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etiquette ROADMAP

NAVIGATING SLIPPERY SOCIAL SITUATIONS...WITH KIDS

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WE COULD ALL USE A LITTLE HELP NAVIGATING THE SOMETIMES-SLIPPERY ROADS OF SOCIAL SITUATIONS, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT COMES TO OUR {UNPREDICTABLE} CHILDREN. FORTUNATELY, WE HAVE A DIRECT LINE TO ANNE CHANDLER, FOUNDER OF THE CHANDLER SCHOOL OF ETIQUETTE IN ACWORTH. WE TOOK OUR READERS' QUESTIONS STRAIGHT TO HER IN ORDER TO GET A ROADMAP FOR SOME OF THESE PERPLEXING PREDICAMENTS.

BY TARA DORSEY

Q Our son's birthday is coming up and we want to let people know that they don't need to bring gifts to his party. Close family and friends will likely bring gifts, but we don't want others to feel like they need to. What is the appropriate way to handle this? —Grace Powers, Acworth, pictured right.

Anne: A child's birthday celebration is a wonderful opportunity to teach "thinking of others before self" (a basic tenet of etiquette), and your question reflects your desire to do this. Here are three options for explaining this in the invitation:

- "No presents, please. Your presence is a gift in itself." (Some will still bring a gift.)
- "In lieu of a gift, please bring a book (or toy) that will be donated to [charity name]." Then, plan a special trip where you and your son can present the gifts to the charity.
- "Please kindly limit the amount of your gift to [a chosen amount]."

If you do opt for "no gifts," those received from family and close friends should be opened before others arrive or after they've departed. And, of course, make sure the birthday boy shares your expectations, to avoid any hurt little feelings or dashed hopes.

Q My daughter is a picky eater. What's the most polite way to handle this when we are invited to a friend's house for dinner? Does she have to eat everything on her plate? —Jennifer Maner, Powder Springs, pictured below right.

Anne: The quantity of food we are served, allergies to foods, or simply a dislike of certain foods are all reasons not to eat everything on our plates. However, our response to these situations is where our manners come into play.

Set the following expectations at home of how to respond to unwanted foods and reiterate these guidelines before visiting friends' homes:

- If she is served food she knows she doesn't like, she should simply not eat it—without making faces or inappropriate comments like, "Spinach is yucky!" or "I don't like that!"
- If served something new, encourage her to taste (even a tiny bite) before deciding whether to eat it or not. If she doesn't choose to eat it, she should quietly move on to the next item.
- If given choices of what to put on her own plate, she should select what she likes without commenting on the items not selected.

In all situations, she should thank the host or hostess for the meal. A sincere thank you is always appropriate! The takeaway: when children know what is expected of them and are given proper training and consistent reinforcement, they'll have the tools to succeed socially, wherever they are. ●



Anne Chandler offers manners and protocol training for children, teens and adults at The Chandler School of Etiquette in Acworth. Visit ChandlerSchoolofEtiquette.com, call Anne at 706-346-7405, or send an e-mail to Anne@ChandlerSchoolofEtiquette.com.