

Middle School Kids Ask Questions About Etiquette

Written by Cindy Post Senning



One of my favorite activities is talking to middle school kids about etiquette. I always start with the King Louis story, then together we think about what makes magic words magic, we usually do some sort of meet and greet etiquette, and finally I give the kids an opportunity to ask any etiquette questions they may have. Asking middle school kids if they have etiquette questions always prompts a great discussion.

The first time I ever did it was in Brooklyn with a group of fifth graders. I had done a talk about etiquette with about seventy students and then I asked if they had any questions. I did not expect them to have any (middle schoolers with etiquette questions?) so I had actually given them a series of cards with tricky situations that would provide material for this question and answer time.

When I asked for questions one little hand in the middle of the crowd went up. “My best friend’s father died a year ago and I didn’t know what to say so I didn’t say anything. Now I feel bad. Is it too late and what should I say?” At first I was almost speechless. It was so poignant and unexpected. I was able to comfort him and told him “It’s never too late. And you can just tell him how sorry you are and that you didn’t know what to say then but you want to say something now.” He nodded his head and said he would do that.

Another middle schooler (sixth grade this time) wanted to know how she could “disinvite” someone who had accepted her invitation to her birthday party. Her best friend had said “No” and then discovered she could come after all. In the interim the girl had invited someone else who had accepted. Her mother told her she could not have more than a certain number. She wanted to “disinvite” the second girl and have her best friend come. Of course I told her she could not do that. You **never** “disinvite” someone who you have invited and they have accepted. I also suggested she let her best friend know and plan something special with her on another day.

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Many of the questions involve relationship issues. A kid you don't like keeps asking you over. What can you say? Someone you have been friends with doesn't like the same things you do anymore. What should you do? You go to your friend's house for dinner and don't like the food. What should you say? The list is endless and clearly shows that kids care about these things. Once they realize this is what etiquette is about, it's like turning on the faucet. The questions do keep coming. And if they don't have their own, they love to use the ones I suggest. I call them So You cards:

So you... "borrowed" your sister's sweater without asking and now you've spilled grape juice all over it. You would...?

So you... are caught at the dining room table with your crazy Aunt Ellie who is boring you to death. You would...?

So you ... notice that the new kid in your class always sits alone at lunch. You would...?

So you ... are going to visit your grandmother in the hospital. You are nervous about what you will say and do. You would...?

I have pages of these. I give them out to the kids and ask if anyone has one they would like to read. They **always** do. I have had the best conversations with kids using these So You cards. Come up with some on your own and engage your own kids in the discussion. For teens I just pick situations they might encounter. Sometimes there are clear answers – you never "disinvite" someone – but many don't have a clear right or wrong answer and the conversation gets kids thinking about interactions and what you might want the outcome to look like. Try it!

This article originally appeared as a post on Cindy's parenting blog, [The Gift of Good Manners](#)