

Encouraging Manners in High School

Good social skills involve polite behaviors like greeting others, shaking hands, maintaining eye contact, taking turns, listening, and saying “please” and “thank you.” They also involve helping others, knowing how to behave in a variety of settings and applying proper etiquette in different situations. Manners and politeness can be linked to social success and to a person’s sense of respect for themselves and others. During the high school years, your teen may not fully understand the importance of good social skills, but if you talk to them regularly about the benefits of being polite, they will be better-able to see how their social graces contribute to their interactions and relationships.

Talk to your teen about their personal “brand.” People’s social behavior has a major impact on how they relate to others, and it’s important to remind your teen that when they are out in the world, they are representing himself or herself and their own brand. Personal branding involves considering your values and how you want to be perceived by others, and ways that you can live your life by those standards. Tom Hoerr, Head of St. Louis-based New City School, suggests that you ask your teen to offer three words that describe their brand. If your teen is receptive to this, ask how those words are different today than they would have been ten years ago. This reflection helps your teen think about maturity and growth. What does this have to do with your teen’s social skills? The way a person interacts and treats others is a direct reflection of their brand, and if your teen is courteous, kind, and polite, they are positively influencing how others see them. Explain to them that by simple gestures like saying “thank you,” acknowledging a person’s ideas or holding the door open for them can create a positive impression. Discussing these matters with your teen will help them realize how important good manners are to their personal growth and success.

Work on the art of sincere compliments. Compliments are a perfect example of how a polite and kind gesture can make a difference. Try to find frequent opportunities to compliment your teen, as this allows them to see kindness and praise in action. For example, if your teen passes their driving test or if they do well at school, point out how their hard work and determination made these things possible. It can be something as simple as, “I’m proud of you for passing your driving test. You did so much to prepare for it, and you even missed your friend’s birthday party to attend driving lessons. Great job!” Talk to your teen about the impact that compliments have on others and ask them about times they have received compliments and how it felt. Explain to them that many other teens are going through challenging times in high school, and that by finding ways to praise them, they can help them realize their own strengths and possibly contribute to their self-esteem. Discuss ways they can pay compliments without seeming artificial and ask them to try to give at least one person a compliment each week. Neurologist and teacher Judy Willis says that praise should be specific and include recognition of effort. Author Faye de Muyshondt suggests that you also talk to your teen about the difference between an inappropriate compliment, like commenting on a person’s body, as some words of praise can cross the line and make others uncomfortable.

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