young child responding in such a mature way in our casual culture, and parents are often stymied when it comes to helping their children greet adults. It's embarrassing when a child doesn't respond, and it's hard to know what to do.

Montessori's genius revolved around making children feel empowered in almost every area of life by breaking tasks into manageable steps. Parents can help children interact comfortably with adults by teaching those skills at home. Teach each step of greeting a new person by showing a child how to make eye contact and say, "It's nice to meet you." Make the learning fun by pretending about a variety of situations.

In real life, give children gentle encouragement for speaking to adults they don't know. Afterward, when you are alone, give very specific praise for demonstrating any facet of the politeness previously discussed at home: "You smiled and said 'Hi'" or "I was so impressed that you remembered to say 'It's nice to meet you.'"

When it comes to manners, as in any area of life, focusing on positive steps forward helps children to believe in themselves and their abilities.

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