

Thanksgiving holiday a great time to teach manners
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When thinking about the perfect Thanksgiving meal I picture my adoring family, eagerly digging into a plate full of turkey and other holiday foods, happy faces and energetic conversations.

Then I move back into reality to what my dinner table will actually look like. My nieces and nephews texting their friends under the table, complaining about eating their vegetables and talking with their mouths full of food, while my nine month old drags a hand full of sweet potatoes through her hair. Yes, the holidays are here again!

In any civilized society there is a code of conduct that must be learned – and table manners are part of that code. Thanksgiving is not the only occasion in which this skill is important. There are many situations throughout the year that will require children to practice basic etiquette so what better time to teach these things than during the holiday season?

It's important to understand that no one is born with manners, they must be taught. If parents want their children to get by in a "polite society", they have to be conscious of teaching etiquette in a deliberate, intentional way – being careful, of course, to not go overboard. So how do we lead our kids down the proper road to etiquette?

First and foremost, teach your children phrases like "please," "thank you," and "may I," and the importance of making eye contact when talking with adults. Basic niceties like these will help even the most rigid hostess overlook table faux pas.

Instruct in small doses, don't try to teach your children the rules of table manners and telephone etiquette all at one time. It would be difficult for *adults* to remember all that information, it would certainly be for children. Stay consistent; if you would not allow your son to wear a baseball cap to dinner in a restaurant then he should not wear one to dinner at home either. Tell your children what you expect and compliment them when they meet those expectations, that way they will know what they are doing right and keep on doing it!

Most importantly, be a good role model. If you talk with your mouth full of food, the likelihood is great that they will do the same. Don't expect perfection however, the more pressure you put on your child, the more he or she will resent having to use those behaviors.

Finally, explain to your children that rules of etiquette are not only important codes to live by, but also acts as kindness and consideration for others around you.

For more information about the 4-H program or other youth development issues, contact the Oconee County Cooperative Extension Office at (706) 769-3946 or stop by our office located behind the Oconee County Courthouse.