



Cindy P. Senning

Emily Post's Table Manners for Kids
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Five Questions for Peggy & Cindy

1. Since you've written a book about table manners, it must be difficult when you go out to dinner. Do people expect you to have perfect manners? At first people do expect us to have perfect manners-whatever that is! If one of us picks up the wrong utensil, everyone at the table gets a big kick out of it. They are not laughing at us. They are just recognizing that we really are human and approachable. Everyone makes mistakes, even manners writers. The thing we worry about is that others think they have to be perfect because they are out to dinner with us and assume we must be judging them all the time. Nothing could be further from the truth. Actually, our goal is to put others at

ease so they can enjoy their meal and our company. That is really what good manners are about and that is what we try to do with perfection (even though we still miss the boat sometimes!). **2. When you write your books on manners, how do you decide what the right manners are?** We decide which manners are the right ones through a process of research and evaluation.

- First we talk to people who are involved with the topic at hand. For example, we ask restaurant owners or waiters questions about how people act in restaurants. We watch people in restaurants and talk to them. We search the internet and read what people have to say about eating in restaurants.

- Then we evaluate all the information we have gathered. Manners are simply a set of tools that help us show respect, consideration, and honesty to the people we are with. So when we are trying to decide what the right manners are for a particular situation, we think about those three principles. Does an action show respect for others? Does it show consideration for the people nearby? Does it show sincerity (honesty)?

- And, finally, does the manner we are considering reflect common practice? It really is the people in a society who decide what the standards (manners) are. In American culture, it is not okay to talk on your cell phone in a restaurant. In other cultures, it may be okay. The manners we write about will be meaningless if they do not reflect our culture, so we have to be sure that they do. **3. Why is it even important to learn table manners?** Kids ask us this question all the time. They think that a bunch of "stuffy old rules" just make it more difficult to enjoy a good meal. We like to tell them that table manners really aren't just "stuffy old rules" that have no reason behind them. Every table manner in the book is designed to do one of two things:

1. Avoid grossness - Meals are social events. The idea is not only to eat but also to enjoy other people's company. If your friend comes to the table with grease all over his hands from fixing his bicycle chain, chews with his mouth wide open, and coughs all over the table, what would you think? He has missed three manners that help avoid grossness and, by doing so, has left you gagging.

2. Keep us from embarrassing ourselves - Manners help us know what is expected of us and what we can expect from others. If we know that our bread and butter plate is the one on the left of our table setting, we won't eat our neighbor's roll by mistake. If we know to wait until everyone is served or the hostess says to start eating, we are less likely to be the only one halfway through our dinner when everyone else is saying grace.

Table manners help us know how to eat tricky foods, what to do when we need to sneeze, which direction to pass the food, where to put our used napkin, and a zillion other things.

4. Isn't it boring to write about manners all the time? What keeps it interesting?

If writing about manners was just about keeping track of a bunch of rules, it really would be pretty boring. But it's not. We actually write about etiquette. We think about etiquette as an equation: etiquette = manners + principles. As in any equation, all parts are necessary to make it work. The manners are the tools, or skills, that you use to show the principles: respect, consideration, and honesty. You really can't have etiquette without both.

Etiquette is about relationships, about how we get along with each other. That's what we like writing about. For example, we wrote this book about table manners in order to give kids the tools they need to make the most of meals together with family or friends. We also wanted to show kids the other part of mealtime. If meals were really just about eating, we would do it on our own, in private, and most of the manners wouldn't matter. But we don't. Meals are also social occasions, so there is an art to mealtime. Part of that art is creating interactions that are pleasing to everyone at the table, from the menu to the way the table looks to the conversation. We like helping people find the art in mealtime and develop it to the benefit of everyone at the table. For instance, this is one of our favorite Q&As;

Question: Sometimes I feel frustrated that I never get to see my mom at dinner anymore. We used to eat together every night, but then she got a job and isn't home for dinner. I miss that. What can we do?

Answer: A meal together doesn't have to be dinner. Maybe breakfast on weekends can offer the opportunity for a meal together. During the week breakfast might be a piece of toast, some juice, and an apple or banana on the way out the door. But on a weekend everyone can sleep in a little and then sit down together to a stack of pancakes, maple syrup, bacon or sausage, juice, hot chocolate, and a dish of fruit. Take the time to share plans for the day, rehash the past week, and figure out what's going on in each other's lives. It can be a special way to start the day.

The challenge of helping this young person and hundreds of others like him improve their relationships by using etiquette is what keeps us going. **5. Have you ever had any embarrassing moments related to table manners? How did you handle it?** One of my most embarrassing moments was a table manners incident. I was sixteen and out to dinner with my great-aunt at a fancy New York City restaurant. I decided to try eating escargot (snails) because I thought I should be very fancy in this fancy place. The snails were served in their shells and I was given a special set of spring-loaded tongs to hold the shell while getting the snail out with a small fork. The spring was tight! It slipped, and the shell shot straight up into the air about five feet, arced, and landed in my great-aunt's lap. Oh my

gosh! I was mortified. She was awesome. She put the shell on the side of my plate, grinned at me, and said, "Don't worry, the dry cleaners will take care of this. Please, don't worry." She put me completely at ease. So I didn't handle it; she did. -Cindy Post Senning