

# DEAR *Dr. Robyn*

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## APRIL 2010: MANNERS

*(Paraphrased an email; with permission)*

Dear Dr. Robyn,

*My daughter has always been my “Manners Maven” and my son, well, I guess you can say he’s just a typical boy; rude, crude, and lewd. It was OK when he was in preschool because people thought it was funny. Now it’s getting him into trouble. How can I get him to adopt some manners?*

*--Janine S, New York, New York*

Dear Janine,

When children are very young, making people laugh or getting a look of shock is easy encouragement for someone looking for a little extra attention. Now its not so funny anymore but your son is still looking for that reaction. He has also formed some negative habits. Creating new, positive habits around manners may take some time but will certainly be worth it as he shows others consideration, respect, and kindness.

Here are some ways to get started:

(1) **Nix the negative labels:** By calling your daughter a “Manners Maven” and your son “rude, crude and lewd,” they are both finding ways to live up to their label. For your son, since the label has a negative connotation, the self-fulfilling prophesy is setting him up for failure.

(2) **Dine away from home sometimes:** Put your children in situations in which they are exposed to other positive influences and rules. Whether its at a restaurant or at a friend’s house, when children are out of their usual routine, they can exhibit behavior that may surprise you. If they can show respectful manners in public, they can show them at home.

(3) **Explain, expect but don’t lecture:** When we make dinner time, car rides, outings and play dates all about long lectures, children don’t even want to try. Explain your expectations and then allow them to rise to the occasion. Make sure your children

know that you are certain that they will meet and exceed your expectations as they are respectful, kind people.

(4) **Compliment and thank:** When you see it, let them know you’ve noticed. Praise them for good choices and positive manners. Tell them how much you appreciate their positive choices and how it makes spending time with them even more pleasant for everyone.

(5) **Don’t laugh:** Again, since your son wants to get your attention, laughing at his antics will only encourage him. Make sure that other adults are forewarned also-- so that when he tries to get a rise out of people he is met with blank stares and disinterest. He’ll have to find other ways to get attention.

In the end, it’s all about consistency. Make your “manners rules” required for all your family members so that your son (1) has great examples to watch and (2) doesn’t feel singled out. Whether he’s in your home or out in the community, make sure that the rules still apply. He can do it! With you on his team, he is sure to succeed!

Here’s to your success!



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